

STEVE HOLMSTROM

ACCESS  
GRANTED

THE PATH TO ENCOUNTERING  
GOD'S GLORY IN THIS LIFE

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To Mike

It was a great question

I hope this answers it



# INTRODUCTION

It is very likely that you are under the impression that *you* decided to read this book, that it was your idea, your choice, and that you picked the day, the time, and even the chair in which you would begin to read it. I am afraid, however, that it is not quite that simple. The Bible says that all your days were written in His book before you ever lived a single one of them! While that may leave you with more questions than answers, and feeling just a little bit less in control than you once imagined, it is true nonetheless. God knew, before He created the world, that you would be sitting in that chair reading this book, on this day, in this place, and in this exact season and time of your life. This wasn't your decision, this was your appointment, and you are right on time!

What you hold in your hands is not just another religious book. It's not just more knowledge to fill your head. This is a door, a path, and a narrow one at that, leading to a place that you probably once believed in, but have quite likely long forgotten or lost hope in. It leads to a place that God has chosen, during this season of your life, to bring back into the forefront of your thoughts, desires, dreams and imagination.

You are about to discover something that, deep down, you intuitively already knew. You are about to be bombarded by the

reality that *you are surrounded* and that you always have been. You are continually being watched, like an actor on a stage, and everyone watching is very interested in what you will do, in what you will say, and most importantly *whether or not you will say yes* to the One who is about to make you the greatest and the most expensive offer that you have ever been made.

You – plain old ordinary you – are being invited to *access heavenly places!* You are being invited to hear God, to feel God, to know, to experience, and even to see God! And before you finish this book you will know exactly what someone just like you must do to be granted access to this realm of glory that is as close to you as the air you breathe.

If you are anything like me, you grew up believing that you were average, or even slightly below average. You never imagined that you would ever do anything remarkable. You never believed that you were smart enough, skilled enough, or attractive enough to achieve greatness in this life. You certainly never imagined yourself being someone that the God of the universe would notice or even consider choosing to be an instrument through which He would perform real miracles in the real world. You never imagined that God would give *you* an anointing to heal the sick, to see into the supernatural realm, to prophesy mysteries, to have prophetic dreams, visions, or that He would grant you the power to create incredible wealth. You never believed that someone like you could ever be... important? Boy were you wrong! Please hear me loud and clear. You don't even have a grid for the destiny that God has prepared for you. You don't have a clue of how important you are.

Get ready to be awakened! Get ready to begin to take your life seriously. Get ready to say goodbye to the mundane and the



ordinary and to begin to walk in the glorious extraordinary. This is not just another book. This is your wakeup call to begin to pursue your destiny as one who truly walks with God and experiences His glory right here in the land of the living!


I can promise you that you have an enemy that does not want you to finish this book. I purposefully created an audio version of it simply because I know how many men – and more than a few women – have a hard time finishing a book. If finding the time to read is a challenge for you, download the audio version and I will read it to you. Whatever you do, make sure that you *finish this book*, one way or another, because the revelation that you hold in your hands has the power to turn your life inside out and upside down, for the better.

I'll warn you ahead of time, this is going to hurt a little. This is going to be costly, and if you are not willing to pay the price to reach the incredible destiny prepared for you, you may just wish that you hadn't read this book. You might just wish that you never knew what was truly available to you. But if, however, something inside of you is ready to die to the life of same-old-same-old ordinary blah, of doing what you want but never feeling like you want, then make a note of today's date because you are going to want to remember it. A whole new chapter in your life is about to begin, and this one is going to be anything but boring.



O N E

## Caught



My wife and I had just returned from holidays in the Caribbean when I stepped into my garage and was horrified to discover that while I was gone someone had broken into my garage and had completely... cleaned it? My first thought was, *Who did this? Who had the nerve to clean my garage without my permission?* It was spotless. My once chaotic mess was completely neat and orderly. All the garbage and clutter had been removed. The floor had been swept. All my loose tools had been put away – to who knows where – and if that wasn't bad enough, my empties were gone! My ridiculously large collection of empty cans and bottles had completely vanished from my garage.

I instantly felt sick to my stomach. A wave of anxiety washed over me. I knew that my secret was out, but I didn't know who knew it. Feeling more than a little bit violated and exposed, I barked at my wife, "Cara! Cara! Someone cleaned the garage while we were gone! Who was it?"

"Relax, it was just Taeya," she said, as though that would bring me some relief. It didn't. "She thought it would be a nice

surprise for you. Why are you so upset? You should be happy. It was disgusting in there.”

“Why am I so *upset*?” I blasted back, even louder than before. “Are you completely clueless? Are you kidding me? Do you have any idea how many empty beer cans were in that garage? Do you know how many empty wine bottles and whisky bottles were in there? I can’t believe that YOU let her do this! What were you thinking?”

People knew that I drank a beer or a glass of wine from time to time. I didn’t hide it. Jesus drank wine and I’ve never believed that I would be more spiritual than Him by avoiding it. What I didn’t want people to know, however, was *how much* I drank. That was something that I was very careful to hide! My collection of empties would have been a very big surprise to anyone who knew me. It wasn’t just a couple bags of beer cans. It was a *mountain* of large garbage bags in the corner of my garage, each filled to the brim with empty cans and bottles, and not a pop can in the heap. I even crushed most of the cans so that I could fit more in each bag, and yet still they piled high. And of all people, it had to be Taeya – *my pastor’s daughter* – who decided to “bless me” by cleaning my garage.

In fear and trembling I called up Taeya and thanked her for her thoughtful surprise, attempting to sound genuine. After a little small talk about our holidays, I asked nonchalantly, “So, what did you do with all my cans?”

Taeya chuckled and said, “Yeah, you sure had quite a collection there Steve! Don’t worry, I left the money on the table in your house. I had my dad take them to the bottle depot for you.”

I thought that I had died and gone to Hell! I couldn't care less about the money. All I cared about was making certain that no one knew how much I drank—and that certainly included Pastor Randy! The whole reason why I had not taken them to the bottle depot myself was because I didn't want to bump into anyone from church as I poured out bag after bag of evidence to the fact that I had a major drinking problem. When kids came to my door asking for bottles, I would load them up with as many bags as they could carry, removing as much evidence as possible. The few times that I did go to the bottle depot was always late at night, after they closed, and I would leave the bags of cans and bottles outside for someone else to cash in on.

At the time that Taeya cleaned my garage, I hadn't disposed of any of my empties for quite a while and there were literally thousands of beer cans in my garage. The thought of my very own pastor counting them out one by one tortured me for days. I felt so embarrassed, so exposed, and so very uninterested in ever looking my pastor in the eye again! I didn't know what to say to him, I could hardly even look at him, but the next time I saw Pastor Randy at church he simply put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Don't sweat it, Steve." He never mentioned it again.

I hadn't always been a heavy drinker. It wasn't until 2005 that I let things get out of hand. I wanted to please the Lord, but I was depressed and the booze numbed the pain. Life had not gone the way I had hoped. My ministry had fizzled to nothing, I had to get a job that I found uninspiring, and my marriage was a complete disaster. My wife and I were an inch from divorce and loathed each other's presence. We both wanted out, and badly. I'm not sure why she stayed with me, but I know why I stayed with her. I stayed because I was convinced that a divorce would negatively affect my ministry. That was my reason for

staying. I didn't stay because of love or commitment, I stayed because I didn't want churches to stop asking me to come and preach.

In retrospect, I'm not sure why I really cared about all that anyway. Nobody was asking me to come and preach anymore. Though I had once been a legend in my own mind, a busy young evangelist, living in a VW hippy van, and preaching in small town churches everywhere, those days were long gone. Due to my own hot-headedness I had a falling out with one church, and word had got around that I was proud and unsubmitive (true and truer). Churches were not inviting me to come anymore. Unable to pay the bills, I had given up on ministry, got a job as a rig-jacker in the oil patch, and started a small oilfield rental company on the side that wasn't making any money. All that I wanted to do was preach. All that I actually did was work a job that I detested to support a wife that I couldn't stand. I hated my life, except for when I drank.

Every evening, after kissing my children good night, I would go to my garage, light up a cigar, and crack open a beer. I would drink at least four or five each night, but usually six to eight. A few times a week I would let my hair down and have a dozen or more. By about one or two o'clock in the morning I would stumble out my garage, across the house, and crawl into bed with the woman who loathed me. As soon as she would smell my breath she would roll over in disgust. I could often hear her sobbing as I was passing out.

What is interesting about that season of my life, however, is that I never felt like I walked away from God. I knew that I was compromising, but I still felt loved by God, and felt like I loved Him too—or at least like I *wanted* to love Him. Of the thousands of hours that I spent in my garage drinking, I

probably spent half of them talking to God, reading my Bible, or listening to sermons. I sometimes wept, half drunk, longing for the presence of God and dreaming about better days when I would preach the gospel and inspire people to love Jesus well. I imagined myself teaching people how to live powerful and victorious lives, something (I'm embarrassed to say) I felt very equipped to do. I just needed the right chance, the right connection, the right open door, and then everything would fall into place. I never felt like a backslider, but always believed that I was just having a really bad week and that next week would be different.

I drank every day for five years.

While my evenings were blurry, my days weren't all bad. The areas of my life that I did surrender to God, He blessed. I loved my kids and was, for the most part, a pretty good dad. I got involved in my community as a volunteer and as a leader. God spoke to me about business, money, and about how to steward these things His way. As a result, our financial situation exploded. We became very wealthy, very fast. I quit my job as a rig-jacker and started working full-time for myself. As more and more staff joined our company, my life was freed up to do other things. Eventually, I even began to preach again and I saw many lives genuinely touched in the services.

Many people would consider a preacher who heavily drinks every single night a hypocrite, and while I may have been one, I didn't really feel like one. I wasn't "pretending" to have a passion for God, I really had one. He spoke to me often, and I spent a lot of time with Him. But when I got home each night I spent time with God *while* I sat in my garage drinking beer after beer, smoking like a chimney, and avoiding a very broken and nearly suicidal young woman who desperately needed for her self-

centered and sin-bound husband to crawl out of the bottle and to discover a power – a glorious power – that would change his life forever.

The first draft of this book did not include this chapter. My wife asked me to add it. I'm happy to say that we get along quite well these days. She has become my best friend and confidant, my business partner, my lover, my cheerleader, and even my editor. I included this part of my story at her request. When she read the first draft she said, "Steve, you need to let them know how things *used* to be. People need to know where we started, and just how human you really are." And so... there you go. That's me *minus* the Kingdom—well meaning, but powerless and constantly headed toward shipwreck.

Make no mistake, I was not born with a passion for purity! I am made of the same stuff as the preachers who have horrible falls. I love the Lord, and I love to help people, but I also have a real talent for getting wasted and hurting those around me as well as myself. Like most from my generation, I wanted God, but I didn't care too much for religion, rules, or just about anything that would cost me something or rob me of my buzz. I liked *fast food Christianity*—quick and inexpensive. It wasn't until I discovered the Kingdom of God that I found something worth selling everything to possess. Only the Kingdom could lure me away from all my traps and vices. Only the Kingdom possessed the power to transform a person as selfish as me into someone who would do absolutely anything for more of God.



TWO

# This Changes Everything



I never gave a whole lot of attention to the subject of the Kingdom of God until the day that a friend of mine asked me a question about a well-known scripture that I had always found to be a little harsh. I love to study the Word, to pull it apart and gaze at it from different angles, but I had never done a study on the *Kingdom of God* before. I had never preached a single sermon on it, read a book about it, or even had the slightest interest in it. To be honest, the Kingdom of God had always been a subject that seemed a little bland to me.

My friend is a very wealthy and brilliant businessman, and while our conversations usually revolve around business, on this particular occasion we got chatting about spirituality. At one point in our conversation he said something like this: “The thing that I find frustrating about Christianity is that everybody seems to interpret the Bible differently. One person says that a certain scripture means one thing, while another person says that it means something totally opposite. How do we know what a

verse really means? Do I have to learn Greek and Hebrew?” Then he paused and said, “I even heard of one scripture that says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God! What is that supposed to mean?”

His question created an awkward moment for me for a couple of reasons. First of all, he is the wealthiest man I know, and when I say that he is wealthy I don't mean “a little bit”. To him, losing ten or twenty million dollars would be disappointing, but not life changing in any way. It is obvious why he would be curious as to the meaning of a scripture like that. Because he has been a mentor to me in business, and because I care about him, I really wanted to explain the scripture in a way that would cause him to be more excited about God, and not in a way that would make him feel rejected by God. I didn't exactly know how to do that and it bothered me. The scripture does seem to be a little hard on the rich.

The second reason for the awkwardness was because I have often struggled with that very passage myself! I am no billionaire, but the Lord has blessed my wife and I with an ability to create wealth through businesses and investments and we do steward far more than we live on. If it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom, what does that mean for me? I don't want to be shut out because I have money.

I felt like I had to say something, so I looked at my friend and mumbled, “Well, I actually know that scripture quite well and it makes me a little nervous too. It is found in Luke 18 and was spoken by Jesus Himself. Jesus said that it is hard for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God.” I then added, “Guys like you and me better not show up on Judgment Day hoping that our good deeds outweigh our bad. It isn't going to be easy for us to get into Heaven!”

Even as the words were coming out of my mouth I could hear the Holy Spirit shouting in my heart, *BAD, BAD, BAD, BAD INTERPRETATION!* I knew that I was missing something. I felt like I was misleading him but I didn't know how. I didn't know how to look at that scripture any other way. I was quoting the Bible, but something didn't feel right about the way I was explaining it.

Later that night, as I was mulling it over in my mind, the Lord spoke to me and said, *You know that the Kingdom of God is on earth Steve! Why do you always make it about Heaven and Hell?*

It was a good question. Why did I always do that? I knew that Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God “has come near”. He said that it was “at hand” (close enough to grab). Anybody with any Bible knowledge knows that. It was Jesus’ primary message and He taught it everywhere He went. John the Baptist taught it too, and so did the disciples. If anyone had ever asked me where the Kingdom of God was, I would have correctly answered that it is here on earth. Yet, for some strange reason, every time I read a scripture that mentioned the Kingdom of God, I thought of Heaven. I assumed that those scriptures were referring to a place far away, a place we travel to after we die, a place that is not near, at hand, or close enough to touch.

Whenever I read a scripture that mentioned a requirement for entering the Kingdom of God, I assumed that it was a requirement to enter Heaven. For example, when the Bible says that the greedy and those who slander cannot enter the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10), I assumed that they were rejected from Heaven itself. When the Bible says that *through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22), I assumed that we had to go through tribulations to enter Heaven. I never saw Heaven and the Kingdom of God as two separate places.

The conversation with my friend that day, and the Lord's question to me, inspired me to begin to study this very important subject. I began to meditate on every scripture that even mentioned the Kingdom of God, and was absolutely astonished at how shallow and confused I had been. I read each Kingdom scripture and forced myself to apply it to the here and now – to life on earth – and the meanings of those passages transformed right before my eyes. This, however, led to some conclusions that made me squirm! I began to see the Kingdom in a new way, and this new understanding of the Kingdom affected so many other beliefs that I had. It was like knocking over a domino, which knocked over another, and another, and I feel like I am still following the trail to see how far it goes. I haven't found the end of it yet.

Some things that I once considered to be gospel have become unbiblical the way I see things now. Any passage that even mentions the Kingdom has so much more meaning to me than ever before. Scriptures that I used to ignore, because they seemed so weird, suddenly began to make sense. I found myself falling in love with almost any scripture that even mentioned the Kingdom. Each one seemed to be a key that would grant access to more of God's presence, power, and glory in *this* life! On *this* side of the grave!

## **The Puzzle**

Building a biblical belief system is like putting together a puzzle. Every scripture is a piece, and figuring out how they fit together is a wonderful challenge that will last your whole life long. If you keep studying the Word you will never stop learning and growing. The puzzle just keeps getting bigger and bigger. Have you ever found yourself reading the Bible when all of a sudden

something clicks? That is the sound of two puzzle pieces coming together.

My desire in this study has been to look at all of the scriptures that speak of the Kingdom of God and, with the Holy Spirit's help, put them together like puzzle pieces in an attempt to gain a bigger picture of what the Kingdom really is. Only when we see all the pieces together in their right places can we truly see the beauty and the complexity of the Kingdom of God. One piece, on its own, can actually be very misleading if you believe that you have the entire picture. Many people have seen one piece of the Kingdom but believe that they have seen it all. No one has seen it all. There is so much more to the Kingdom than we have ever imagined. While this book may give you a bit bigger picture of the Kingdom than you previously had, it is still just the tip of the iceberg. Keep digging on your own and you will find more.

I don't pretend to have the Kingdom all figured out. I am still wrestling with certain passages that I do not fully understand. Sometimes it feels like I have a few puzzle pieces on the table that I have not been able to comfortably fit anywhere, and I'm not willing to force them where they do not belong. But I can tell you that the more that I engage with this puzzle, the more real the Kingdom is becoming in my life.

Pursuing the Kingdom – and discovering how to access it – has not only changed my theology, it has changed my life. My friendship with the Lord has soared to new heights. My once self-centered life is becoming more about Him, less about me, and yet I am happier now than I ever was. When I open the Bible, my heart comes alive and the Holy Spirit shows me things that I have never seen or heard. I am now one of those people who cry *happy* tears! God speaks to me more now than He ever

did, often through dreams, impressions, and prophetic experiences. I have never had such victory over sin, nor felt so clean. I have never been so financially prosperous, nor as physically fit (I know this sounds like an infomercial but it is true nonetheless). I live each day with expectation, wondering what miracle might happen today, because when you live a Kingdom life you never know what's coming down the pipe!

Looking back now, I can hardly believe that I was able to live such a mediocre Christian life for so long. I was a drunk, depressed, proud, hurting, lonely and pathetic soul and yet I somehow convinced myself that I was doing okay—maybe even a little better than most. I never knew what I was missing out on. I never knew what was available to me. I never knew that someone as normal and as boring as me could ever become one of God's close friends, or could experience His presence, His power, and His glory in significant ways. I never imagined that I could heal the sick, or pray for miracles and see immediate results. I never imagined that He would grant access to someone so unspectacular.

I say all that to say this: you won't recognize yourself in a year from now if you begin to seek His Kingdom today. Accessing the Kingdom will be costly, more costly than you will appreciate, but it will be worth it. Engage with this puzzle. Wrestle with the Word on this one. I welcome you to question anything that I say that does not line up with the scriptures, and if something doesn't taste right, don't swallow it. At the same time, however, please allow me to put a few things on the table that may cause you to ask some questions that you have probably never asked before, questions that I believe will lead you to a whole new life, and a whole new experience in God. They certainly have for me.

T H R E E

## The Gospel of Salvation



Nothing has ever changed the way I read the Bible more than the discovery that Heaven and the Kingdom of God are two separate places. That was the beginning of the domino effect that I mentioned earlier. That changed everything.

I had always thought that the Gospel of Salvation (how to get to Heaven) and the Gospel of the Kingdom were the same thing. I took all the scriptures that mentioned Heaven, salvation, eternal life *and* the Kingdom, threw them all in the same bag, mixed it up, and called it *The Gospel*. The problem with doing that was that my gospel was cross-eyed. Those scriptures do not all point in the same direction.

If you know exactly what an elephant looks like, you will never bump into a giraffe and wonder if it is an elephant. You might not know what the giraffe is, but you will at least know that it is not an elephant. Christians who are not certain about what the Gospel of Salvation looks like tend to mistake it for the

Gospel of the Kingdom. They mix the two up, and it has cost us a lot. An undefiled Gospel of Salvation is what will win the world for Christ. An undefiled Gospel of the Kingdom is what will grant us access to greater glory and power in this life. Mix them together, however, and you have nothing but cross-eyed confusion, mixed messages, and not a lick of power. For this reason, while this book is primarily focused on the Gospel of the Kingdom, the evangelist in me feels compelled to devote this one chapter to cleaning up the Gospel of Salvation for anyone who might not be completely certain what it is.

If you are well educated in Bible teaching, this chapter will probably sound very familiar to you. You may have heard all this before. If I am losing you in this chapter, and you are tempted to give up on the book, skip it and move on. I'll forgive you! The revelation of the Kingdom found in later chapters is significant and I don't want to lose you here. But if you can put up with a little *Christianity 101*, I think this chapter will really help you to get a firm grasp of what an elephant looks like. Or something like that.

## **What Must I Do To Be Saved?**

Paul and Silas were in prison but they wouldn't let it ruin their day. They knew that, as always, God was up to something. While the other prisoners listened in, Paul and Silas prayed and worshipped the Lord until late into the night. At about midnight God showed up in power and shook their prison with such a violent earthquake that every prison door flew open and everybody's chains came loose. At this the jailer woke up, saw the prison doors open, and assumed that everyone had escaped. Had that happened he was as good as dead, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself. Without a moment to lose, Paul



shouted out, “Don’t harm yourself! We’re all here!” Relieved, the jailer rushed in and fell trembling before them. He then brought them out and asked them a question that we have all asked at one time or another:

*He said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

*They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30-31).*

A simple question gets a simple answer. What must I do to be saved? *Believe!* That’s it? Just believe? Yes. *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.*

I am glad that the jailer asked the question that he did, and particularly that he used the word “must.” *What must I do to be saved?* It is as though he asked, *What are the minimum requirements for salvation?* That, quite sadly, is what many people today want to know. Most of us came to Jesus to escape Hell and we were hoping to do it for the lowest possible price. Most people don’t want to know what they *should* do, they want to know what they *must* do. While I don’t believe that this kind of an attitude leads to a glorious, victorious, miraculous Kingdom life, there is a one-word answer to that question: *believe.*

If you take the time to study the scriptures that refer to “salvation” or “eternal life,” you will quickly discover that there are many things that the Bible says we *should* do. We should confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. We should call on the name of the Lord. We should repent, turn from sin, be baptized in water, and receive the Holy Spirit. The Bible mentions many things that we *should* do, but only one thing that we *must* do. We must believe!

If I am unsure as to whether or not a particular passage is teaching a requirement of salvation, I use what my mother called the “thief-on-the-cross-litmus-test.” I ask myself this question:

*Would the thief on the cross be disqualified for Heaven if this is a requirement of salvation?* If it would disqualify the thief on the cross, then it is not a requirement of salvation because we know that the thief made it to Paradise. Jesus told him, *Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise* (Luke 23:43).

Let me give you an example. In Mark 16:16 Jesus says, *He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved*. Jesus said it so we know it's true. We get into trouble, however, when we start jumping to conclusions and the first conclusion that many jump to is that those who *aren't* baptized are going to Hell—but Jesus never said that. He said that those who *believe and are baptized* will be saved. So is water baptism a requirement of salvation? If you only had Mark 16:16 to go off of, you would probably think so. Before we jump to that conclusion, however, let's use the "thief-on-the-cross-litmus-test." Was the thief on the cross baptized in water? No, he was not. Did he end up in Paradise anyway? Yes, he did. Case closed. A failure to be baptized is not an eternal death sentence. It will keep you from living a powerful and victorious Kingdom life, but it is not a ticket to Hell. If it were, the thief on the cross would not have entered Paradise.

If you are uncertain as to whether you are going to Heaven or not, I can tell you with certainty what the Bible says you *must* do. You must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! *Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16). Speaking of Jesus, the Bible says, *He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God* (John 3:18). Believing in Jesus is non-negotiable. There is only one way to receive eternal life and that is through faith in Jesus (John 14:6). There is only one name under Heaven that can save you, and that is the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). If you believe in Him, you are safe. If you do not believe in Him you are on very thin ice—and soon to be sunk.

## Believing in Jesus

How do I know if I actually do believe in Jesus? What exactly do I have to believe to be a “believer”? If I *say* that I believe, does that mean that I actually do? Believing in Jesus means a number of things:

1. **First, it is about trust.** Believing in Jesus is more than an intellectual assent where one agrees that certain facts are true. It is about trusting Jesus. Anyone with three brain cells will agree that Jesus existed. He is a historical fact. Believing in Jesus is about believing that He is still alive today and that you can depend on Him in your time of need. At the very least, a believer is someone who trusts that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the punishment for their sins and that because of His sacrifice we can freely receive eternal life.
2. **Secondly, it is about believing the things Jesus said.** Not only did Jesus claim to be God’s only begotten Son and the *only* way to get to the Father, but He also claimed that He and the Father were *one*, that He was *in* the Father, and that the Father was *in* Him. They are, in some mysterious way, inseparable. Jesus even went so far as to say, “He who has seen Me *has* seen the Father”. That’s bold! It is not good enough to believe that Jesus was just a nice guy or a good prophet. Nice guys do not claim to be God! He was either nuts or He was God. What do you believe?
3. **Thirdly, it is about believing what the Bible says about Jesus.** It says that He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, performed many miracles, died on a cross, was placed in a tomb, and three days later rose from the dead and was seen by many before ascending into

Heaven and taking His place at the right hand of the Father.

So you tell me, do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe that He is the Son of God and that He is one with the Father? Do you believe that He died on a cross for your sins and that He rose from the dead? Do you believe that He is the only way to the Father? Do you believe that His words are absolutely true? If you believe in Jesus Christ, the Bible says that *you will be saved*.

## **But... It Will Change You**

Now I would be lying if I said that believing in Jesus doesn't change you. It does. What you believe will always change you. If you said that you believed a tornado was about to hit your house while you sat out on your patio with your feet up, I would assume that you were either crazy or lying. If you really believe something big it will cause you to do something big. The same is true for those who truly believe in Jesus, and the big things that Jesus said.

Some Christians change a lot slower than others, but those who truly believe in Jesus will change in many ways. If you have been in the faith for quite some time and your life hasn't changed, you need to be suspicious of your faith. I'm serious. It might not be the real thing. Your faith might have even died (see James 2:17), and dead faith won't save you.

Saying "I believe" does not mean that I actually do, any more than saying "I'm a hippopotamus" makes me a hippopotamus. I am either a hippo or I am not. You are either a believer or you are not. If your life isn't changing, it could be because you don't truly believe. The Bible says, *Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves* (2 Cor. 13:5). Not everyone will pass the test. I believe that we will all be a little

surprised at who makes it to Heaven, and who doesn't. Some who boldly claim to be followers of Christ are going to miss Heaven by a long shot, and others – who you and I would have voted off the island – will be warmly received.

While I know that believing in Jesus will change your life, I am very careful when communicating with people that I do not include *works* or *good behavior* as requirements for salvation. Salvation will change your life, but changing your life is not a requirement of salvation. To be saved you must believe, and God knows if you truly do.

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**Salvation will  
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but changing  
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requirement of  
salvation.**

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And that's the point. God knows. God knows everything! If you were an apple tree, in the winter with no apples on you, God would still know that you were an apple tree. You, and those around you, might not know until you see some fruit, but God knows what is in you. The same is true with believing. God knows if you are a believer – even if there is no obvious fruit to prove it – but if *you* want to know you should keep an eye out for some fruit. Eventually, you can always tell a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:16).

Most believers will accomplish far less for God than what they were created for, but that does not mean that they are sentenced to Hell. The Bible teaches that there will be many who enter Heaven smelling like smoke because they missed Hell by a sliver. The Apostle Paul spoke of these people when he talked about those who build their lives on the foundation of faith in Christ, but only build with *wood, hay, and straw*. When tested by fire, their life's work is burned up and they suffer loss, but yet they themselves are saved *even though only as one escaping through the*

*flames* (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15). In other words, they enter Heaven smelling like smoke!

Now you probably already knew all that, but I needed to remind you of it before we go where we are about to go because the first thing that tends to get thrown out the window when people study scriptures that refer to the Kingdom of God is *salvation by faith*. I don't want to let that happen in this book. To understand the Gospel of the Kingdom we must first be firmly established in the Gospel of Salvation. We must understand that eternal life is granted to those who have faith in Jesus, and that it is not by works. The Bible says:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Eph. 2:8-9).

If you know your Bible well, you know that the very next verse says that we were *created* for good works. So while works

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**The first thing that tends to get thrown out the window when people study scriptures that refer to the Kingdom of God is salvation by faith.**

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certainly matter, they cannot save us. Salvation is a free gift. Receiving salvation will change you, but you don't have to change to receive it. Receiving salvation is not complicated. Anyone can receive it. Not everyone does, but anyone can. It is not hard. It is not difficult. Even a rotten thief on a cross who has never prayed a single prayer, been baptized,

attended church, or put so much as a penny in the offering plate can receive eternal life by simply believing in Jesus. You don't have to be good, you just have to believe in the One who is!

If you find yourself resisting this message at all, that eternal life is a *free* gift given to those who believe in Jesus, take a few

minutes to meditate on these six foundational scriptures. Without this foundation the message of the Kingdom that we are about to explore will be very muddy.

*For we maintain that a man is **justified by faith** apart from works of the Law (Rom. 3:28).*

*Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).*

*But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace (Rom. 11:6).*

*I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly (Gal. 2:21).*

*He who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).*

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him shall not perish**, but have eternal life (John 3:16).*





## FOUR

# The Kingdom Conflict



I will now take the liberty to assume that we are all on the same page concerning the Gospel of Salvation, believing that eternal life is a free gift given to those who *believe*. Anyone who takes the Apostle Paul's writings seriously understands that we have no wiggle room to believe that we are saved by our works. There is just way too much Bible saying the opposite.

The conflict and struggle that I want to invite you into occurs when we begin to study passages that speak of the *Kingdom of God* or the *Kingdom of Heaven*. When we read what the Bible has to say about receiving eternal life, it seems so easy. It is all about *believing*. What is startling, however, is how often the Bible emphasizes the difficulties involved in entering the Kingdom. Not once does the Bible say that the Kingdom is received by faith, or by simply believing. It's quite the opposite actually. The Kingdom is reserved for the *poor in spirit* (Matt. 5:3), for those who are *persecuted because of righteousness* (Matt. 5:10), for those who have been through *many tribulations* (Acts 14:22), and

for those who *sell everything* they've got to buy the Kingdom (Matt. 13:44-45).

Have you ever read a passage of scripture that made you wonder if you were even saved? Have you ever read a verse that seemed to condemn even most of the Christians that you know? If you go and look those scriptures up you will find that, more times than not, they do not even mention Heaven, Hell, eternal life, or eternal damnation—but rather *the Kingdom*. Over and over you will find scriptures that speak of how difficult it is to enter or inherit the Kingdom. Over and over the Bible describes the kind of people who will *never* enter the Kingdom.

When you hear a preacher preaching against homosexuality you will almost certainly hear him quote 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. Among other things, it says that men who have sex with men will not inherit the Kingdom of God. This passage is often used as “proof” to say that there will be no gays in Heaven. But does it actually say that? While I have no intention to debate who goes to Heaven and who doesn't (I'm not the Judge), I would like for us to look at the passage in its entirety. It is actually a list of a whole bunch of people that are disqualified from inheriting the Kingdom of God. And guess who else is included in that group? Probably you!

*Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10 NIV).*

That's at least 80% of my church! Most of us were wiped out by the word *greedy* and just as many by the word *slander*. *Wrongdoers* includes most of us, and if the *sexually immoral* includes people who look at pornography, the Kingdom of God

is sounding like a pretty quiet place. And that is only one verse! Guess who else will never enter the Kingdom?

*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3).

I would describe about 10% of the Christians I know as being *like children*, and probably less. Most adults do not have a childlike (humble, trusting, teachable, and forgiving) disposition, and yet Jesus Himself said that unless we change and become like children, *we will not enter the Kingdom!* Isn't that a little harsh? Especially for such a small sin as "not being childlike". Seriously? Is that even a sin? Can you imagine being rejected at Heaven's gates after you die because you weren't childlike enough?

There are many scriptures in the Bible just like these ones. I call them the "disqualifying scriptures" because they reveal the things that disqualify us from entering the Kingdom. I could go through each one, but just to keep things short, let me give you a quick list of the kind of people that the Bible says will *never* enter or inherit the Kingdom. See if any of these disqualify you.

## **Disqualified for the Kingdom**

- The un-childlike (Matt. 18:3)
- Slanderers (1 Cor. 6:10)
- The selfish (Gal. 5:20)
- Those who cause discord/disharmony (Gal. 5:20)
- Foolish talkers (Eph. 5:4)
- Coarse jokers (Eph. 5:4)
- The greedy (1 Corinthians 6:10, Eph. 5:5)
- The envious (Gal 5:21)

- Those who practice witchcraft (Gal. 5:20)
- Those who hate (Gal. 5:20)
- Those who rage (Gal. 5:20)
- The immoral (Eph. 5:5)
- The obscene (Eph. 5:4)
- The sexually immoral (1 Cor. 6:9)
- The impure (Eph. 5:5)
- Drunkards (1 Cor. 6:10)
- Those who do not do the Father's will (Matt. 7:21)
- Thieves (1 Cor. 6:10)
- Swindlers (1 Cor. 6:10)
- Wrongdoers (1 Cor. 6:9)
- Idolaters (1 Cor. 6:9)
- Adulterers (1 Cor. 6:9)
- Men who have sex with men (1 Cor. 6:9)
- Those who engage in orgies (Gal. 5:21)
- Those who have not been through many hardships (Acts 14:22)

Please note that this is not even an exhaustive list. There are more. I haven't even mentioned those to whom it is "hard" to enter the Kingdom, like the rich. These are just the ones who will certainly never enter!

That list includes what some might consider to be some pretty small sins. Coarse joking? Foolish talking? Selfishness? Who isn't a little selfish from time to time? If all these things can disqualify us from going to Heaven, how many of us have even a remote chance? If that is the case, I know about three people who might go to Heaven, and I'm not one of them!

This is where those who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible begin to wrestle. What do we do with these disqualifying scriptures? If they are true, then most of us are disqualified from entering the Kingdom! What does that even mean? It is so clear in scripture that eternal life is a free gift given to those who believe. And then, on the other hand, it is just as clear in scripture that even most of the Christians that you and I know will never enter the Kingdom unless they experience a radical change (1 Cor. 6:11).

You know as well as I do, however, that many of them won't change. Think of your Christian loved ones that have already died. Many died greedy. Many died with some immorality in their hearts. Many died with some envy toward others. Many died selfish. Many died without a childlike disposition. Many did not go through great hardships. Have they all been sentenced to an eternity without Christ? Are they all going to Hell? Personally, I can't believe that they are because I know "what an elephant looks like." I know that the Gospel of Salvation says that eternal life is a free gift given to *whosoever* believes, and most of them did believe.


Can you see the conflict that we are faced with? The Gospel of Salvation tells us that eternal life is for all who *believe*, and that if you believe you are accepted. The Gospel of the Kingdom teaches us that that only radicals who embrace a deeply sanctified lifestyle can enter in. It's like the Bible gives us directions to Heaven, and directions to the Kingdom, yet the two sets of directions are completely different!

What will you do with this apparent conflict? Will you ignore some scriptures so that you can embrace others? Will you ignore them all and just believe whatever you want? Or is there any chance that the Bible actually makes sense?



FIVE

## A New Set of Lenses



If you know your Bible well, you may already know where I am headed. You know that I am not teaching that 95% of the church is going to Hell. You know that I am simply trying to emphasize that the Kingdom of God is on Earth, and you already knew that. But if you are like most believers, you believe that the Kingdom of God is on Earth *and* up in the sky at the same time. You believe that the Kingdom of God is on Earth, but you also believe that your sweet grandma who died last year entered the Kingdom of God after taking her last breath. That is what most Christians think. Most believe that the Kingdom of God includes that wonderful place called *Heaven*.

You might ask, *What's wrong with that? Does it really matter if I believe that Heaven is part of the Kingdom of God?* Quite frankly, yes! That would be horrifying news for a lot of people. If the scriptures that refer to the Kingdom of God also refer to Heaven, then salvation is *not* a free gift and 95% of the church *is* going to Hell. Ephesians 5:4-5 says that even telling an off-

colored joke will keep you out of the Kingdom. If the Kingdom of God includes Heaven, then telling dirty jokes will send you to Hell. That condemns some of my best friends – and they are preachers!

## **Ignoring the Kingdom Scriptures**

I realize that most Christians don't actually believe that coarse joking, failing to be childlike, or struggling with a little selfishness will condemn you to Hell. But why? Why don't we believe that? For most of us it is not because we have understood what the Kingdom scriptures mean, but rather because we have chosen to ignore them. They seem too harsh, so we toss them out.

What if we didn't toss them out? What if, instead, we looked for a treasure inside of them? They were obviously written for a reason, and quite clearly to be warnings. *If you do this... you will never enter the Kingdom of God! If you do that... you will never enter the Kingdom of God!* These are warnings from God, letting us know that if we choose to live impure lives filled with selfishness, slander, lust, greed, envy, hatred, drunkenness, adultery (see chapter four for the full list of disqualifiers) we are going to miss out on something awesome. I don't want to miss out on something awesome, and therefore I need to understand what all those disqualifying verses disqualify me from. What will I miss out on if I live a sin-filled Christian life? What do I miss out on if I'm a little selfish? What do I miss out on if I'm not childlike, or if I drink too much? I need to know!

The disqualifying verses are not only warnings, but they are also wonderful promises as well. If those who do not choose to live surrendered lives miss out on something awesome (the Kingdom), then it only makes sense that those who do live



surrendered lives can access or enter into something awesome. If there is something to lose, then there is something to gain. And if that prize is called the Kingdom of God, I want to know what the Kingdom is so that I can decide if it is worth paying the price.

## **It's Not What We Thought**

We will never understand the Kingdom of God until we have a major paradigm shift concerning where it is, and just as importantly, where it isn't. When the Bible talks about the Kingdom, it is referring to a realm of the supernatural that is on *earth*, not a place we travel to after we die. To understand the scriptures correctly we must begin to recognize that there is a big difference between Heaven and the Kingdom.

It is a little bit like Disney. Whether you go to Disneyland (California) or to Disney World (Florida) you are going to see a lot of the same stuff. You'll find Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and even Cinderella in both places. While Disneyland and Disney World may look and feel very much alike, because they are charged with the same atmosphere, that doesn't make them the same place. One is in California, and the other is in Florida. You cannot be in Disneyland and Disney World at the same time. And if you get kicked out of Disneyland, that doesn't necessarily mean that you are banned from Disney World. They are two completely different places.

The same is true with Heaven and the Kingdom. They have a lot of similarities, but they are not the same place. They are both ruled by God (Heaven is ruled by the Father and the Kingdom is ruled by the Son). They are both charged with the same atmosphere of glory and power. They are both filled with the presence of God, angels, other heavenly helpers, and God

knows what else. And while they certainly have a lot of similarities, they do not share the same address. One is on earth, and the other is not.

The Apostle Paul got to experience both places during his life. He had many angelic encounters, visions, and visitations on the earth (Kingdom stuff), but he also had at least one trip to Heaven as well (see 2 Cor. 12:2). Nobody, however, can be in Heaven and the Kingdom at the same time—except the omnipresent God. If you go to Heaven, you are not in the Kingdom. If you enter the Kingdom, you are not in Heaven.

If you are a speed-reader I need you to slow down for a second and read this next verse very carefully. Zero in on every word. I don't want you to miss this because it is really important. It reveals to us where the Kingdom is, and even more importantly, where it isn't. Speaking of Jesus, the Bible says:

*Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (1 Cor. 15:24-25 NIV).*

This is a future event. It has not happened yet. Can you see that? Father God is not presently ruling the Kingdom from the “Kingdom's capital city” up in the sky. This scripture teaches us that *the Kingdom of God has not even been handed to the Father yet*. Yes, you read that right. The Kingdom is not in the Father's hands! It is still in Jesus' hands. It is on Earth, and it is under Jesus' complete control. While the Father does have shared ownership of the Kingdom, it seems as though He has purposely locked Himself out, leaving the whole thing in His Son's hands.

The Bible actually calls the Kingdom of God *the Kingdom of His beloved Son* (Col. 1:13). One day, in the future, Jesus will *hand*

*over the Kingdom to God the Father* (vs. 24), but I want you to notice that it does not happen until after Jesus has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. *For he must reign until...* Did you see that? *Jesus must reign until...* until when? *Until he has put all his enemies under his feet* (you are His feet). And then what? And then He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, but not a minute before. It hasn't happened yet.

The Kingdom of God is on Earth. If you could see a map of the Kingdom of God, Heaven would not be on it. Heaven is on another map. You do not die to get to the Kingdom of God. In fact, if you die, you can't get there (unless you get sent back, which does happen from time to time as well (see Matt. 17:3)).

We are the body of Christ, the hands and feet of Jesus, and before He hands the Kingdom over to the Father all of His enemies will be put under *our feet!* Until we are stomping on sin, sickness, disease, demons and every other enemy of Christ the end will not come and the Kingdom remains under Jesus' control. Even when the Kingdom is handed over to the Father, it doesn't leave the earth. The Kingdom of God will always be a title given to God's realm of glory, power, and manifest presence *on earth*, and there will always be people wishing that they could enter in.

*Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able* (Luke 13:24).

## **Get It While You Can**

When you understand that Heaven and the Kingdom of God are two completely different places you can then see that it is possible to be a Christian, to enter Heaven after you die, *and yet never enter the Kingdom of God.* The scriptures that speak of eternal life (or Heaven) do not conflict with those that speak of the

Kingdom. If a man has put his faith in Christ, but does not have a childlike heart, he can still inherit eternal life. He can still go to Heaven when he dies. He might just walk right into Heaven, look around the place, and say, “Wow! The Kingdom of God is beautiful!”

And then I imagine that the Lord would approach him and say, “I’m glad that you like the place, I prepared it for you, but this isn’t the Kingdom of God. This is Heaven! The Kingdom

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**It is possible to be a  
Christian, to enter  
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and yet *never* enter  
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of God is a realm of glory on earth that you never entered into because you did not embrace a childlike heart. I’m sorry, but you didn’t qualify. Very few of My people do. Trust Me, you don’t even want to know how much power, glory, and

presence was available to you! I never made a promise that I wasn’t willing to keep, and there was never a season in history where I turned the power off. The Kingdom was always there for the taking to those who would pay the price. I’ll tell you more about it later, but for now just come on in and have a rest. I love you and My grace is sufficient for you. Welcome to Heaven!”

## **Understanding Matthew**

The biggest reason why the Kingdom of God is so often confused with Heaven is because Matthew usually referred to the Kingdom of God as the *Kingdom of Heaven*. Matthew is the only Biblical writer who ever did that. The phrase *Kingdom of Heaven* is only ever found in Matthew’s gospel. All the other Biblical writers used the phrase *Kingdom of God*. It is quite possible that Jesus never even spoke the words *Kingdom of Heaven*. When Mark, Luke, or John quote Jesus speaking about

the Kingdom of God, they use the phrase *Kingdom of God*. Matthew didn't. Matthew recorded the exact same stories that the other guys did, but in his version he would often change the phrase to *Kingdom of Heaven* (compare Matthew 13:11 with Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10). He did this over and over again. Why?

Most scholars believe that Matthew did this because he was writing to Jews who had very strict rules surrounding even the mention of the sacred name *God*. It is possible that Matthew was simply being sensitive to them by avoiding that name, and choosing the more palatable phrase *Kingdom of Heaven* instead. That might be true, but it might not. Matthew does use the phrase *Kingdom of God* four times. If he didn't want to use the phrase, why did he do it four times?

Personally, I believe that it is a divine riddle yet to be revealed. The Lord isn't against speaking in riddles or even hiding treasures for later generations to discover (see Prov. 25:2, Deut. 29:29). I believe God has been saving some of His best revelations for the last days, but hidden them right before our eyes in the Bible we read every day.

## **Thy Kingdom Come**

Many preachers say, "Our job is to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to Earth." I know what they mean, but it isn't a completely correct statement. The Kingdom of Heaven is already on Earth, and nowhere else. We are, however, called to pray for *God's will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven*. The Bible also teaches us that Heaven is continually blessing the Earth. James said that every good and perfect gift comes *from above, coming down from the Father* (James 1:17). There are accounts in scripture where Jesus, angels, and even saints have come down from Heaven to visit Earth. Bill Johnson wrote a great book

called *When Heaven Invades Earth*, and I would agree that we need Heaven to invade Earth. I'm hoping to have an invasion from Heaven in my prayer room tonight! We need to understand, however, that the Kingdom doesn't *come down*. It is already here.

Jesus taught us to pray, *Thy Kingdom come*. But from where? Many pray that prayer assuming that it will come down from above. It won't. That is a prayer for the Kingdom to *spread*. It spreads to new churches, new businesses, new towns, new cities, and new nations. Like a mustard seed, the Kingdom of God has already been planted in the earth. Our goal is to partner with God to see it grow and flourish until it fills the earth and becomes a blessing to everyone (Matt. 13:31-32). When I pray *Thy Kingdom come*, I am not praying for the Kingdom to *come down*, but rather to *come over here*. I am praying that the Kingdom would spread, and preferably in *my* direction! I want the Kingdom to come to my town, to my house, to my family, to my businesses, and to my ministry. I want it to spread in my direction.

The Kingdom of God is in our midst. It has been here at least since *the days of John the Baptist until now* (Matt. 11:12). Over and over the Bible emphasizes that it *has* come (past tense). John's message was a fresh revelation when he first declared, *Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven **has** come near* (Matt. 3:2). That was John's message. What was Jesus' message? It was, *The kingdom of God **has** come near* (Mark 1:15). And what did Jesus teach His disciples to preach when they went out? You guessed it. *The kingdom of God **has** come near* (Luke 10:9).

This simple message – *the Kingdom **has** come near* – is all over the New Testament and yet somehow we, in the twenty-first century, have missed the memo. Many still believe that the Kingdom is far, that it is going to come down from above, or that we will one day go up to it. Many believe that it is *way up*

*there*. It is not way up there. That place has another name. The Bible clearly teaches that the Kingdom of God is here, near, in our midst, coming upon us, and at hand.

## **The Implications**

When you begin to interpret the scriptures that refer to the Kingdom through this new set of lenses the implications are enormous. When you remove *Heaven* from your mental image of what the Kingdom is, you are forced to interpret the Kingdom scriptures as being applicable to your life right now. You can no longer say, *Well that's too good to be true, so it must be talking about something in the next life!* The good news of the Kingdom becomes good news for you. The challenges involved in entering the Kingdom become challenges that you must face. The Keys of the Kingdom become keys that you can use to unlock the manifest presence, power, and glory of God in this life. Everything becomes personal, everything becomes useful, and the Bible really starts to make sense.





SIX

## Power & Purity



I have shared with you what I believe to be the biggest misconception concerning the Kingdom of God, and that is to assume that it is a place we travel to after we die. Another big mistake that we tend to make is to reduce the Kingdom of God to being another name for the “Family of God” or the “Body of Christ”. The Kingdom of God is so much more than just another name for Christian.

Paul Keith Davis often talks about the importance of using the proper spiritual language to explain spiritual experiences and truths. I once heard him say, “Don’t say that you had a ‘vision’ when what you really had was an anointed thought or picture in your mind. Don’t say that you were ‘taken up’ or that you ‘visited the throne room’ when what you really had was a dream about the throne room. If we use words like ‘visitation,’ ‘trance,’ or ‘vision’ loosely, nobody takes us seriously when we have a real visitation, trance, or vision”. I believe the same is true with the

phrase *Kingdom of God*. We use it too loosely and as a result we have watered it down.

When a person is first saved, it is not uncommon for people to say, “Welcome to the Kingdom of God!” And while it sounds nice, it is no more true than saying “Welcome to Disneyland!” to a person who just crossed the border into California. They may be on their way to Disneyland, they may even be on the right road, but they still have a journey to get there and a price to pay before they get through the gates. I don’t care what anyone tells you, if you don’t see Cinderella, Donald Duck, or Mickey Mouse, you are not *inside* Disneyland yet. And if you aren’t experiencing power, glory, revelation, healing, anointing, or bumping into the occasional angel, Moses, Elijah, or better yet Jesus, keep driving, because you’re not *inside* the Kingdom yet. You might be near it, or even tapping into some Kingdom power, but you are not *inside*.

Becoming a Christian does not include automatic entrance into the Kingdom. Jesus told His followers that they still needed to *seek first the Kingdom* (Matt. 6:33). If they were already in the Kingdom, He wouldn’t have told them to seek it as their first priority. The Kingdom of God is not the dwelling place of all believers. It is not where most of us live.

So what is the Kingdom? I thought you’d never ask!

The Kingdom of God is an intercessor’s dream come true. It is the sweet spot in the Spirit. It is where angels gather. It is where the anointing is the heaviest. It is the other side of the veil. It is where the glory is. Its atmosphere is *righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Rom. 14:17). It manifests in healing and deliverance (Matt. 10:7-8). I define the Kingdom of God as *the manifest presence, power, and glory of God on earth, and all that goes along with it*. It is not a small thing to “enter into” the Kingdom of God. Most believers never do.

The most defining characteristic of the Kingdom of God is *power*. If there is a theme verse for the Kingdom, it is this one:

*For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power* (1 Cor. 4:20 NIV).

We cannot separate the Kingdom from power. We cannot enter the Kingdom and not be touched by power. That would be like sticking your finger in a light socket and not noticing the power. You are going to notice the power, for sure, every time you do it, and you will never get used to it. Jesus often connected the Kingdom to power. He said...

*And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons... (Matt. 10:7-8).*

It is like Jesus is saying, *Tell people that the Kingdom is near, and then PROVE it to them! Show them some power! Heal someone! Find a dead guy and raise him to life! Find the most demonized person you can and cast that thing out! Do something powerful so that the lost will know that they have come into contact with the Kingdom of God, so that they know that the power of God has finally come to their town.*

I once heard Bill Johnson say, *Jesus never told his disciples what to do or say if someone **didn't** get healed, raised, or delivered.* It is a very interesting point. Failure wasn't an option. They *had* to learn how to live glorious, victorious, miraculous Kingdom lives. That is what He came to teach them! They *had* to learn how to tap into the Kingdom, and if they didn't connect with Kingdom power, they themselves were to blame. They didn't have permission to blame the dead guy for not having enough faith. They couldn't blame the demon for not listening. They couldn't blame the sickness for not going away. I know that this is not a popular message, but Jesus never told a disciple, *Nice try, but this*

*time it wasn't God's will to do a miracle.* Those words never left His mouth, and they never will.

Were the disciples always successful? Of course not. This isn't easy stuff. It takes faith, and some other things that we will look at later. Some days the disciples did have trouble connecting with the Kingdom. Look at this:

*When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once (Matt. 17:14-18).*

How would you feel if Jesus called you *unbelieving and perverted*? Isn't that a little harsh? Why would Jesus say something like that to His best friends? Is it possible that there is truth hidden in what we have thought to be an insult?

When we hear the word *perverted* we usually think of sexual sin. Sexual sins certainly are perverted, but that is not what Jesus is getting at here. The Greek word used for perverted (*diestrammenē*) means *distorted, twisted, or bent*. Jesus was telling His disciples that the reason why they could not cast out demons or heal the sick – the reason that they could not access Kingdom power – was because something inside of them was bent. Something was twisted. Something needed to be straightened out.

Like Jesus' disciples, many of us are bent in different ways. Most of us have areas in our lives where we are not the way God

intended us to be. This world has a talent for twisting us and bending us. If you let today's culture determine what you will believe, and how you will live, you will be perverted for sure. In fact, we don't even need the world to pervert us. Our very own hearts will gladly do the job!

## Follow Your Heart?

A popular phrase that we hear a lot today is “follow your heart.” Just yesterday I saw those three words on a little girl's T-shirt. We say it like it is a good thing. Doesn't it sound like the right thing to do? It sounds Biblical, like something that should be written in red. I can promise you that it is not!

The Bible teaches us that *the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick* (Jer. 17:9). There is one – and only one – scripture in the entire Bible that tells us to follow our hearts. Before we do, however, we ought to read the end of the verse:

*Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things **God will bring you into judgment*** (Ecc. 11:9 NIV).

There's your one verse. *Follow your heart... and God will judge you for it!*

Following your heart means doing whatever feels natural, or whatever you feel like doing at any given time. Your heart might want to eat chocolate three meals a day. Your heart might want to have three girlfriends as well as a wife. Your heart might want to spend every evening looking at porn. That doesn't mean that you should! In Acts 5:3 the Apostle Peter asked his Christian brother Ananias, “Why has Satan filled your heart?” Ananias was just doing what seemed right to him. He was following his heart. But what did God do to Him? God brought

him into judgment. He killed him! A Christian. In the New Testament. Under grace. I'm not saying... I'm just saying.

Now God may not kill you for following your heart, but you definitely don't want to go where your heart will lead you. Following your heart, your every whim and desire, will only lead you toward being twisted and bent, and twisted bent people cannot live the Kingdom life. Don't follow your heart! Follow your spirit. Follow the voice of the Holy Spirit. Follow the Word.

## **How Sin Hinders Us**

Being bent by sin keeps most Christians from accessing Kingdom power, but it is not for the reason that we might think. Many assume that God refuses to do miracles for those who sin, but that is not the case. God never stops us from getting a miracle. It is actually our own hearts that stop us. Check this out:

*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight (1 John 3:21-22).*

Did you see that? *If our heart does not condemn us... we receive whatever we ask!* If I live a life that is pleasing to God my conscience will be clean, I will have more confidence before Him, and my prayers will be more powerful as a result of that confidence. When I do things that displease the Lord, however, my own heart condemns me, I lose my confidence, and as a result my prayers are not answered. It has nothing to do with God. God has made His power available to anyone, but we must have confidence before Him and a heart void of condemnation to access it.

Ironically, there are actually some people with such *hard and calloused hearts* that it actually works in their favor! I'm talking about people who can engage in wicked sin and still access Kingdom power because their hearts are too hard to condemn them. Their hearts have been seared as with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2) and they have no conscience. They live in sin, but they feel just fine about it. They have confidence before God (misguided, but real nonetheless) and as a result of their confident faith they tap into Kingdom power. They prophesy with accuracy, heal the sick, perform miracles, and often even preach lies with a true anointing. Jesus mentioned these sorts when He said:

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**There are actually  
some people with such  
hard and calloused  
hearts that it actually  
works in their favor!**

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*“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ‘And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS’”* (Matt. 7:22-23).

Never assume that power equals purity. Some people will tap into Kingdom power without a whole lot of purity, but don't follow people like that. They are fairly easy to spot. You will recognize them by the fruit of their lives. They tend to give themselves, and others, permission to live loose and they call it “grace”. Rather than drawing people into holiness and passion for Jesus, they draw people after themselves. Proud and condescending, they talk about themselves a lot, and while their stories are amazing, something about them just won't sit right with you. They taste funny. And while we ought to avoid people like that, let's learn from them.

What can we learn from them? We learn that to access Kingdom power requires a heart free of condemnation—we just pursue it in a different way. Rather than hardness of heart, we pursue purity of heart. A pure heart leads to a clean conscience, confidence before God, and a Kingdom life. A heart that condemns will always keep us from accessing power. It trips the breaker.

Most of us, if we were honest, would have to admit that we have a ways to go in the purity department. Most of us are a little “bent”. Most have a few unsundered areas of sin, addiction, or false comfort. So how do we deal with these things? How do we get straightened out so that we begin accessing the Kingdom in a greater way?

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**A heart that condemns will always keep us from accessing power. It trips the breaker.**

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I want you to notice that after Jesus’ apparent insult (*You unbelieving and perverted generation*), His very next words are: *How long shall I stay with you?* That question reveals to us the solution to our perversion. The thing that will straighten us out and give us victory over sin is to spend more time with Jesus! The more time you spend with Him – talking with Him, walking with Him, worshipping Him, and meditating on His Word – the more you will begin to look like Him, and Jesus isn’t bent at all.



## SEVEN

# Plugging In



Every illustration breaks down at some point, and this one won't be perfect either, but I find that it is helpful to think about the Kingdom of God much like we think about electricity. Electricity is power, and that power can manifest in many different ways. It can generate heat. It can generate cold. It can turn on a light bulb, charge a cell phone, or even burn your toast. There are thousands of uses for electricity. In the same way, the Kingdom of God is very much about power (1 Cor. 4:20) and that power manifests in many different ways: miracles, signs, wonders, provision, encounters, healing, peace, joy, wisdom, deliverance, and the list goes on. The Kingdom of God – God's realm of power on Earth – causes powerful things to happen.

Another thing about electricity is that while we rarely ever see it, it is all around us. It is in the walls, in the ceiling, in the floor, and often even in our pockets. While we access electricity daily, and our lives are enriched by it continually, it is very rare for a person to *enter into* electricity. For the most part we *plug into it* and access power that way.

There are, of course, those special occasions – and usually it is an unplanned surprise – when we get touched by electricity. Sometimes we get a shock from someone who has power on them. Sometimes we get an even bigger jolt by touching the wrong wire or something that is connected. And there are even some people who have actually *entered into* electricity – via a lightning bolt or a power line – and they will tell you that the day you *enter into* electricity is a very rare and very memorable occasion! Don't be sad if you haven't done it yet, you might not even want to.

Similarly, *entering into* the Kingdom of God – the realm of His manifest presence, glory, and power – is not a normal experience for Joe Christian and that does not mean that Joe is unspiritual or evil. It simply means that *entering in* is a very big deal, an unusual experience, something a little over the top. You don't get hit by lightning every day! There are some people who do enter into the Kingdom on a regular basis, but they are the exception, not the rule, and it costs them far more than most want to pay. We will get into that later on.

The norm, however, is to *connect to* the Kingdom, to tap into it, or to be touched by it. Living a Kingdom life is not usually about “entering” in, but rather “plugging” in. That is the most common way to access the Kingdom. Little shocks are not unusual, and a little shock can accomplish a lot. A Kingdom shock can open blind eyes, heal cancer, or remove a nasty wart. When Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God He spoke about a realm that is all around us, like electricity, not something that most would enter into. As we saw in chapter four, the Bible makes it very clear that even most Christians will *never enter* the Kingdom of God. That is not an insult, it's just a fact.

Jesus talked about the Kingdom as something that was *in our midst*. He spoke of the Kingdom *coming upon us*. Over and over

again He said that the Kingdom *has come near*. That is also what He told His disciples to preach, that the Kingdom is *near*, that it is *close*, that it is *at hand*. Something that is *at hand* is something that is so close you can reach out and touch it, but you still have to reach out to touch it. We often have to reach, and even be stretched, to access the Kingdom of God.

## The Kingdom Within

I know that I am going to kick over a golden calf here, but I need to address Luke 17:21. It is very likely that you have only ever heard this passage quoted from the *King James Version*, which is not the best translation of this particular verse. The *King James Version* records Jesus saying these words:

*The kingdom of God is within you.*

I won't lie to you, I like the sound of that myself. It preaches well too, especially when you emphasize the word *within*. *The Kingdom of God is **within** you!* The only problem is – and please brace yourself – that's not what Jesus said. *Within you* is not the best interpretation of the Greek word (*entos*) in that passage. Most major translations properly translate that passage to say that the Kingdom of God is *in your midst*, or *among you*. The point Jesus is trying to make is that the Kingdom of God is here on the earth and that it is really, really, really, really *close to us*. It is in our midst, near us, among us, coming upon us, and sometimes even touching us. Understanding that the Kingdom is all around us – rather than *within* us – is a big leap toward a greater revelation of the Kingdom of God.

If you are struggling with what I just said, and wondering if perhaps the *King James Version* got this one right, and all the other major translations got it wrong, read the passage in its context and look at who Jesus was speaking to. That will end the

debate. When He said those words Jesus was talking to Pharisees! There isn't a chance that He would have told a bunch of Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was "within" them. Nothing would be further from the truth. This is what Jesus had to say about what was within a Pharisee:

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness"* (Matt. 23:27).

Jesus never said that the Kingdom was *within* us. If you have imagined the Kingdom being within you, rather than all around you, this revelation may be a key to unlock some amazing things for you. I'll tell you why it matters.

If I assume that I am always inside the Kingdom and that the Kingdom is always inside me, I'm golden, and I have nothing to contend for. But if I believe that the Kingdom is near, in my midst, all around me, and closer than my next breath – but realize that I might have to lean into it, reach into it, press into it, or even find a key to unlock it – then I have something to pursue. I have something to contend for. I have something to do. If I recognize that *the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force* (Matt. 11:12), then I'm less likely to be so passive. I can't just sit back with my feet up and say, *I've already got it! It's within me!*

Many claim to have the Kingdom within them but do not have the power to heal a headache. That is not the kind of Kingdom I'm talking about in this book. I'm talking about the real one! I'm talking about the Kingdom of God that – when it touches you – drives out demons, sickness, disease, and everything else that doesn't smell like God (see Luke 11:20).

**Look at the way Jesus talked about the Kingdom:**

*“... nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is **in your midst**” (Luke 17:21).*

*When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are **not far** from the kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34).*

*“Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has **come near** to you’” (Luke 10:9).*

*But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has **come upon you** (Luke 11:20).*

You can see by the way Jesus talked about the Kingdom that the most common way to be impacted by its power is to be *touch*ed by it, to get close enough to the Kingdom to get a shock. You don't have to enter into it to access its power any more than you need to be struck by lightning to charge your cell phone. Being touched by the Kingdom is a very viable way to access Kingdom power.

So when I say that most Christians never *enter into* the Kingdom I do not mean it as an insult, nor as an eternal death sentence. Entering in is a very extreme and very uncommon experience. To say that most never enter in is like saying that most never see an angel in their earthly lives or a chariot of fire coming down from the sky. Most never hear the audible voice of God or experience an open vision. Most never wake up to see Jesus sitting at the end of their bed or receive a visit from Moses or Elijah. These are not insults, just facts. Those would be examples of *entering in*. They are not small things.

Having said that, however, many people do live Kingdom lives. Many do tap into Kingdom power in extraordinary ways.

Many are touched by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, the very atmosphere of the Kingdom of God. Many are healed. Many have prophetic pictures, dreams, and spiritual experiences that come from being connected to the Kingdom. Many experience the overwhelming love of God. Many develop true friendship with God, love for God, and intimacy with God. We do not have to get to the other side of the veil to be God's friend or to do great things for God, we simply need to learn to *connect* with the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is near. If you have ever had an answered prayer, you have accessed it. If you have ever experienced a miracle, you have plugged into it. If you are saved, you have been changed by it. If you have ever heard God speak to your spirit, you have tapped into it. If you have ever been healed or delivered, you've been touched by it. And if you are a revival junkie like I am then you have probably been buzzed, shocked, and knocked down by it more times than you can count!

You may still have a long way to go in the area of sanctification. Most Christians do. You may still have some areas in your life that you have not yet surrendered to the Lord, areas that disqualify you from *entering in* (see chapter four). But if you love Jesus, if you are hungry for more of Him, and if you are moving forward and growing in your walk with Him (growth is the key) you *are* living a Kingdom life and you should expect to see miracles! A Kingdom life is not a perfect life, or even always a mature life, it is a life that is *growing*. Jesus compared the Kingdom to a tiny mustard seed that, when planted, grows and grows until it becomes a great tree that provides a place for birds to come and live (see Luke 13:19). You might be small now, but if you are committed to growth you are going to go places and become a blessing to many!

Mike Bickle often emphasizes that *God enjoys us even in our immaturity*. That message has given me confidence with the Lord. We need to know that we are enjoyed by God in every stage of our development (as long as we actually are developing). God doesn't wait until after we are mature to begin loving and enjoying us. He enjoys us all along the way. Just as we enjoy small children, even in their immaturity, God enjoys us in our early development as well.

If you are growing in your faith and in your walk with the Lord, know that God finds pleasure in you right now, right where you are. Don't be satisfied to stay where you are because there is far more for you in maturity than there is in immaturity, but you can enjoy God's love today nonetheless. Expect God to touch you with His presence and His power, and expect things to get better and better as you grow in Him. We can enjoy *plugging in* while we dream about one day *entering in*. We can enjoy the little shocks while we dream about the lightning bolts. That is what keeps us moving forward!

## **Try Not To Be Offended**

Some people will read this and get offended (that will keep you out too). Some will snap, "Are you telling me that I'm not *in* the Kingdom of God?" My answer is... probably not, at least not at the moment. I hope, however, that I'm convincing you that entering in is not a small thing, and that living a Kingdom life is not all about entering in anyway.

Please don't be put off by the way that I use the phrase *Kingdom of God*. I realize that it is probably not the way that you are used to hearing it used. I am not trying to call anyone spiritually weak. I am attempting, however, to adjust our vocabulary a little bit so that we can begin to see the Kingdom in a new way, recognizing what is available, and what it can cost.

When you understand that the Kingdom of God is a very special place that very few people ever enter into or inherit, you are not so offended when you discover that you don't live there. Nobody does. My goal in writing this book is to inspire and motivate you to be one who lives a Kingdom life, connects to Kingdom power, and perhaps even one of the few who does *enter in* on occasion, like those who were permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies in the Old Testament. Passing through the veil, and entering into the Most Holy Place, was not for common people living common lives. The same is true today. There is a veil that few get past, and a Most Holy Place that few enter into.

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**There is a veil that few get past, and a Most Holy Place that few enter into.**

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It might make this pill a little easier to swallow if I told you that some of the greatest men and women of God in history never entered the Kingdom. They *tapped* into it, experienced some of the glory of it, but many never *entered* into it. Jesus actually taught that the greatest man ever born of a woman (John the Baptist) never entered the Kingdom. Jesus said that the person who is the very least in the Kingdom would be greater than John (see Luke 7:28). John could not have entered the Kingdom or that statement would not be true. And so we know that it must be tough to enter in when the very guy who first introduced the Kingdom didn't! (This is another reason why I can't believe that the Kingdom of God includes Heaven. If it does, then John the Baptist went to Hell.)

## **Splitting Hairs?**

I'm sure that someone is wondering if I am just splitting hairs and trying to make something simple into something complex.



Why do we need to differentiate between *plugging in* and *entering in*, or being shocked versus struck? Having a proper understanding of what the Kingdom of God is, and the different ways that we connect to it, is vitally important. It has a big impact on what we believe, especially in the following four areas:

## 1. We stop sending everyone to Hell

A proper understanding of what it means to *enter into* or *inherit* the Kingdom keeps us from misinterpreting the scriptures that talk about those who will *never* enter into or *never* inherit the Kingdom (chapter four). Your late grandmother, who had an issue with slandering her sister, might just be in Heaven! I hope that is good news to you. You don't have to delete 1 Corinthians 6:10 from your Bible to get her into Heaven. You simply realize that she may have missed out on entering into *Heaven on Earth* – the Kingdom of God – but that doesn't mean that she missed out on Heaven itself. And Uncle Joe, who did love Jesus almost as much as he loved beer, he might be in Heaven too.

## 2. The scriptures make more sense

The truth is, you probably never thought your grandma was in Hell. You knew she loved the Lord, even though she was a little loose with her tongue. And you were pretty sure that Uncle Joe went to Heaven too, even though he did get drunk most Friday nights. So how did you come to believe that they were in Heaven when the Bible clearly says that they will *never enter the Kingdom of God*? It isn't a grey area in scripture. It is black and white. The Bible says that drunks and slanderers will *never enter* the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10).

If we are honest, most of us will admit that we just didn't believe that verse. At the very least, we hoped that it meant

something else. The good news is – it did! The Bible doesn't say that grandma and Uncle Joe can't enter Heaven, it says that they can't *inherit the Kingdom of God* – God's realm of glory and power on Earth. Receiving eternal life is a free gift given to *whosoever believeth in Him* (John 3:16), not *whosoever lives a spotless life, never slanders, and never gets drunk*. You will be surprised how many scriptures that once seemed confusing, or appeared to conflict with other scriptures, will now make perfect sense in light of the fact that the Kingdom is the manifest presence, power, and glory of God on earth and not the "eternal destination of the saved".

### **3. We will experience more power**

The more you understand the Kingdom of God and how it works, the easier it becomes for you to tap into its power. When you read scriptures that refer to the Kingdom you will discover keys that you can use to unlock it. You will learn how to live a life that attracts the Kingdom to you. Those who do not understand the Kingdom or how to connect to it are unlikely to be on the receiving end of Kingdom power. Many believers live powerless lives because they do not know what is available to them or how to access it.

### **4. We begin to contend for something bigger**

When you reach the peak of a mountain, you stop climbing. But if you can see a higher peak, it causes you to press on to higher places. Many think that they have reached the peak of spirituality, that they have been there, done that, and got the T-shirt to prove it. But when you understand the Kingdom of God, and what you might see at the top of this mountain – or inside it – you quickly realize that you aren't there yet. You haven't arrived. There is more for you. Much more.

When we understand that *entering in* is a rare and glorious experience it makes us want it even more. When we realize that there is a realm of glory that very few people ever enter into, it makes us want to be one of the few – even if the price is high. And yes, it is.



## EIGHT

# Entering In



I have been trying to emphasize that 99% of Kingdom life has nothing to do with “entering into” the Kingdom. It is mostly about accessing the Kingdom, touching it, being touched by it, or plugging into it. And after all that I have said up to this point you might be led to believe that I am satisfied with all that. I am not. I desperately want the 1% that few find. I want to enter in!

Entering in is something that I think about a lot. I dream about it at night. I am always looking for an unlocked door – a big door, a small door, a back door – any door will do! I search the scriptures for *Keys of the Kingdom*, keys that might unlock whatever door happens to be in front of me. It sometimes seems like the key that opened a particular door last week doesn’t work this week, and I wonder who changed the lock. I have literally wept on the floor with pain in my heart, crying, *I’ll do anything Lord! I will give You anything! Just let me in for a minute or two – or You come out here with me! I need to be closer to You than this!*

In an intense time of prayer or worship He will sometimes give me a little taste of the other side and then I am ruined.

Nothing but the Kingdom will satisfy a hunger for the Kingdom. Nothing compares. I would trade everything I have for what is on the other side of the veil. Jesus commands us to *seek first His Kingdom* (Matt. 6:33), but what a tall order that is! Sometimes it feels like trying to catch the wind.

What exactly do we seek when we seek the Kingdom? What is it that we pursue? I can only speak for myself, but it isn't the power that I'm after. Like anyone, I like to see healings, miracles, and financial breakthroughs when I pray – and that is all Kingdom stuff too – but power isn't my main goal. What I want is *Him!*

I want to see Jesus. I know that sounds a little grandiose, but it is the absolute truth. I want to see His eyes. I want to hold His hand. I want to feel His presence wrapped around me. I want deeper connection and intimacy with the Lord. I want to go for a walk with Him, maybe even across a lake! I want Him to show up in my pickup and ride with me for a few miles. I want Him to wake me up in the middle of the night with a vision or a heavenly encounter. I want to hear His voice, to see His smile, and know with all certainty that the way I live my life is pleasing to Him. The tangible presence of the Lord is the prize that I am after.

Many seek the Kingdom only for the miracles, but it is not the miracles that I want most. It may sound ironic, but miracles have actually caused me pain at times because they remind me that God is so close and yet I can't see Him! I know that He is there but I can't quite touch Him. I find it gut-wrenching to be convinced that He is only an inch away and yet I cannot feel Him. It's like knowing that the long lost love of your life is only ten feet away, but on the other side of a wall too tall to scale.

One time, a few years back, I saw so many miracles (all financial) in a period of forty-five days that it was mind blowing. Every time I turned around, for a month and a half, something radically improbable would happen. The first few miracles were impressive but some might have argued that they were amazing coincidences. By the end of forty-five days of daily financial miracles, however, I had no grid for what I was experiencing. Day after day I would find myself saying, “This is impossible!” The statistical odds of the events that occurred would have the same probability as flipping a coin two hundred times and having it always land on heads. It’s a great story about how we made a boatload of cash, but I’ll save it for another book as I don’t want to make this chapter about money.

What I will tell you, however, is that at the end of the forty-five days of miracles I found myself standing outside under the stars at three o’clock in the morning, weeping, and pleading with the Lord for a visitation. I cried, “Jesus, I don’t need more money! We’re loaded! What I want is YOU! I know that You love me and that You are trying to show it with all this ‘stuff,’ but these miracles are not satisfying me. All I want is for You to come out here and visit with me for EVEN ONE MINUTE! Don’t hide any longer. I know you’re here right now. I see Your hand a thousand times a day—but I want to see Your face!”

Was the Kingdom near? Oh yeah! I could taste it! Was I plugged in to the Kingdom? Definitely. Was I experiencing power? For sure. But did I enter in? No. He stayed on His side of the veil and I stayed on mine. The veil – so thin – yet just thick enough to feel like a brick wall.

All my life I have longed to see Jesus. I know that I’ll have eternity to gaze at Him, but somehow that isn’t good enough. I want to see Him now. I remember being at the altar at summer

camp as a seven-year-old boy crying out to the Lord with genuine tears, “Jesus I need to see You! Just show me Your face! One time Lord! Just make an exception this once!” In the middle of my prayer I thought that I heard Him speak to my heart and tell me that He would meet me behind the shower shack at midnight. I couldn’t believe it! Was it His voice? Was it my mind playing tricks on me? I figured that I had better go just in case.

At 11:59 that night I stood behind the shower shack, outside and in the dark, under the stars, keeping a close eye on my watch as my heart pounded with excitement. I was happy and terrified at the same time. Full of expectancy, I waited for the clock to strike twelve. I imagined that Jesus Himself would come walking around the corner of the shack at any moment, glowing white, and lighting up the entire area. What would I say? Would I stand, or bow? What would He say? Would I pass out? At one moment, nervous that He might not show, I whispered to the Lord, “I really want to see You Jesus, but if You are too busy and You just can’t make it, I will settle for an angel as well. But just so You know, I really want YOU! An angel would be a slight disappointment.”

12:00 came and went. So did 12:01 and 12:02. I stayed there for at least thirty minutes hoping that He was just running late. Maybe He got caught up in the heavens or something. That happened to an angel in the Bible. Maybe the Prince of Persia was slowing Him down. But He never showed up, my seven-year-old heart broke, and I cried for quite a while. I still remember feeling so disappointed, and so incredibly rejected and alone. I wondered why Jesus wouldn’t visit me, even for just a minute or two, if He really loved me so much.

Decades have come and gone since that night, yet I still find myself crying those same tears at times, with the same knot



in my stomach, waiting in that same place, that dark place, hoping that Jesus will slip through the veil and light things up. It feels like I am forever missing Him. Do you ever feel that way? You know that you are saved, but is that somehow not quite enough for you?

Jesus has given us a hunger for communion with Him because He hungers for communion with us. Intimacy with Him is a narrow road that few find, but He is hoping that we will desire Him enough to search for it and find it. He actually wants us more than we want Him. Jesus was not talking to sinners, but rather to believers when He said, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me* (Rev. 3:20).

The Bible is filled with promises that point to the fact that there is a supernatural realm for us to access in this life. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God! Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.* Over and over the promise is repeated: *there is more for those who pay the price than for those who simply believe.*

To a group of wealthy, but lukewarm and self-satisfied believers, Jesus says, *I advise you to buy from Me... eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see* (Rev.

3:18). Do you wonder what you might see if you had some of that eye salve? I do. I wonder what is happening on the other side of the veil. What is going on? What is Jesus

up to? I wonder how many angels are in this coffee shop that I'm sitting in right now as I type these words. I wonder what

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**There is more for those who pay the price than for those who simply believe.**

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they look like, how big they are, and what they think of me. Do they find me amusing? Boring? Exciting? Disappointing? I would love to have a peek behind the veil. I would love to *see* the Kingdom of God, but I need some of that salve so that I can see it. Jesus said I could buy it from Him. How much do you think it costs?

Just as we find pleasure in knowing that someone desires us, the Lord finds pleasure in our hunger for Him and in our willingness to pay the price to be close to Him. He desires to reveal Himself to people, but not to just anyone. He only shows Himself to those who desperately seek Him. His presence is His reward to them. Jeremiah 29:13-14 says:

*You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord.*

One day, while walking through my kitchen, the Lord said to me, *I've got a word for you Steve!* When I asked Him what it was He said, *Jeremiah 30:21*. I found that intriguing because I had no clue what that verse said. Usually God speaks to me through scriptures that I have already committed to memory. I looked up Jeremiah 30:21 and found this question halfway through the verse: *Who is he who will devote himself to be close to Me?*

I shouted, “Pick me! I’ll do it! I will devote myself to be close to You! I will do whatever it takes! Just give me the chance to come closer!” The Lord does that to me a lot. Even when He isn’t necessarily allowing me past the veil, He is speaking to me, showing His love to me, touching my heart, drawing me closer, and stirring up a deeper hunger in me for the Kingdom of God, and for His presence in particular. He wants me to want His presence. He wants you to want His presence too.

I don’t even mind the fact that it is difficult to enter in. Just knowing that it is possible – and getting my toes wet from time

to time – is enough to keep me pressing in and pressing forward. I suppose I sometimes wish that it was a little less expensive, but I have come to accept that the best things in life... cost you everything!

*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matt. 13:45-46).*

Jesus is that pearl. At least, to me He is. Everything else in the Kingdom is just an added bonus. Righteousness, peace, and joy are fantastic, but what I really want is Him. Power is great, healing is awesome, miracles are a blast, but nothing He gives compares to who He is. The manifest presence of Jesus is the greatest prize that the Kingdom has to offer.

## Why Won't You Let Me In?

One morning the Lord spoke to me and said, *If you press into My presence today I will show you something else about the Kingdom.* That was enough for me! I took the whole day to seek the Lord and to soak in His presence. I had a wonderful morning in worship and enjoyed a real sense of closeness to the Lord. I could feel that He was near.

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**Nothing He  
gives compares  
to who He is**

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At one point I asked the Lord, “If we really are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, by angels, power, and a supernatural world filled with glory, why don't You let more people see it? If everyone could see You once in a while, or even an angel, there would be a lot more faith in Your people. It just doesn't make sense to me. Why don't You let more people enter in?”

I had not even finished the question when the Lord answered me with a scripture that I had never paid much

attention to. It revealed to me that it is actually His kindness that keeps many of His people *out* of the Kingdom. This is the scripture He brought to my remembrance:

*For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame (Heb. 6:4-6).*

If you didn't quite catch that, God just said that there is no grace to backslide if you have entered into the deepest places of the Kingdom. This passage reveals that God does allow some people to taste the *heavenly gift* and the *powers of the age to come*, to experience radical *enlightenment*, incredible connection with the Holy Spirit, and to experience the spoken word (*rhema*) of God in extraordinary ways. To those who have been granted access to that realm, however, falling away becomes an eternal death sentence! If you go that deep, and then fall away from the Lord, you are lost forever. It becomes *impossible* for you to be brought back to repentance. The Bible says that those people subject Jesus to open shame and it would appear as though the Father basically says, *THAT is where I draw the line! THAT is how to run out of grace with Me!* What is my point? It is my belief that God keeps many people *out* of the Kingdom – the realm of glory and power – for their own good.

After the Lord showed me that scripture He asked me, *Do you still want to enter in, Steve?* To be honest, I had to think about it! I did fall away from the Lord for a season in my youth. I can't imagine myself ever walking away from the Lord again, but do I want to bet my *eternity* on it? Stranger things have happened. I wouldn't be the first preacher to fall away. It took me a while to

answer that question but finally, soberly, I answered, “I understand the risk, and yes I want to enter in.”

## A Glimpse

One time, on the *inside* via a vision, Jesus did let me see Him. Believe it or not, it actually happened. It lasted probably two minutes and I stared at His face for most of it. I have never seen anyone as kind, as peaceful, or as humble as the Lord. No one has ever looked at me or loved me like that Man did during those two minutes. His eyes were so full of friendship – intense *friendship* is what I saw – and He is so incredibly protective of me. When I saw the way He looked at me I knew that I would always be safe as long as I was with Him. Those two minutes of gazing into the face of Jesus were the highlight of my spiritual life to this day. I have never doubted His intense love for me since.

For a “rich young ruler” who often finds it hard to enter in, the experience was more than a dream come true, but it ruined me. Once I knew that I could see Him I wanted to see Him every day. The two-minute vision happened while I was at IHOP (the *International House of Prayer* in Kansas City) and it happened in the middle of someone’s preaching. When the vision ended I blubbered and sobbed and howled so loudly – and was such a distraction to the meeting – that the speaker actually called for a break to pray for me. People gathered around and laid their hands on me. It was embarrassing and awkward. I told all the people touching me that I was fine, and kindly asked them to stop. I just wanted Jesus to come back!

As I write these words, that was seven years ago in April and I have gone back to Kansas every April since, always for at least a week. I go by myself so that I can be alone with the Lord.

I turn off my phone, I sit in that big prayer room, I listen to the beautiful music and drift away. I pray. I sing. I think. I read. I meditate. I daydream. I wait.

It has become an annual spiritual retreat for me. I keep asking the Lord to show Himself to me again, like He did that one time. He hasn't, but I'm certain that He will. As I write these words I am in Kansas City, I'll be here all week, and we'll see what happens. Whether I get "struck by lightning" or not, it will be a great time. I will hear His voice speaking to my heart. He will give me vision and direction for the upcoming year. I will experience His love for me, and He will experience my love for Him. At the very least it will be a great escape, but I'm not hoping for the least. I'm hoping that maybe – just maybe – I'll enter in!

Some people think that seeking the Kingdom is a big waste of time, but the Lord told me that I have nothing better to do with my life.

## NINE

# The Top of the Mountain



To get a bigger picture of what the Kingdom of God is, and how intense Kingdom experiences can be, take a look at the early church. Those guys entered in! One of my favorite Kingdom encounters is found in Luke chapter nine. It is a bit wordy, but I encourage you to read this passage out loud, and slowly. As you do, try to watch for three things:

1. The incredible cost of going after Jesus
2. The promise that some people will see the Kingdom of God in this life
3. A few people actually *seeing* the Kingdom of God in this life

*And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? For*

*whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God."*

*Some eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep; but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not realizing what he was saying.*

*While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!" And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone (Luke 9:23-36).*

Can you imagine seeing that, not in a dream, but with your very eyes? What a trip! I think that I would have done the same thing as Peter. I can just see myself saying something really stupid in an attempt to make the encounter last a little longer. In my case, however, rather than offering to build three shelters, I would have offered to book them into a really nice hotel. That's more my style.

I love Peter's words: "Master, it is good for us to be here." No doubt, Peter! I'd call that a pretty good day too! What *wouldn't*



we do to keep an experience like that from ending? I would stand on my head and stack nickels to keep it rolling if I thought it would help.

While reading the story, did you notice all three things that I mentioned earlier?

## 1. The incredible cost of following Jesus

Before Jesus even mentions the idea of anyone seeing the Kingdom of God, He starts by talking about the surrendered life. Jesus says, *If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*

Now most people will interpret a verse like this by inserting the idea of Heaven and Hell. They make it about salvation. Many will read this to mean that if you want to go to Heaven you have to deny your fleshly desires. But Jesus didn't say, *If you want to go to Heaven you must deny...* He says nothing about Heaven or Hell in this passage. What He said was, *If you wish to **come after Me** you must deny...* Because I believe all those scriptures that we looked at in chapter three about salvation being a free gift given to whosoever believes, I have to read this scripture differently than many people do. I can't make it about Heaven and Hell. I can't make it about salvation because I won't embrace a salvation that is bought by works or self-denial. Paul's writings won't allow me to.

Do you remember how I mentioned my mother's "thief-on-the-cross-litmus-test"? If you have a belief that would disqualify the thief on the cross from entering Heaven, then your belief is wrong because Jesus said that he made the cut. Well, the thief on the cross certainly never lived a sacrificial and surrendered life! He wasn't big on self-denial, and therefore,

Luke 9:23 can't be about salvation. I tend to interpret the passage a little more like this:

Jesus: *Hey Steve, do you want to come after Me?*

Me: *Uh, where?*

Jesus: *Wherever I am.*

Me: *But You are in heavenly places. You are on the other side of the veil, or in Heaven itself.*

Jesus: *Yeah, I know. Do you want to come after Me?*

Me: *Are You saying...*

Jesus: *You know it!*

Me: *Yes! Of course I want to come after You! Let me in!*

Jesus: *You can't enter this realm like that. You are going to have to deny yourself, to say no to some stuff, and you aren't all that good at saying no to yourself Steve.*

Me: *I'll do it!*

Jesus: *You're going to have to take up your cross—it's a daily thing. There will be some dying involved on YOUR part. It will be a slow death, and it is going to hurt.*

Me: *I'll do it! I'll do anything! Bring it on!*

Jesus: *Alright then, follow Me!*

## **2. The promise that a few people will see the Kingdom of God in this life**

Here are some of the most misunderstood words Jesus ever spoke:

*But I say to you truthfully, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God (Luke 9:27).*

Many throughout history have considered this to be an error on Jesus' part. Many have believed that Jesus missed it, assuming that He meant that some of those standing there that day would live until the second coming. Because they have all died, people have said, "Aha! Jesus was wrong! None of them lived that long!"

When Jesus appears to be wrong, always make the assumption that you are missing something and that He is absolutely right! He always is. Jesus never said that any of them would live to see the second coming. He said that some who were standing there that day would *see the Kingdom of God* before they died. And then – in the very next verse – Luke says, *Some eight days after these sayings...* and he tells the story of the transfiguration. He tells a story about three guys who were in that meeting who got to *see* the Kingdom of God with their very eyes. Do you think that the story of the transfiguration follows that promise by accident? Not a chance! The transfiguration was the fulfillment of that promise.

Luke says that the transfiguration happened *some eight days after* Jesus promised that some would see the Kingdom in this life. The phrase *some eight days* means *somewhere around eight days* (the NIV says *about eight days*). I'm not sure why Luke didn't use a more concrete number. I suppose he didn't know it. But Matthew did, and so did Mark. Matthew and Mark both tell the exact same story. Like Luke, they both emphasize the cost of pursuing Jesus. They both follow that by mentioning Jesus' promise that some standing there would see the Kingdom of God *before* they died. And then both Matthew and Mark – just like Luke – head right into the story of the transfiguration. The only difference in their versions of the story is that while Luke basically says that it was "about" eight days later, Matthew and Mark both clearly emphasize that the transfiguration happened

six days after Jesus made the promise that some would see the Kingdom in this life (see Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2).

I'm not drawing attention to this to say that Luke messed up (although maybe he should have called Matthew or Mark to get the exact details before sending his book to the publishers). The reason why I am drawing attention to this is because it seems so incredibly interesting to me that all three of these writers feel the need to emphasize that the transfiguration happened *just days* after Jesus' promise that some would see the Kingdom in this life. Isn't that a little odd?

Why would they all do that? Why would they all emphasize the time frame unless they were trying to connect these two events to each other? All three of them obviously wanted us to understand what it might look like to *see* the Kingdom of God in this life. They all wanted us to know that the transfiguration was the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that some would see the Kingdom before tasting death. All three writers make it as plain as day for us. *Jesus said that some would not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God, and then, about a week later... (drum roll)...tada!!!*

### **3. A few people see the kingdom of God**

The transfiguration is possibly the New Testament's greatest example of Kingdom encounters. It pretty much has it all: the presence of God, the glory of God, the audible voice of God, a glory cloud, Jesus' face changing and His clothes getting as bright as lightning. And if that weren't enough, Moses and Elijah even slip through the veil for a visit! If you have that happen to you next week, you can be quite confident that you have *seen* the Kingdom of God! You have entered in!

Why do you think that this story was mentioned in the Bible? Do you think that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were just


trying to tease us, as if to say, *The early church rocked, and your church stinks! We had glory clouds, and you have PowerPoint! Nana-nana-boo-boo!* I have a sneaking suspicion that they weren't just trying to tease us, but rather trying to let us know just how glorious this Kingdom stuff can really get. They were trying to whet our appetites.

The Kingdom of God is a realm of glory on Earth that this generation has no grid for, yet it is a realm that you and I can inherit if we are willing to pay the price. We need to be reminded, however, that inheritances do not come to us after we die, but rather while we live. If you want to inherit the Kingdom of God you have to do it now, but there is a price to pay and that price is the surrendered life. If we want to go after Jesus – *at this level* – we must deny that flesh that holds us back like a ball and chain, we must take up our crosses daily, and we must pursue the Lord with wholehearted devotion.



T E N

## Kingdom Encounters in the New Testament



When it comes to the Kingdom of God, and Kingdom encounters, always dream big and shoot for the moon. If you don't expect much from God, you won't get much from God. If this book does anything at all, I'm hoping that it will convince you that there is more for you to contend for in the realm of the Spirit. I'm hoping that it will raise your expectations, your faith, and that you will experience more of the Kingdom as a result. Having said that, however, I want to be careful not to mislead you concerning what it means to enter the Kingdom of God.

While entering in is a very big deal, it is usually a little less grandiose than the transfiguration! You won't always see Jesus shining like lightning in front of you. Moses and Elijah do not normally show up for afternoon tea. That would be wonderful, and it is not unbiblical or impossible, but it is also not an average day in the Kingdom and we would be naïve to think that it was. I have never personally had a visit from Moses or Elijah... yet!

We have looked at the transfiguration – the glory realm at its peak – now let’s have a look at what might be considered more *normal* occurrences (as far as the New Testament is concerned).

Kingdom encounters will vary in many ways. I have purposefully avoided drawing a hard line between *entering in* and *being touched*, but there is a difference. We can see many in scripture who were *touched* by the Kingdom that would have been disqualified from *entering into* it, but I can’t confidently say where to draw the line between those two realities. What I can tell you is that entering in is a lot more intense. It’s more than simply hearing the *still small voice* of the Spirit within your heart. That should be an everyday occurrence for every believer.

Entering in is when “things get real”, as the saying goes. When you have to ask someone, “Did you see that?” or “Did

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you hear that?” you are probably *entering in, seeing, or inheriting* the Kingdom. So what does it mean to enter in? This is my best attempt at a definition: *Entering in is when the spiritual realm becomes more real to you than the natural realm.* I would use the same definition to explain *seeing or inheriting* the Kingdom.

As much as I would enjoy telling some present day stories to illustrate what it means to enter in, I’m going to try to stick to the Bible because I know that it is harder for you to argue with (just being honest). I do, however, encourage you to study the lives of people who have entered into supernatural places or have connected with significant Kingdom power. To name a few, people like William Branham, Smith Wigglesworth,



Kathryn Kuhlman, Kenneth Hagin, Bob Jones, and the like. Some of my favorite modern day examples are people like Paul Keith Davis, Bobby Conner, Larry Randolph, Rick Joyner, Mahesh & Bonnie Chavda, and Heidi Baker. Mike Bickle is great too, and his series entitled *Encountering Jesus* is filled with story after story that will set you on fire with a hunger for the supernatural (and it is free online). This is not by any means an exhaustive list, but rather just a few of my favorite preachers. Google any one of their names and you will find a multitude of sermons to listen to or watch, often for free.

There are many integral ministers today with stories that will whet your appetite to seek the Kingdom. While not everyone who claims to have had supernatural encounters actually have – some people lie – if we roll our eyes at everyone who claims to have seen an angel or had a visitation from the Lord we are certainly not Biblical Christians either. Jesus rebuked people who did that:

*He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen (Mark 16:14).*

God is still doing powerful things today in the lives of hungry and surrendered people. We need to hear their stories.

In this chapter, however, I want to look at just how common these Kingdom encounters are in the New Testament. I want you to believe that this stuff is Biblical. I am not saying that these things happen every day, but simply that they can happen to those who live Kingdom lives, and that they are more likely to happen to people who believe in and celebrate the Kingdom of God. So here are some New Testament examples...

## **Kingdom Encounters in the New Testament**

Peter, in Acts chapter ten, was up on a roof praying when he fell into a trance. Heaven opened like a curtain and he saw right into the spiritual realm. God showed him something that looked like a sheet filled with animals and reptiles and birds. Peter then heard a voice saying, “Kill and eat!” It was a pretty intense experience where the veil was pulled back and Peter was allowed to see into the supernatural realm. *That* is a Kingdom encounter. That is something I would refer to as *entering in*, or *seeing* the Kingdom of God. Peter saw something and he heard something. It was more than a daydream or a prophetic thought. While the people around him might not have seen anything, it was very real to Peter.

Acts chapter seven records the story of Stephen, a man known for performing signs and wonders, and also known for being filled with God’s grace and power. He was a Kingdom man. While preaching to a crowd of angry people he looked up and could suddenly see right into Heaven. The veil was torn open for him. He saw the glory of God, and he even saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God. Jesus, who is normally seated at the Father’s right hand, stood up for Steve! He tells the angry crowd what he is seeing and rather than celebrating with Him, they lose it! They drag Stephen out of the city and stone him to death. What a way to go—with a standing ovation from Jesus Himself!

The Apostle Paul had many Kingdom encounters in his life, six of which are mentioned in the book of Acts. I list them for a quick reference, but they are all worth taking the time to study in depth if you desire to build your faith for a greater release of the Kingdom in your life.

## Some of Paul's Encounters

1. On the Damascus road Paul (Saul) is knocked to the ground by a light that flashes from Heaven and he hears Jesus' voice rebuking him (Acts 9:3-6). It is interesting to note that he was not even saved when he had this first encounter. This tells us that while those who contend for the supernatural ought to live surrendered lives, God can touch anyone He wants with Kingdom power, saint or sinner.
2. On another occasion Paul had a vision in the night of a man from Macedonia begging Paul to come to him (Acts 16:9-10). After having the vision Paul and his team immediately conclude that God was calling them to go to Macedonia to preach the gospel, and they left.
3. Jesus spoke to Paul in a vision, promising to protect him, and encouraging him to keep speaking in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10).
4. One time Paul fell into a trance where he got to see Jesus. The Lord warned him to quickly leave Jerusalem because trouble was on its way. The Lord informed Paul that He was sending him to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21).
5. Another time the Lord stood right next to Paul – how amazing that must have been – and spoke to him about how he must testify in Rome (Acts 23:11).
6. While on a ship, in a storm, Paul had a visit from an angel who encouraged him and promised him that he and all his companions would survive the storm (Acts 27:23-24).

It is easy to see, even just from Paul's six Kingdom encounters recorded in Acts, that these experiences range in both scope and intensity. We can see angels, we can hear the

Lord, we can see the Lord, we can have visions and dreams, we can fall into trances, and we can even get knocked off our horses by bright lights from Heaven! These are all examples of times where Paul was more than simply touched by Kingdom power, but was rather permitted to *enter into* an encounter that was as real to him as the nose on his face.

In all of these experiences the Kingdom of God became radically evident, even to Paul's natural senses. He heard things, saw things, and physically felt things. That is entering in. These types of encounters are going to increase in the days ahead. Joel prophesied that in the last days God would pour out His spirit on men and women, young and old. He said that God's people would have visions, dreams, and that God would *display wonders in the sky and on the earth* (see Joel 2:28-30). If you are wholehearted and lovesick, things are going to get real and will only continue to intensify. If you are unwilling to live a surrendered life, however, you will miss out on this realm. A little lust, pride, or unforgiveness in your heart might not send you to Hell, but it will keep you from entering the Kingdom.

We should also note that many of the most intense Kingdom encounters occurred during difficult times, and especially during persecution. Jesus said, *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* (Matt. 5:10). Peter said that the *Spirit of glory* rests on those who are insulted for the name of Christ (1 Pet. 4:14). Stephen was about to be stoned when he saw into Heaven. Paul was often in life and death situations when he received visitations. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw Jesus *after* they were thrown into the fire. If God sends an angel to you it is probably not because you said "pretty please" or because you thought it would be kind of neat to meet one. God sends His messengers to those who need a message. He sends His power to those who

find themselves in need of a miracle. The Kingdom of God is not for party tricks, impressing crowds, or for proving to your mother that you finally accomplished something with your life. It isn't for armchair Christians who want to have a cool story to tell. Kingdom encounters are most common among those who live surrendered lives on the front lines of the battlefield. And guess what? You are called to do just that!

Paul's greatest supernatural experience, by far, is found in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4. He starts by saying, "I know a man in Christ..." as though he is talking about someone else, but then later lets the cat out of the bag (in verse seven) that he is really talking about himself. I don't think he was trying too hard to keep it a secret.

*I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago –whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.*

Paul couldn't tell if he was in his body or out of his body. That's a pretty good problem to have if you are seeking the Kingdom!

When you read a story like that, does it register with you that this is a true story and something that *really* happened to a *real* person? Do you think that something like that could ever happen to you? Can you imagine going up – with or without your body – into the third Heaven? Into Paradise? Can you imagine hearing things that words cannot express, and being told secrets that God will not permit you to share? That experience even goes beyond the borders of the Kingdom of God. Paul entered Heaven itself!

I know that these experiences can seem a little too-cool-to-be-true, but keep in mind that I am showing you this stuff *in the Bible* – our very source for what is true and what is false. We do not have permission to choose our beliefs based on our personal experiences or our comfort level. We believe what the Bible tells us to believe, and this is all in there. None of these things are unbiblical. All these things come straight from the Book. If God were against supernatural experiences He would not have offered them to the early church, and He certainly would not have had them recorded in such a way as to cause us to desire them.

You have to believe in this stuff if you are going to see it happen in your life. Jesus said, *If you believe you will see the glory of God* (John 11:40), and then he raised a dead man. If you believe, you will see the glory. But if you don't believe, you will not see the glory. Ironically, many people who cannot see the glory love to talk about how the glory doesn't exist anymore – all while the guy in the next room may be having a conversation with an angel!

I can just hear someone saying, “Yeah, I can see that it is biblical Steve, but I don't think that Paul and the boys were ‘pursuing’ spiritual encounters.” Are you kidding me? Paul was hungrier for the Kingdom of God than anyone! He lived for this stuff. He wanted to *see* God, *know* God, *encounter* God, and he loved to feel God's power. In fact, Paul was pursuing the highest form of power: *resurrection power!*

## **Paul's Pursuit**

If there was ever a man in history that we might assume had *arrived* spiritually it was the Apostle Paul. He wrote half the New Testament, he had heavenly experiences, and he often

demonstrated supernatural power in his life and ministry. Yet even this seasoned apostle adamantly declared that he had *not* arrived, and that there was much more for him to experience in the realm of the supernatural. He said that he was *pressing* and *straining* for more of it. Paul was hungry for the deeper things of the Kingdom.

I find it amazing that Paul said, “I *want* to know Christ...” I am pretty sure that if anyone did know Christ, it was Paul. If Paul didn’t know Him, none of us do. And while Paul certainly did know Christ in some measure, you can see in his letter to the Philippians just how desperately he longed to know Christ in a deeper way, and more specifically, in the realm of the supernatural. Paul says, “I want to know Christ,” and then immediately explains what he means by that statement:

*I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10-11 NIV).*

This passage would be far more popular in the church today if Paul had not included his words about *participation in Christ’s sufferings*. Westerners aren’t all that big on suffering and usually steer toward scriptures that avoid it. This fiery apostle, however, didn’t steer away from anything that would take him deeper into the Kingdom of God. He knew that the Kingdom was costly. He knew that no one could experience this level of power – *resurrection power* – without a good death. And by *death* I do not mean physical death, and Paul didn’t either. He was pursuing resurrection power and he wanted to experience it *in this life*. That is intense! He believed it was possible to experience that level of power on this side of the grave. We know this by his next words:

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, 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 (Phil. 3:12-14 NIV).*

Paul insisted that while he had not yet experienced resurrection power, he was *pressing and straining* toward it. He called it *the prize*. He said that God was calling him *Heavenward* in Christ Jesus. He was feeling pulled by God toward heavenly places. It wasn't about going to Heaven after he died. If that is all he wanted, he could have just stepped in front of a chariot. You can be sure that the guy who wrote the book on "Justification by Faith" was not *pressing* and *straining* for eternal salvation, or for Heaven. He was pressing into, and straining toward, his *Heavenward call*. Sometimes you have to get a little aggressive to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! Here is an often misunderstood scripture:

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force (Matt. 11:12).*

Many have assumed that this scripture is telling us to "storm the gates of Heaven" to get what you need from God. People who like to yell at God during prayer meetings will quote this verse and call it "taking Heaven by force." It's pathetic. I can promise you that no one is storming the gates of Heaven! No one is forcing their way into God's throne room. Nobody bosses Him around. It doesn't happen – ever! Once again, we have weird theology because we have not understood the difference between Heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven.



Heaven isn't subject to violence, the *Kingdom of Heaven* is subject to violence, and violent people like Paul push their way into it. How? He was beating his body, and making it his slave, so that he wouldn't be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor. 9:27). He was counting the cost, selling all, dying daily, denying self, and taking up his cross in pursuit of a greater manifestation of Christ. *That* is how violent men and women take the Kingdom by force. They don't get violent with God. They get violent with Satan, sin, and self, and radical about surrender to the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is filled with story after story of people who entered into the Kingdom – the realm of the supernatural. These people did not live comfortable cushy lives – they lived surrendered lives – but they were real people, just like you and me. Never forget that. The Kingdom of God is for people just like us, if...



## The Surrendered Life



You may find it surprising, but Jesus said very little about the Gospel of Salvation. He touched on it a few times, but it was not His primary message. He gave that message to Paul and others while He focused on the Gospel of the Kingdom. Compare Paul's teachings to Jesus' and you will find a radical difference. Paul taught us how to enter Heaven *after* Earth, Jesus taught us how to enter Heaven *on* Earth!

I know that I make some people uncomfortable when I talk about two gospels. Didn't Paul declare a curse on anyone who preached another gospel (Gal. 1:8)? Yes, he did, but he was referring to another Gospel of Salvation. What Paul meant was that anyone who taught another way to get to Heaven is cursed. Apparently some other leaders were teaching the Galatians that they were saved by works, and Paul was putting them in their place (Gal. 3:10). The Gospel of Salvation was something that Paul was very passionate about. He called it "my gospel" on a number of occasions, as if he owned it, and he did not appreciate anyone tinkering with it. He would not have spoken a curse,

however, over those who preached other messages of good news (that is what “gospel” means) on other subjects. He just didn’t want anyone tweaking his Gospel of Salvation.

Jesus’ gospel, His message of good news, was not primarily about salvation. Jesus did not say a lot about how to get to Heaven. Because He had not yet died on the cross, He could not preach the most important part. John 3:16 is a very special and rare verse because it is one of the few times that Jesus explains to people how to receive eternal life (salvation). His primary message was the Gospel of the Kingdom, a completely different message altogether.

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**Paul taught us how  
to enter Heaven *after*  
Earth, Jesus taught  
us how to enter  
Heaven *on Earth!***

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Heaven. Because He had not yet died on the cross, He could not preach the most important part. John 3:16 is a very special and rare verse because it is one of the few times that Jesus explains to people how to receive eternal life (salvation). His primary message

Have you ever noticed how Jesus’ teachings often emphasize an incredibly *high price*, while Paul’s teachings emphasize *no charge*? Paul is almost always trying to convince his reader that it is *not* by works and that you can’t earn or buy it any way you try. Jesus, on the other hand, is often telling people that unless they pay a high price they will never get in! Why is that? It is because they are not talking about the same thing, or more accurately, the same *place*. They are both sharing good news, but it is not the same good news. When you understand that they are preaching two separate messages there is not a conflict in scripture whatsoever.

I say all that to say this: Salvation is free. Forgiveness is free. Eternal life is free. Entering the Kingdom of God... *I wish!* Sorry friend, this one comes with a price tag that will make anyone squirm. Jesus’ gospel is much harder to swallow than Paul’s. The

price of the Kingdom is spelled out quite clearly by Jesus in Matthew 13:44. It will cost you everything.

*“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field” (NIV).*

Imagine being that man. You are out for a walk enjoying some fresh air, wandering through fields, not really knowing where you are going but going just the same. And then, lo and behold, you stumble across a hidden treasure worth more money than you could earn in a hundred lifetimes! You can’t even believe your eyes. You pinch yourself and wait to see if you will wake up. But you don’t wake up. The treasure is real!

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**Salvation is free.**  
**Forgiveness is free.**  
**Eternal life is free.**  
**Entering the Kingdom...**  
**I wish!**

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It would appear as though you hit the jackpot until you remember one tiny, but very important, little detail. The treasure is on someone else’s land, and therefore, it’s not yours to take! You are too honest to steal it – and it is too big to steal anyway – but you want it desperately. Now that you have seen it, you just have to have it! But how? What will you do? I’ll tell you what you do. You hide it again, you cover it up fast, and you pray to God that no one was watching, and that no one else knows that it is there.

After hiding the treasure again, you find the owner of the land and you ask him if he would consider selling his field, explaining to him that you like the “view.” You negotiate a price, and the price is high, much higher than you had expected. You assume that he does not know what he is selling, and yet for some odd reason he sets the price so high that you will have to

sell everything that you have to buy it. That, however, doesn't deter you in the least. You know that the price is chump change compared to the treasure that will soon be yours.

You quickly discover that selling everything you own is not an easy task, especially if you want to get a good price, and you need to get a good price for your stuff or you won't be able to afford the field. It takes time, a lot of time, to sell everything you own.

Garage sale after garage sale, weekend after weekend, you watch your life's possessions slowly disappear into the hands of friends, neighbors, and total strangers. Item by item you let go of all that was once so dear to you. Some things are harder to let go of than others, but it all has to go or you won't have enough to buy the field.

You feel pain over certain losses. You loved that saw, and that old car, and your gold coin collection that your dad left you. Some things are hard to let go of because they are valuable, others because they are sentimental, and still others because they make you feel so good. But every time your heart pangs for the loss of something precious to you, you think about the treasure and let the item go. It feels like a slow death, letting go, letting go, letting go, but you know deep in your heart that it is going to be worth it.

Lastly, you sell your house, and with that you have sold everything. The process took a lot longer than you thought, and it was more difficult than you had imagined, but you are finally ready to buy the field.

You head to the bank to get a certified cheque made out for the price of the field. You ask the teller how much you have, hoping that it is enough, or that you might even have a little left over. You know that it is going to be close, but you're not quite sure how close. When the teller shows you your balance your

jaw drops! *How can this be? Is this a coincidence or a miracle?* You have exactly the amount necessary to buy the field. Not a penny more, and not a penny less. You are suddenly glad that you fought Joe over the price of that chainsaw. If you hadn't, you would have been twenty dollars short!

With nothing but a cheque in your hand, and the clothes on your back, you walk toward the home of the owner of the field to give him everything – absolutely everything – that you have in this world. And while your neighbors laugh, your friends mock, and the whole town is certain that you have completely lost your marbles to sell everything you have just to purchase an overpriced dusty old field with a horrible view, you're smiling. Everyone wonders why. You're skipping. Now they are certain that you are nuts. You have a silly little grin on your face that won't go away. You are buzzing inside. Ecstatic. And the reason? Because you know something that no one else knows... *you're about to become the richest man in town!*

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**It feels like a slow death, letting go, letting go, letting go, but you know deep in your heart that it is going to be worth it.**

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## **The Rich Young Ruler**

Mark chapter ten records a story about a rich young man who ran to Jesus, fell on his knees, and asked the Lord what he must do to inherit eternal life. He wanted to know how to get to Heaven. Now keep in mind that that was not Jesus' main message. That was (soon to be) Paul's message. It wasn't what Jesus came to preach. You can tell by the way the Lord simply starts spouting out Old Testament commandments. He tells him to avoid murder, adultery, stealing, lying, defrauding, and He reminds him to honor his parents.

Isn't that odd? Why didn't Jesus tell the young man that he was standing right in front of *the way, the truth, and the life*? Why didn't Jesus say, *Believe in Me and you will be saved*? Jesus doesn't even give the guy a half-baked version of the Gospel of Salvation! Paul would have been mortified by Jesus' answer! It was all about the law. It was all about following rules. Apparently the Gospel of Salvation was not yet ready to be preached.

The rich young man informed Jesus that he had kept all those rules since his youth, yet it is obvious to the Lord that the young man is not satisfied with his spiritual experience. He is not satisfied just being a goody-good. He feels empty inside, hungry for more, and Jesus knows it. The rich young man wants to hear the Gospel of the Kingdom – Jesus' message – but he doesn't even know that it exists.

We are now at my favorite part of the story. The next few words are so beautiful that I love to read them again and again: *Jesus looked at him and loved him...* (Mark 10:21 NIV). I love that Mark mentioned that! The majority of wealthy people do not feel very loved by God because religion (not the Bible) has taught them that God loves poverty and hates people with money. It's a lie. Jesus genuinely loved the rich young ruler, and not in a generic "God loves the whole world" sort of way, but in a very personal way. The Lord looked him in the eye and saw something that made the human part of Jesus' heart move. Jesus *connected* with him. He didn't just love him, He liked him, and decided to invite the young man to be a part of His inner circle of friends.

At this point something very interesting happens. Jesus preaches *His own gospel!* I don't believe that the young man knew what Jesus was about to offer him, or that he even understood the offer when it was made, but he was being offered more than



just a ticket to Heaven. Seemingly out of left field, Jesus asks this guy for something absolutely outrageous:

*“There is one thing you lack: Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me”* (Mark 10:21).

What a request! How could Jesus ask for so much? All this young man wanted was to know how to get to Heaven, and Jesus seems to place a multimillion dollar price tag on his salvation! What was that about?

Can you imagine if this rich young man had asked the Apostle Paul the same question? He would have received a very different answer! Paul would have likely said, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!”* If the guy wanted some advice on finances Paul might have added, *“You should set aside a sum of money at the beginning of every week, in keeping with your income, and have it ready when I come by for collection. Don’t be proud, or put your trust in riches. Be generous to those in need. Give what God tells you to give, and never give grudgingly or under compulsion. And remember, God has given all this to you for your enjoyment, so try to have a little fun too!”* That young man would have joined the church in a second and become Paul’s biggest supporter! I guarantee it!

As it turned out, however, the rich young ruler did not hear Paul’s gospel that day. He heard Jesus’ gospel and he went away sad because the price was a lot more than he was willing to pay. If only Jesus had asked him to be a tither! Sadly, what Jesus was selling that day can’t be bought with ten percent.

Before the young man walked away, Jesus looked him straight in the eye and said something that reveals that he was being offered more than eternal life—He was offered the opportunity to *enter* the Kingdom!

*Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For 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" (Luke 18:24-25).*

I have a belief that I cannot prove. Let's call it a feeling. I have a feeling that that young man got saved at one of Paul's meetings a decade or two later, probably after hearing the Gospel of Salvation. I like to believe that he is in Heaven today, but wherever he is I can guarantee you one thing. If he could go back in time and do it all over again, he would say yes to the *Gospel of the Kingdom* that Jesus offered him. He would sell it all in a heartbeat to live the Kingdom life.

Many people are offended by spiritual teaching that includes a cost. We love to talk about God's promises in the Bible, but often ignore the conditions connected to those promises, and therefore we attempt to claim things that we do not qualify to receive. The Kingdom of God is no exception. It costs something to live a Kingdom life. It costs something to connect with Kingdom power. To enter in can cost you everything. Like it or not, access will not be granted to those who will not pay the price that Jesus sets for them.

Many of us have been nursed by a religious culture that boldly declares that *everything is free*. The motto of our times is: *Jesus did it all, so let's not do a thing!* We have been told that if spirituality costs you something, it is legalism, and therefore bad. This type of thinking is so deeply ingrained in the church today that to even question it is considered religious, legalistic, and pharisaical.

Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom goes against so much of what we have been taught. It is expensive. It is difficult. It says that if we are unwilling to pay the price, we do not get to enter

in. And we don't like being told that! We don't like being told that there is somewhere that we do not have permission to go. We don't like being told that we are missing out. Most would rather believe that the glory realm does *not* exist than to believe that it does exist and that they are failing to access it. Most would rather believe that the glory is only available to a small few of *God's choosing* than to believe that it is available to all but costly. Most will believe anything *except* the fact that they have not paid the price. It couldn't be that! Or could it?

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**Access will not be granted to those who will not pay the price that Jesus sets for them.**

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Many of us have been offended by the Kingdom message because we have lived like birds with clipped wings living in cages bragging about how high we can soar. One bird can jump four inches, another can jump six inches, but both of them are in awe of the one who can jump eight inches! And when a prophet comes through town and tells them that it is possible for a bird to soar high in the sky, a mile above the earth, they roll their eyes and laugh. They don't even have a grid for that! They think in inches, not miles.

So it is with many of us. We have no idea what is available to us in the realm of the Kingdom. We roll our eyes at anyone who even talks about visions, encounters, angels, glory clouds, portals, visitations, or the audible voice of God. We find it near impossible to believe that those stories could be true even though the Bible is filled with stories just like them. Why? Because our wings have been clipped by sin, skepticism, selfishness, overindulgence, a lack of self-discipline, and an absence of hunger. These things may not cost us Heaven, but they will cost us the Kingdom. They will keep us from soaring in heavenly places. That's what the Bible says. We all memorized

Romans 3:23, but had no clue what it meant. Sin doesn't keep a Christian from Heaven. Sin keeps a Christian from the glory!

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Many have no clue what their lack of surrender has cost them, nor will they ever know, because a great part of the church today is completely unwilling to even listen to any teaching that involves saying *no* to the flesh. I can promise you that many of those who bought this book never even got to this page. Why? Because the Kingdom message is expensive, and most people avoid big price tags.

But wait just one second... look at you! You're still reading! I wonder why? Do you think that maybe – just maybe – you've been cut from different cloth?

The reality of Jesus' gospel, the Gospel of the Kingdom, is that we were created to soar in heavenly places and yet most will never pay the price necessary to ever leave their cage.

## TWELVE

# Cocaine & Cupcakes



Let's talk about the rich man again. I like picking on the rich man, because I am one. You probably are too, whether you realize it or not. Riches come in many forms.

Jesus never said that it is hard for the rich to enter Heaven. He said that it is hard for them to enter the *Kingdom of God*, the glory realm. It is hard for them to live glorious, victorious, miraculous Kingdom lives. It is hard for them to enter into the deep things of God, into the realm of the supernatural. Why? Because total surrender, humility, purity of heart, and childlikeness are rare qualities, and even more rare among the rich. On top of that, the rich face many temptations, roadblocks, and demons that others know nothing about. If entering the Kingdom costs a person *everything* – and it does – then the price is much higher for those who have a lot.

Even getting saved – often referred to as “giving your life to Jesus” – is easiest when you believe that your life isn't worth anything. That is why most people come to Jesus when they are broken. Most people receive Him when they are at the end of

their rope (see 1 Cor. 1:26). If you want to be a soul winner, and you are looking for ripe fruit, just find the most broken guy in town. That is as ripe as you get! The rich, the self-satisfied, and those who love their lives find it much harder to turn their hearts to the Lord.

Kathryn Kuhlman, a woman who had one of the greatest healing ministries in history, once said in a message:

*He doesn't ask for golden vessels and He doesn't ask for silver vessels. He only asks for yielded vessels. I have no talent. I was born without anything. I have no talent... nothing. That's the reason it was easy for me to say, "take nothing and use it." For some of you it may be a little harder to die on that cross... your cross. What are you going to do about it? When you face that cross remember... what do you want most in this life? I have made my decision, and I'm glad that I made it. It costs much, but what do you want most?*

## **Stewardship**

Seeking the Kingdom requires a move away from ownership and toward stewardship. It is about being a steward of your life, and not the owner of it. It is about giving your life away to such a degree that you truly don't own yourself anymore. That is a difficult and humbling transition for the rich (financially or socially), but it is necessary for anyone who wants to live a Kingdom life. Stewardship is far more expensive than ownership. Here is a little verse that very few have understood:

*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48 NIV).*

Did you notice the steward and the owner in that passage? Most people don't. Read it again, but this time I want you to

really look for ownership versus stewardship. Also, pay attention to which one costs more. Go back and read it again...

You can look that scripture up in any translation and, now that you see it, you will see it every time. There is a very clear distinction between those who are given something (owners) versus those who are entrusted with something (stewards), and it is also clear that it is much more expensive to be in the second group. Stewardship costs more than ownership. It is also a very rare quality in the world today.

Very few people choose stewardship over ownership, but each of us has to make that choice. Jesus may be your Savior, but will you let Him be your Lord and Master? Will you let Him own you? It is your choice, and He won't force you to give Him your all, but the Kingdom of God is in the balance of that decision. Let's break this scripture down a little more:

*From everyone [this is a large group] who has been **given** much [owners] much will be demanded; and from the one [a small group] who has been **entrusted** with much [stewards] **much more will be asked.***

In every body of believers there is always a large group of owners and a very small group of stewards (if any). You can often tell the difference between owners and stewards by the way they talk. Owners often talk about what's *theirs*. It's *their* money, *their* gifts, *their* church, *their* anointing, *their* ministry. Everything is *theirs*. If they are generous, they give God 10% of *their* money, and two hours of *their* week, but the rest is... well you get the point. Stewardship is very different.

## Going for Broke

If you truly pursue a Kingdom life, you need to know that you are a part of a small group of people who are on their way toward

zero. We are going for broke and we are doing it on purpose. The goal is to become *fully* His. It won't happen overnight, thank God, but the Lord will begin to systematically ask you for everything you have. Count on it. He won't stop until He has all of you.

God will test you again and again to make certain that you know that you are a steward of your life and not the owner of it. He will sometimes even ask you for things that He has no intention of taking from you – like when He asked Abraham for Isaac. Every request, and every test, is to move you closer to the surrendered life, the exchanged life, where you become completely His, and He becomes completely yours. That is how Jesus lived His life before the Father. He said, *All things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine* (John 17:10).

Even when God prospers you, and He will, you will be more like Joseph than Solomon. Joseph was never rich – not really. He didn't own Egypt, he stewarded it. Like Joseph, God might give you a nice house, a nice chariot, nice clothes, and even entrust you with great wealth, but you will know in your heart that it all belongs to Him and He can ask for it at any time. If He trusts you with a couple million bucks, don't assume that you are allowed to buy the expensive watch. You have to get permission because it isn't your money, and He will say no more times than you will appreciate (I might be speaking from personal experience).

When you ask for the Kingdom, God asks for everything. Remember that the next time that God asks you to give Him something that you do not want to part with, when He asks you to say no to your flesh and yes to His Spirit. Remember that when He tells you to befriend someone that rubs you wrong, or when He asks you to write a big cheque at an inconvenient time.



Remember that this is what you signed up for when you cried out, “Show me Your glory! I want the Kingdom!”

And if you decide, as most do, that it is just too expensive, you can go back to being the owner of your life anytime you want. You can pay God His taxes at church every week, and do what you want with the rest. You can spend your time however you want, watch what you want, think what you want, eat what you want, and drink what you want. You might still even go to Heaven when you die, but you will never enter into the glorious, victorious, miraculous Kingdom life that you were created for.

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**When you ask for  
the Kingdom, God  
asks for everything**

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It’s a hard choice, isn’t it? It’s easy to understand why the rich young ruler, and many people just like him, go away sad. It’s hard to say yes to Jesus when He is asking for everything.

## “One Thing” You Lack

The Rich Young Ruler’s *one thing* was money. That is why Jesus went after it. Jesus will always go after your one thing because He wants to be your one thing. He wants His presence – His Kingdom – to be the one thing that you want more than anything else in this world.

When God asked Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice, it was a test. God never wanted him to sacrifice his son, but He needed to know that Abraham was willing to give the one thing that meant most to him in this life. God needed to know that He owned Abraham, and Abraham needed to know that he was owned. Abraham passed the test and became great because of it. Personally, I don’t believe that Jesus ever intended

for the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give all the money away. I could be wrong, but I believe that it was only a test, like Abraham's test. Jesus needed to know if the young man could give it all. He failed the test, and now only God knows what he could have been.

This is why God had so much affection toward David. David wasn't perfect, by any stretch of the imagination, but he was hungry for God and he kept pursuing wholeheartedness. He made mistakes, like we all do, but he would get up after every fall and sign up for total surrender once again. There was nothing that he wanted more than God. The Lord's presence was David's greatest desire. God's presence was his *one thing*. Psalm 27:4 says:

*One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.*

## **The One Thing Throne**

Does Jesus ask everyone to sell all their stuff and to give the money away? No, He doesn't. What He usually asks for is the thing your heart wants most. He asks for the thing you love more than Him. Or, at the very least, He asks you to reorder your priorities so that He becomes your first love.

You can be confident that if there is anything other than Him on the *One Thing Throne* of your life, anything that means more to you than He does, He is either going to take it away or put it in its place. It could be money, ministry, family, food, TV, video games, sexuality, music, addictions, your pickup-truck, or even your stamp collection. It could be anything, good or bad.

If something fills your heart more than He does you can be sure that He is looking at that thing with jealous eyes.

Jesus wants to be first in your life. He is not even okay with you loving your father, mother, son, or daughter more than you love Him (see Matt. 10:37). Of course He wants you to love your family, but never more than you love Him. That alone (if you love your family) is an incredible request but it is what He asks of those who seek His Kingdom.

I even had the Lord ask me to give up *preaching* one time, and it lasted for five years! That was a hard pill to swallow for a guy who never wanted to do anything but preach. When I was invited to minister in churches, for five years, the Lord made me decline. It was very depressing, and I didn't handle the depression well.

Why would God ask me to give up something like preaching? Apparently, God wasn't comfortable with the level of my surrender to Him. He thought that my self-worth was getting too connected to my preaching. He noticed that I was only reading the Bible when I needed a new sermon. He saw that I rarely prayed, worshipped, or spent time with Him unless I needed anointing for the pulpit. He could see that I had lost my love for Him, and that I had fallen in love with ministry instead. Add to that the fact that I was drinking like a fish, and you can understand why He made me keep my mouth shut for a while. It was a long five years, but we got all that straightened out on the backside of the mountain! Ministry is no longer in competition with my love for Christ. Ministry isn't even a close second.

Let me tell you about the most painful request the Lord ever made of me. Try not to laugh...

## **The Glory Cloud of Nicotine**

If God and my wife had let me, I would have smoked every day of my life. I know that is a horrible declaration, but it is the truth. I loved smoking. When I gave my life to Christ I gave Him a lot, but I couldn't give Him the smoking. I smoked right through Bible school and over fifteen years of ministry. I smoked cigarettes for the first ten or so years, but then I switched to cigars because I convinced myself that they were somehow *less bad* than cigarettes. I'm not sure how I came to that conclusion.

I genuinely loved the Lord and would give Him most of the things He asked for. I poured my heart out to Him in worship. I wrote Him songs. I would meditate on His Word for hours on end, and often all night long. I would guard my heart from lustful thoughts, and guard my life from sinful things. I shared my faith. I preached the Word. I gave generously. I even stopped getting drunk (eventually). I got to the place where I would do just about anything God asked... except quit smoking!

Why? Because it was the only thing that seemed to help me unwind, and that has been something that I have needed a lot of help with. When I felt stressed out, depressed, lonely, tense, or just needed to zone out for some reason or another, smoking was my fix. I would go for a drive, or head to the garage, light up a cigar, and *peace like a river would come rushing through my soul*. It seemed pretty heavenly to me! I couldn't understand why God would even ask me to give up something that offered me so much peace.

But what did He always ask for? You guessed it. And I would always have the same answer. *Not a chance!* I told the Lord a hundred times, "It's not even a sin! You can't ask for this because You don't have a scripture to back up Your request. If

it were a sin, I would stop. If it affected my heart for You, I would stop. But it doesn't! Please stop asking for this... I need it to unwind!"

I remember standing outside an airport in Florida where I had just preached a powerful weekend of meetings. I was smoking a cigar when the Lord brought up the issue again. He said, *Steve, you want Me to give you an international ministry and you can't even quit smoking! This is not okay!* I just gave Him the old "it's not a sin" spiel and enjoyed the rest of my cigar. I never felt like He was horribly mad at me. I always felt loved by God. I knew, however, that He wanted me to stop and that He was not going to drop the issue.

One day the Lord used language that got my attention. I was out for a run when the Holy Spirit brought up smoking again, and asked me if I would stop. I, once again, explained that I needed it to help me unwind. The Holy Spirit said, *Steve, I want to be the Comforter in your life! I want to help you unwind. I want to give you peace. But every time you need comfort you always choose smoking over Me. I cannot be your Comforter when you already have one.*

It was a good argument, but I wasn't budging. I started with my other favorite argument: "God, this is not a sin! There is nothing in the Bible that says anything about smoking. You cannot ask me for this because it is not even a sin!"

At that moment I could feel Holy Spirit's attitude toward me change. I knew that I had grieved Him. His tone with me became very firm as He spoke these words to my heart: *I don't need a scripture Steve! If I ask you to do something and you don't obey Me, it's a sin! Smoking is a sin for YOU because I told you to stop and I AM GOD!*

Just as I was about to start into another excuse, He cut me off and said, *Fine Steve... keep your cigars!* When He said that I could almost see Him throw His hands in the air, as if to say, *I'm done trying to fix you!* I knew in that moment that I had just lost something. It felt like He had something good in store for me but had just decided not to give it to me anymore. The thought unnerved me.

Right then, while I was still running, I looked into the trees on my left and had a prophetic experience where I saw a very overweight woman pointing her finger and laughing cynically at a man who was chained to a computer with pornographic images on the screen. I knew intuitively that they were both Christians and destined to spiritually soar in heavenly places, like eagles, yet they were both sitting on the ground.

She pointed her finger at the computer he was chained to and said to him, “You will never soar with *that* in your life!” He knew that she was right, and he looked very ashamed. My attention was on him until I noticed that she was chained to something too, but it wasn't a computer. She was chained to a giant four-foot-tall cupcake with icing on top! She was weighed down, just as he was, but by something so ridiculous that it would have been comical if it weren't so sad.

The whole picture came across my mind in a millisecond just as the Holy Spirit said, *Fine Steve, keep your cigars!* The next thing He said sliced me in two. His words still echo in my heart to this day. It was so loud and so firm that it seemed to be audible, but I am certain that it wasn't. He said, *It doesn't matter if it's cocaine or cupcakes! If there is ANY area of your life where you give yourself permission to say no to Me you will NOT reach your full destiny. Steven Holmstrom, I make note of the fact today that YOU are a man who says NO to God!”*

That did it! Terrified that I had just lost any chance at reaching my greatest destiny, I burst into tears in the middle of my run, I threw my hands in the air and wept out loud, “I quit! I quit! I quit! Just wait a second – and don’t make any rash decisions! Give me another chance and I’ll never smoke again! I mean it this time! I quit! I quit! I quit!”

He didn’t say so, but I think He gave me another chance. Needless to say, I have not smoked since that day and I never will again. If you have a baby boy, do not give me a cigar. It just ain’t worth it to me!

As odd as it may sound, that one decision to say yes to God began a chain reaction of other *yes’s* in my life that have taken me in a whole new direction. I am a long way from perfect, but I can promise you that a big page in my spiritual life turned the day that I realized that I no longer had permission to say no to God.





## THIRTEEN

# On the Other Side of Your Yes



The Enemy does not want you to deal with your stuff. He will tell you whatever you need to hear to keep you from saying yes to God. *You're not hurting anyone! Everybody struggles with that! And who doesn't have at least one vice? It's only a bad thought – you're not actually 'doing it'! This is nothing compared to what some Christians are up to! Heck, this isn't even a sin!* And so you hold on to that old ball and chain, and drag it around the mountain again and again and again. And all the while the Devil laughs because he knows something that you don't know. He knows that you have wings. He knows that you were made to fly. He knows that you could live a glorious, victorious, miraculous and supernatural Kingdom life, but that he has convinced you to trade it for cupcakes. He knows that everything changes when you start saying yes to God – and he does not want that to ever happen!

## **The Parable that No One Wants to Preach**

Matthew 22:1-14 records one of Jesus' parables that I used to avoid. I found it to be very uninspiring. Most preachers do. It's just... an odd one. It's *The Parable of the Wedding Banquet*.

The long and short of the parable is that Jesus compares the Kingdom to a king who prepares a banquet for his son. After the king gets everything ready, he sends out his servants to invite the guests, but the guests aren't interested in coming. They make excuses. They claim to be too busy with their fields, their businesses, and whatnot. Apparently, they were very important people with better things to do than to go to the king's banquet.

As the story goes, some of those who were invited mistreat and kill the king's servants. That turned out to be a bad idea, because when the king hears about it he is so angry that he actually burns their city! It is a great big fuss over a dinner party if you ask me.

While the beginning of the story is odd enough, it is the end of the story that always bothered me the most. After the king burns their city he sends out other servants to the street corners to invite anyone willing to come to the banquet. This worked. The wedding hall was filled with guests, all sorts of guests, because anyone and everyone was invited. I like to imagine some poor beggar just having the time of his life, stuffing his face at the buffet, drinking from the chocolate fountain, and living it up for the first time ever. It is starting to sound like a happy ending, until...

The strangest thing happens. The king sees a guy who is not wearing wedding clothes – probably the homeless guy with his head in the chocolate fountain – and for some reason this really upsets the king. In fact, the king gets so upset that he has

the guy tied up hand and foot and thrown out of the party! They throw this poor fellow outside where people are *weeping and gnashing their teeth*.

Doesn't that all seem a little odd? Isn't that cruel? Would you do something like that? Would you invite a street person to your banquet and then rudely toss him out because he doesn't have the right clothes? I never used to like this parable because it seemed so mean to the poor guy in the shabby clothes, which made the king (God) look so unreasonably cruel. Have you ever read it any other way than that?

Because this passage mentions the Kingdom (which I used to believe included Heaven) – and because someone in the story ends up in a place where there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth* – I always used to assume that this was about Heaven and Hell. I assumed that this was saying that God (the king) sent people to Hell who had accepted His invitation but just didn't "change" enough. I struggled with this parable because it seemed so opposite to everything that the Apostle Paul taught, and it also seemed to condemn so many believers to Hell (a lot of Christians don't change all that much). I also found it very hard to believe that someone could actually enter Heaven and then get kicked out later. Like most preachers, I avoided this parable because it wasn't very inspiring. All it seemed to say is that God burns the rich *and* He burns the poor!

When I began to see the Kingdom of God as a realm of God's manifest presence, power, and glory on the earth, however, this parable actually started to make sense. We have to remember that this is a "parable," which means that it is symbolic. It is not meant to be taken literally. Symbols require interpretation.

The Kingdom of God is on Earth. It is something to access in *this* life. The invitation to God’s banquet (the Kingdom) is therefore symbolic of an invitation to experience God’s presence, His power, His glory, and His miraculous provision right now in this life.

This might be a stretch for you, but *weeping and gnashing of teeth* does not necessarily have to represent Hell. Weeping could very well be symbolic of pain and depression, and gnashing of teeth could be symbolic of anger. You don’t have to go to Hell to be weeping or gnashing your teeth. I know people in my church like that! A life disconnected from the presence of God leads to a sad, lonely, and often angry existence. This is even true for Christians.

If you don’t like the way that I am interpreting weeping and gnashing of teeth, that’s fine, but ask yourself this question: Does the rest of the Bible agree with God sending people to Hell after they have entered Heaven because they did not “change” quite enough?

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We are way too quick to make Kingdom scriptures that do not even mention eternal life all about eternal life. We have to keep the whole Bible in mind when we read passages like this one. When we look at this parable through our new Kingdom lenses many truths jump out of it. There are three that I want to point out.

First, we see that the Kingdom of God is something that many people will *not* care to pursue. This is often true for the rich, and it is always true for those who are captivated by their

own self-importance. They are just too busy for all this “super-spiritual” stuff. They like a neat and tidy religion that fits in their neat and tidy box. They like something that they can control. They pick a church where they know exactly what to expect: three hymns, a poem, an uplifting sermonette, and out the door by 11:45 so that they can beat the Baptists to the restaurant.

The Kingdom, therefore, is not their bowl of rice. Many people, even many true Christians who are on their way to Heaven, will ignore God’s invitation to the glory banquet because it’s weird to them, it’s out of their box, and it costs more than they are willing to pay. It is only the broken, the hungry, the childlike, the teachable, the humble, the poor in spirit, and the adventurous in spirit, who will plunge headfirst into the mysterious and unknown Kingdom waters. Let’s face it, it’s not for everyone.

Secondly, many will abuse the messengers who are sent by God to invite them to live Kingdom lives. I expect to take a little heat over writing this book. Any time you ask people to change, you are asking for trouble. Those who preach the Kingdom message will not always be handled with care. Their message won’t always be applauded. They won’t always be handed the keys to the city. It is a message that will be violently opposed by many, but this parable teaches that those who abuse the messengers will pay a price for it. *God will burn their cities!* I’m not quite sure what that part of the parable symbolizes, but I don’t want to be found in that camp.

Thirdly, everyone is invited but very few enter in because no matter who you are – rich or poor – you cannot enter the Kingdom of God *unless you are willing to change!* You don’t have to be smart, popular, or successful in the eyes of the world, but you do have to be willing to change.

## Change

I know that is a painful word. Jesus said, *Unless you change... you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven* (Matt. 18:3 NIV). I always assumed that the guy who got thrown out of the king's banquet for not wearing wedding clothes didn't have access to wedding clothes. I have changed my mind about that. When God calls, God always provides. I have come to believe that he did have access to wedding clothes but probably preferred his jeans. Perhaps he said, like many do, "This is who I am and the king is just gonna have to deal with it!" Does that sound familiar? The

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**God is love,  
but He is not  
always nice.**

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problem is that the King doesn't just "deal with it." The King *throws him out* where he finds himself surrounded by other angry, miserable people who also detest God's dress codes. They start a church together, call it *The Freedom Centre*, and do whatever

the heck they want – except one thing. They can't enter the Kingdom.

Much of the preaching you hear these days can leave you thinking that God is a big sweet overstuffed Santa Claus in the sky who wouldn't hurt a flea. I hate to burst anyone's bubble but... pop! He's not. Read the Bible. Sometimes God burns cities! Yes, God is love, but He is not always nice. The Bible teaches that you would be wise to fear Him (Prov. 9:10).

We cannot enter the Kingdom any way we want. We might not be able to enter in surf shorts and a muscle shirt – spiritually speaking. Comfortable Christianity doesn't cut it. There are protocols. There are things that are acceptable to God, and things that are not. There are things that please Him and there are things that make Him want to vomit. If that bothers people, and if they think that God is just being old fashioned, they are the ones who are just going to have to deal with it!

Please hear me loud and clear. God is never going to change to make room for you in the Kingdom. It is *you* who must change. I can assure you that if there is one area of your life that you are hoping and praying that God will *not* ask you to surrender to Him – He already has. You should rejoice because you have heard His voice! (Sorry.)

God often asks for the thing that you don't want to give Him, the thing you want to keep the most, the thing that comforts you in your time of need, the thing that fills your heart. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus asked the rich young ruler for his money because money is what filled his heart. Had he been a drunk, Jesus might have asked him to give up alcohol. Had he been a glutton, Jesus might have asked him to become a vegetarian. Jesus will go after the thing you love the most until He is the thing you love the most.

My decision to say yes to God and quit smoking started an incredible chain reaction in my life. Smoking had been my biggest *no*. It was the one thing in my life that God did not have permission to touch. That is not to say that I didn't miss the mark in other areas from time to time. I did, and I still do. But smoking was the biggest area of *willful and continual disobedience* in my life. When I said yes to God to quit smoking, every other yes seemed so miniscule. Everything else was easy. I actually started waking up in the morning and saying to the Lord, "Ask me for anything and I'll do it!"

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It is a very big day in your life when you give God a wholehearted *YES*. It's not that you are perfect, but simply that you are not holding anything back anymore. You're giving all you've got. God isn't looking for Old Testament *law-fulness*, but

He is looking for wholehearted *yes-fulness!* He's not looking for you to follow rules, but rather to follow His voice. When God speaks, you obey. That is the Kingdom way. If you are not hearing His voice, then you must walk closer to Him. Jesus said, *My sheep hear My voice* (John 10:27). If you can't hear Him, you have a problem.

## **Rewired**

As I began saying yes to the Lord in new areas of my life, God began to speak to me in new ways. I was used to hearing God's voice from time to time (small impressions etc.), but things started to go to a whole new level. I began to hear Him more often, and with more clarity. I remember Him telling me to look up a specific scripture that I did not know, but before I found the passage in my Bible He told me exactly what the verse said – word for word! I never thought of myself as being prophetic, but all of a sudden God became a chatterbox. This had a huge impact on my ability to minister to others as well. I could now see things, feel things, and know things by the Spirit. Saying yes to God was like steroids to my spiritual ears.

The Lord began to meet me in my dreams as well. I had never been one to remember my dreams, but suddenly I became a dreamer. I had to begin journaling all of the things that the Lord (and other visitors) said to me in the night. Sometimes I wake up feeling all buzzy and “gloryish” like I have been off with the Lord somewhere but I can't remember where. I'll ask the Lord, “What did we do last night? Where did You take me?” He doesn't usually tell, so for all I know I just may have met Moses and Elijah!

God's Word began to come alive to me new ways as well. As I read the Bible I began to see things that I had never seen



before. It was as if the Holy Spirit was leaning over my shoulder as I read, pointing things out, and showing me things that were unlike anything I had ever heard. He showed me scriptures that offended my beliefs, Bible verses that seemed so unbiblical! Then He would open them up to me and I would discover a jewel inside. I became so hungry for the Word that I couldn't get enough. I can now say, along with Jeremiah, *When I discovered Your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight* (Jer. 15:16 NLT).

The Lord began to bless our finances in very unusual ways as well. In my experience, finances are often the first thing to be impacted when I am touched by the Kingdom. I always *want* angels and glory and portals and fireballs, but I usually *get* money. The more I said yes to the Lord, and pursued intimacy with Him, the more money we made. Our company's sales doubled the year I quit smoking and we had already been making far more than we needed the year before. I started asking the Lord, "What in the world are You going to do with all this money?" He told me that He had plans and that He would let me know. Even during times of economic recession I have watched God's miraculous faithfulness toward us. When God owns everything you have, He seems to take better care of it.

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Our company's staff and managers became so proficient at their jobs that I rarely even needed to go to work anymore. When I did go in, I often chose long driving jobs so that I could have hours alone with the Lord. When I didn't go in (most days), I spent my time with the Lord in my den at home, or on long hikes with Him out in nature. Being God's friend, spending time with Him and enjoying His presence, has become my full-time

job and it's the best job on earth! I often spend all day with the Lord and call it "going to work".

Ironically, I used to think that spending time with God was boring. I would always choose entertainment over time with Him. I used to watch TV and movies endlessly. I would do anything *except* seek the Lord. It's hard to believe now, but I used to actually repent to God for not loving Him! I'm serious. I often said to Him, "I am so sorry that I don't love You very much. I wish that I did. I just find our time together so boring because it feels like You don't show up. I'm sorry that I only talk to You when I need something from You. I hope to one day spend time with You just because I love You so much. Please anoint my heart to love you well!" I prayed that prayer for years.

If you find yourself wishing that you loved God, but knowing that you truly don't, I hope that my story gives you hope. Be encouraged. You don't have to stay where you are. I give you permission to grow! If you don't love God, but you want to, you're heading in the right direction. I promise you – and I know from experience – that God will change your heart if you feed it the right things and if you don't give up.

I not only love God now, I genuinely enjoy Him. He *is* my entertainment. Spending time with Him is something that I look forward to every day – even on holidays. It fills me up. On a day when I have nothing to do but be alone with Him, I'll still get up early so that I have more time to spend with Him! It's like my desires have completely changed. Movies and TV now bore me to death. The last thing that I want to do is sit in front of a screen. Don't bother inviting me to come over to watch *the big game*. I couldn't care less who wins. If, however, you have a guitar and a handful of people who want to spend the night going after the glory... count me in!

You probably think I'm joking, but I'm not. One of the things I now love most is being in meetings where people are worshipping and pursuing God's presence. I had always been one to go to church on Sundays, but I never used to go to conferences or special meetings unless I was the speaker. When God changed my heart, however, I suddenly wanted to be at every anointed meeting I could get to. I wanted to be in worship services. I wanted to be challenged by the Word. I wanted to go places where I could feel God's presence.

I started going to every decent conference that I could get to. Instead of taking my family for a ten-day holiday on a beach, I took them to a ten-day conference where we could worship and sit under anointed preaching (and hit the beach in the afternoons). I began to meet scores of new people who had a similar hunger for the presence of God. I would see them at all the meetings. I drove all over our province, and even started flying to other places, to be in atmospheres where the Kingdom was touching people. I became the very thing that I used to mock – a *revival junkie* – and my addiction is getting worse every day. My kids are even catching the bug now.

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And if hearing God's voice, experiencing prophetic dreams, financial blessings, and a newfound passion for His presence weren't enough – God fixed my marriage too! I'm not sure how. I think He did something to my brain, rewired it or something, because all of a sudden my wife didn't seem so rotten anymore. Actually, she started looking pretty good! God gave me a love and a desire for my wife that I didn't have. He did the same in her. The woman that I talked about in chapter one no

longer loathes me. She actually adores me! She cries when she talks about how much I have changed. She brags about me everywhere. I never thought that we could be happy together, but when I began to say yes to God, everything changed. The Kingdom came.

## **And All These Things...**

I share all those stories to illustrate an important point, and it's this. When we make it our *first* priority to seek the Kingdom – God's presence and glory – *and His righteousness* (that's saying *yes* to God) we get blessed in the natural realm as well. Jesus said:

*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you* (Matt. 6:33).

All what things? If you read the passage before it you will discover that it is talking about food, drink, and clothing. It is talking about *worldly* wealth and provision. God meets not only the spiritual needs, but also the natural and physical needs of those who seek the Kingdom and His righteousness.

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**When I began to say yes to God, everything changed. The Kingdom came.**

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Personally, I seek His face because I want to *see* His face. I seek His Kingdom because I want to *experience* His presence. I have come to realize, however, that I get so much more than what I am after. While I'm pursuing something in the spiritual realm, He is often blessing me in the natural realm. He touches my marriage, my money, my ministry, my health, my kids, my dog, my life. When we seek His presence we get all sorts of other stuff as a result. God is far more practical than many people think.

So when you see your marriage restored, your finances exploding, your health improving, and favor landing on you left, right, and center – be sure to connect the dots. It is not a coincidence. *That* is the Kingdom too! When you find that your sad heart isn't sad anymore, and that you no longer want to numb yourself with an endless supply of alcohol, food, video games, pornography, or entertainment, *that* is the Kingdom too! When you find yourself falling in love with people that you used to hate, and being loved by them as well, *that* is the Kingdom too!

## Just Say Yes

God isn't looking for sterilized people. He is looking for a hungry heart and a great big *YES!* Your goal is not Pharisaical perfection, but rather wholehearted devotion. It is not about following rules, but about following Him, hearing His voice, and simply doing whatever He says.

You will know that the Kingdom is touching you when your desires begin to change. You will actually start to want things that are good for you – maybe even exercise and vegetables! Before you know it you won't even miss those old things that used to bind you, in fact, you will detest them. You will become one that Jesus has *purified for His very own*, someone who is *eager to do what is good* (Titus 2:14).

I remember the day, standing in worship, that the Lord said to me, *Here comes the Devil, but don't worry Steve, he doesn't have anything in you anymore*. I wept. Could it be true? I knew I wasn't perfect.

As I was pondering His words, the Lord showed me a prophetic picture of my face with a bunch of fishhooks all over it, each one with a string attached. They were hooked in my

nose, my cheeks, my ears, and even in the skin under my eyebrows. The Enemy was holding the strings, and leading me around by pulling on them. I then saw the Lord systematically removing all of the hooks – all of the *no's* in my life – until they were completely removed. The Devil could still throw things at me, but he no longer had anything *in* me (see John 14:30). He didn't have anything to pull on. I wasn't sinless, but I was hookless.

Friend, if you're contemplating saying yes to God in a certain area, but dragging your feet, I beg you to pull the trigger! You won't regret it. I can personally testify that *His love is better than wine* (Song of Sol. 1:2) – and *His comfort is better than cigars* (Stevellation 20:14). You will find the Holy Spirit to be the Comforter that your false comforts have kept you from. You will discover God's Word to be like food that truly energizes and vitalizes you (Jn. 4:32). You will learn firsthand that *in His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right hand are pleasures forever more* (Ps. 16:11). Nothing in this world compares to what He wants to give you.

I love when Misty Edwards sings, *"It's gonna be worth it."* I promise you, it will be. Whatever the Lord asks you to do, do it. Whatever He asks you to give Him, give it. Don't put it off for another day. You have a choice to make and God will not make it for you. You can either walk away sad because the price is high, or you can say yes to God and begin to explore what is on the other side of your yes. That is where your destiny lies.

## FOURTEEN

# One From a Town & Two From a Clan



Not long ago the Lord spoke to me and said, *The accumulation has begun!* I knew immediately what He was referring to.

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:3-5).*

The Apostle Paul prophesied that it would one day happen, and that day has certainly arrived. The Enemy is accumulating teachers and preachers. He has great collection already, but it will only get bigger. I'm sad to say that some of my own friends have been accumulated.

Some of our best preachers now preach grey better than they ever preached white. They tell the world whatever its itching ears want to hear. They preach to the church as well,

telling us what we are allowed to call sin and what we are not. If you teach the truth of God's Word, and do not water it down, you will pay a price. *They will not endure sound doctrine any longer*, but will instead attempt to punish those who speak the truth, and the world will applaud them when they do. That is what is coming down the pipe.

Fortunately, God is accumulating His own teachers as well! As darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness the people, God's glory is being released in and through men and women that are truly His own (Is. 60:2). The leaders of this next move of God will be more than just nice guys who went to Bible school. They will be fearless, fiery, friends of God. They will be a new breed of holiness preachers motivated not by legalism or

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**The leaders of this next move of God will be more than just nice guys who went to Bible school. They will be fearless, fiery, friends of God.**

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law, but by intimacy with God and passion for His presence. Their lives will be marked by miracles and Kingdom encounters. They won't just tell you about God, they will bring Him to you!

As God chooses His leaders He is not choosing as the world does. He isn't picking people because they are popular, pretty, or well spoken. He doesn't care how much money you make. His eyes run back and forth throughout the earth looking for those whose hearts are fully committed to Him, and when He finds a man or a woman like that He shows himself strong in and through them (2 Chron. 16:9). God doesn't choose powerful people, God chooses wholehearted and surrendered people, and he makes them powerful. First He needs to own you, and *then* He makes you great.



## How God Chooses & Equips Leaders

God is searching for those who have prepared themselves – spirit, soul, and body – to be set on fire with the Kingdom of God. He needs a few, it doesn't even have to be a lot, who will become burning ones, set ablaze for the purpose of warming the hearts of others toward God. That is how God calls a faithless and backslidden nation back into intimacy with Himself. He calls everybody, but because of the price only a few say yes. He lights those few on fire and they become the leaders that He sends out with power to reach the rest. Let me show you this in scripture:

*“Return, faithless people,” declares the Lord, “for I am your husband. I will choose you – one from a town and two from a clan – and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:14-15 NIV).*

Let's look at this scripture in its parts:

### **1. *Return, faithless people... for I am your husband!***

If you take the time to read the beginning of Jeremiah chapter three (the context of this passage) you will see that God's people had backslidden and God's heart was broken over their adulteries. His bride had prostituted herself with many lovers (Jer. 3:1-13) but still His heart longed for her. He would not give up on her.

God is that way with all of us. I have been amazed, more times than I can count, at God's patience towards me when I have been unfaithful to Him. He cries out to each of us in the weak moments of our lives, *Return, faithless people... for I am your husband!* Whether we return to Him or not is our choice, and we live with the consequences of it.

God loves us, even when we are a mess. Faithless people cannot please God (Heb. 11:6), but He does still care for them and He is faithful to many who are not faithful to Him. When His children break His heart, He disciplines them, but He doesn't reject them. He keeps reaching out to them, and calling them to return. God is full of mercy and compassion, one who is quick to give us a second chance – or a thousandth chance – if we return to Him.

## **2. *I will choose you***

When God calls His people out of their backsliding, does the whole nation (or church) hear His voice and come running? Never! It is usually just a tiny few that hear His voice and open their hearts to Him. It is usually just one here and one there. He calls us all, but only a few respond to His voice. Only a few are willing to count the cost involved in living the Kingdom life. Therefore, *many are called but few are chosen* (Matt. 22:14). What that means is that *many are called but few are commissioned* because most won't pay the price. God calls people to repent and pursue intimacy and those who respond to Him are the ones He chooses as His leaders.

## **3. *One from a town and two from a clan***

It's sad to say, but that is usually about all that will answer His call to the deep places – to the Kingdom life. And therefore He chooses *one from a town and two from a clan*. Fortunately, God can accomplish a lot with one or two completely sold out and yielded vessels. He can do a lot with even *one* person just as long as He has the *whole* person. One here and one there is more than enough for God to get the job done.

#### 4. ... and bring you to Zion!

God takes the one's and two's that say yes to Him and He brings them to a place called *Zion*. That is where He lights them on fire!

Where is Zion? It's not the Bible school that your weird uncle attended. *Zion* is another name for the Kingdom of God. It is the glory realm. It is the atmosphere of God's manifest presence and

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whole person.**

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power on the earth. It is a realm that few touch, and even fewer enter into. It is all the good stuff on the other side of the veil.

When you say yes to God, and pass the tests that He puts in front of you, you are then chosen, commissioned, and empowered by *Zion*! You become one of God's true shepherds, anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring the Kingdom to others. Notice that immediately after God says that He will choose one from a town and two from a clan and bring them to *Zion*, He then says:

*Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15).*

#### 5. *Shepherds after My own heart*

God's shepherds, His leaders in this next great move, will be those whose lives have been marked by *Zion*. It will be those who live Kingdom lives, connect with Kingdom power, and perhaps even *enter in* from time to time! That's who His shepherds will be. The few who responded to the Lord with wholehearted devotion are now called *shepherds after God's own heart*. I love that.

While many may believe the opposite, the world is willing to follow a spiritual leader. The problem is that they are not easy to find! Not a whole lot of our leaders are all that spiritual. Marketing experts, self-help gurus, and motivational speakers run many of our biggest ministries. We've got doctors of theology who don't even pray! The world isn't as hard as the church thinks. It simply wants something real, and it knows how to smell a fake.

This generation has grown nauseous of a church where leaders drop like flies into sexual immorality, substance abuse, and financial corruption. If you want to lead them to Christ you must be a different kind of leader. Show them a leader who seeks the presence of God and not the promotion of man. Show them a leader whose eyes are on the Lord and not on the church secretary. Show them a leader who isn't trying to manipulate their way into their pocket books, but one that demonstrates Kingdom authority and Kingdom power; a leader who feeds them when they are hungry and heals them when they are sick. Show them someone who looks just a little bit more like Jesus and they might just be willing to listen. What the world won't do, however, is pretend to warm up in front of a painted fire.

God is raising up lovesick warriors, burning ones, leaders who live surrendered Kingdom lives, lives of devotion, and lives of purity. They walk with God, they hear His voice, they demonstrate power, and they lead people with *knowledge and understanding* – and not the kind that comes from seminary. If you think that you can simply go to Bible school for four years, get a head full of information, and then spend the rest of your life spitting out that information and calling it “building the Kingdom of God”, think again! You might build something, but it won't be the Kingdom. It may have a form of godliness, but there won't be any power.

I'm not against seminary. I went to Bible school myself. We need to learn, and we need to learn *how* to learn, but we have to recognize that if information was going to save the world, it would have done it by now. Information doesn't heal the sick, raise the dead, or cleanse the leper. Information can't prophesy or heal a broken heart. Information won't release a generation locked away in dark dungeons of depression, addiction, and perversion – but the presence of God can! The Kingdom can!

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painted fire.**

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We need more Zion preachers in the church. I would rather hear a sermon that came from seven seconds in the glory realm than from seven years of seminary. People are tired of listening to preachers who parrot what they read in books. What we need are men and women who know how to get a word from God and release it! We are hungry for messages that are sparked by a prophetic anointing, by dreams, visions, and heavenly encounters. People don't care about what you *think* – they care about what you *say*! Peter and John didn't talk about what they read in books, they talked about what they had *seen and heard* (Acts 4:20). When you are a shepherd after God's own heart, you don't write sermons, *you receive them*.

I once heard Dennis Wiedrick say: “We have been bottle-fed formula and we wonder why we don't have any immune system to fight off spiritual diseases. We are sick, we are weak, we have no power – and we are the people of God! A baby receives a powerful immune system by drinking from its mother's breast – and “formula” is not the same. So it is with the church. We, as shepherds, have got to stop feeding people formula – and formulas – and start giving them warm milk from the breast of God!”

I don't want to feed people formulas. I don't have time to preach doctrines that aren't on fire. I want to give people something fresh out of Zion's oven. Better yet, I want to inspire people to live Kingdom lives so that they can connect to Zion themselves. But *wanting* to do all these nice and noble things is not enough. There is a cost involved in being a *shepherd after God's own heart*.

To lead others to the high places, I cannot be living in low places. To lead others to ascend the hill of the Lord, I have to have clean hands and a pure heart myself (Ps. 24:4). A pure heart will cost us more than we want to pay, but Jesus said of the pure in heart: *they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). Hallelujah! Now that's a promise! If you want to *see God*, and to be used powerfully by God, you must pursue a pure heart.

*In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. **Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work** (2 Tim. 2:20-21 NIV).*

You can be a wooden spoon, or you can be a silver spoon, but you cannot be both. You can be the spoon used for stirring spaghetti sauce, or the one used to serve the King when He comes to visit, but it's one or the other. You have to choose. You can live a common life, or you can live a Kingdom life, but you can't have it both ways.

If you want to be one that God can use for special purposes Paul says that you have to say no to some stuff, to be set apart, to be *cleansed from the common*. That means that there may be some common everyday things that you may not have permission to do.

No one becomes a Navy Seal, or wins an Olympic medal, by living a common life. Gold medalists don't tend to sleep in a lot, eat pizza for breakfast, or drink a whole lot of Slurpees. The same is true for those who live Kingdom lives and walk in deep places with God. Those who have uncommon results live uncommon lives. They choose a road that they know many of their friends will not join them on. It is a road that all of God's truly great men and women throughout history have chosen. It is at times a lonely road, a painful road, a narrow road, and Jesus said that only *a few* would find it. Think about that for a second. Only a few? While Revelation 7:9 reveals that millions and perhaps billions will go to Heaven, Jesus said that there is a road that leads to a place that *only a few would find* (Matt. 7:14). That place is the Kingdom, and it isn't for the masses. It is usually only found by one from a town and two from a clan.

*A highway will be there, a roadway, and it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean will not travel on it, but it will be for him who walks that way, and fools will not wander on it (Isaiah 35:8).*





## A Heart that Moves



We have talked a lot about sanctification – saying *yes* to God, embracing change, and dealing with our stuff. The Bible says that without sanctification – sometimes translated as *holiness* – no one can *see* God (Heb. 12:14). With sanctification, however, we at least have a chance!

Jesus’ primary message was *Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near*. It is a very simple message that leaves no room for misunderstanding as to what our first response to the Kingdom must be. If you want the Kingdom, you start with repentance!

Until you have repented, which means to turn around and head in a new direction, you don’t qualify to inherit the Kingdom. Your access to the Kingdom is limited. You may still go to Heaven – that is a separate issue – but until you have had a turnaround in your life there are realms on earth that you do not have permission to enter. We have to be willing to *throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles*, if we want to really engage with this glorious heavenly realm that surrounds us (see Heb. 12:1).

Repentance is a believer's first step in the right direction. It is step one. It makes accessing the Kingdom possible to those to whom access was previously denied. But repentance is only the starting point. It could be compared to buying some new running shoes. It won't get you into shape, but it is a good place to start. Now let me tell you how to start running!

## **Loving Jesus Well**

There is nothing that the Kingdom is more attracted to than people who genuinely love Jesus and offer Him their affections. Love for the Lord is a Kingdom magnet! Jesus even went so far as to promise to show Himself to those who love Him. He said:

*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him (John 14:21).*

To *disclose* Himself means to *show* Himself, *reveal* Himself, or to *manifest* Himself. Do you believe that He meant it? Does Jesus really still show Himself to people today? If you believe that He was telling the truth, then you have to believe that He will reveal Himself to you *if you love Him*.

Many people hear these promises and assume that they will be fulfilled in the next life. We are so much like Martha! Jesus said to her, *Your brother will rise again*. And what was her response? *I know that he will rise again in the resurrection **on the last day*** (John 11:24). We do that all the time. We take God's promises and assume that they won't happen now, but maybe in a thousand years or so – in the great by and by. We need to stop that. If Jesus says that He is going to raise your brother from the dead, He means now! If He says that He is going to reveal and manifest Himself to you, He is talking about showing up in this

life you are living right now! A quick look at the New Testament should convince anyone that Jesus does still show Himself to people who love Him. As I mentioned in chapter 10, He actually rebuked the disciples who didn't believe it.

*He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen (Mark 16:14).*

Jesus still shows Himself to people today. If you don't believe it, it is because you have an unbelieving and hard heart (those are Jesus' words, not mine – I would never say anything that abrasive to someone as nice as you). Believe it or not, Jesus would love to reveal Himself to you in greater ways – and He will – if you love Him. Where are you presently at in the *passion for Jesus* department? The Kingdom of God belongs to the lovesick.

Mike Bickle is a man with an interesting history of Kingdom experiences. He has some stories about angels, encounters, and trips to Heaven that will leave you tingling. He also has a real passion for intimacy with Jesus, and he has spent about half of his life sitting in a prayer room working on it. I remember a story that Mike tells about a time, many years ago, when he wasn't getting enough quiet time with the Lord and how it was affecting him.

Mike was on the road ministering with John Wimber. They were doing a bunch of huge meetings all over the world and God was really touching people in the services. The impact of the presence of the Lord on the meetings was incredible, resulting in mass repentance, deliverance, and powerful prophetic ministry. These meetings would have been an evangelist's dream come true.

Mike, however, was beginning to feel spiritually dry even though the services were incredibly anointed and many lives were being touched. Why? Because the busy schedule was keeping him from his time of solitude with the Lord. As a result, even though God was moving all around him, not much was happening in him.

Finally, Mike couldn't take it any longer. He said to Wimber, "I have to confess something John."

Concerned, John asked, "What's going on?"

Mike continued, "I'm backslidden!"

John asked, "Is there something that I need to know?"

Mike replied, "No, it's nothing like 'that'. It's just that my heart doesn't move anymore. I can't stand it! I used to pray and my heart would overflow with love for the Lord. I used to open my Bible and tenderly weep over the scriptures. But now I open the Bible and I feel... nothing! I pray, and it seems so cold. When I'm up on stage God anoints me for the sake of the people, but offstage there is nothing. I'm backslidden! I know that I have committed to do a bunch more of these meetings, and I will if you insist, but I don't want to. I need oil. I need to go home. I need to get alone with God and my Bible and stay there in the prayer room until my heart moves again!"

That is exactly what he did. And that is exactly what any of God's true friends will do. They put intimacy before all else – even anointed ministry.

## **A Heart that Moves**

The Kingdom of God is attracted to a heart that moves, an infatuated heart, a heart that is fully committed to Him. If there

is anything that God is searching for in this world, it is wholeheartedness. If your heart is completely His, the Bible says that He is looking for you!

*For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His (2 Chron. 16:9).*

Who does God *strongly* support? It is the wholehearted. It is those who have hearts that are *completely* His. When God finds a person who is no longer holding anything back, someone who gives Him permission to go anywhere, He begins to show Himself strong on their behalf. He starts showing off in their life!

One of my favorite scriptures illustrates this well. It is Jeremiah 29:13, which says:

*“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”*

But I like the next verse even better. I take it as a personal promise from the Lord to me:

*“I **will** be found by you,” declares the Lord.*

Whenever I read that last statement I quickly ask the Lord, “Do you promise?” I’m glad that it is impossible for Him to lie!

I love knowing that the Lord wants to be found by me. He wants to be found by you too. But He won’t be found by anyone who does not seek Him wholeheartedly, *no matter how clean their life may be*. A pure and God pleasing life is fuel for the Kingdom of God, but passion for Jesus is the spark that sets that fuel on fire. Some have a little spark, but no fuel to sustain it. Some have fuel, but no spark. We need both purity and passion.

## What Moves Your Heart?

We aren't all wired the same. The things that move your heart with passion for Jesus may be different than the things that move mine. Some people's hearts move best when they listen to worship music and sing along to the Lord. Some need to have a guitar in their hands. Other people's hearts start moving while they read the Bible, page after page after page. A spiritual mother in my life, Katie Wiedrick, needs to go outside for a long walk

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with Holy Spirit every day. That is where she comes alive. That is what gets her heart moving. If she doesn't get outside she actually gets a little... (I won't finish that sentence cause I'm sure she will want to read this book!).

Personally, I have found that my heart moves best when I meditate on the Word. That is what gets me going.

I am always memorizing new scriptures and mulling them over in my mind throughout the day. I keep a list of them on me at all times so that I always have something to chew on, and chew I do, while I drive, while I run, and while I drift off to sleep. I call that list of scriptures my *marinade*. In the same way as my wife marinates our steaks in her "secret" steak rub, which is a combination of a whole bunch of different spices, I marinate my heart and mind in the compilation of scriptures that God has highlighted to me. When I find a passage that I really love – and that I want to taste like – I don't just highlight it in my Bible and forget it (I used to do that a lot). I add it to my marinade. I begin to meditate on it regularly until it becomes part of who I am. That is what moves *my* heart. That is what works for *me*, and it makes me taste delicious too!

Another thing that gets my heart moving when I am feeling a little dry is to go somewhere that no one can hear me – usually for a drive in my truck – and to let out a few loud shouts or groans to the Lord. I will just pick a vowel, A, E, I, O, or U, and let her rip! OOOOObbb! EEEEEEEE! AAAAAAYYYY!

Don't roll your eyes at me. You don't have to do it, I'm just telling you what works for me. I don't know why, but a good loud shout seems to blow all the cobwebs out of my soul. It primes my pump and gets me going. It wakes me up if I'm a little tired and gets me in the mood to press into worship or prayer. It is for this reason that I enjoy churches with loud worship. I can groan and shout and no one really notices or pays any attention to me. Psalm 98:4 says to make a joyful noise unto the Lord and to make it a *loud noise*. Why? Because it works!

If you are not quite sure what moves *your* heart, try a few of the things that I have just mentioned and see what works for you. Think about times in your life when you were more passionate for the Lord than you are today. Why were you so passionate back then? What were you doing? What weren't you doing? What was going on in your life? If you desire to experience the presence of God you have to figure out what in the world makes *you* want to dance, sing, cry, and worship the Lord with lovesick passion. That is what draws the Kingdom toward you. Find out what primes *your* pump, what moves *your* heart, and what gets *you* going.

Thanksgiving and praise are two things that work for everyone. The Bible says that we *enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise* (Ps. 100:4). Do you want to *enter* His gates? Do you want to *enter* His courts? Those are a couple of big keys to entering in!

I have found, from personal experience, that thanksgiving and praise are two of the quickest ways to connect with the Kingdom. Just today at a prayer meeting I found myself a little bored, but as soon as I starting thanking God for His goodness to me my heart started to move and I could sense His presence. Thanksgiving is a great way to start every prayer time. It is how we *enter* His gates. For the last few years I have actually had my cell phone programmed to remind me to give thanks three times a day. I find that the more I thank Him, the more He gives me to be thankful for, and the more I praise Him, the more reasons He gives me to praise.

Jesus, in Revelation 2:2-7, says some of the most heartbreaking words found in the Bible. They are spoken to very faithful Christians. You might even say that He is preaching to the choir. I will give you the “Steve Holmstrom paraphrase”, and if you want to look it up to see if I mutilated it you are free to do so. Jesus is speaking, and here is how I read it:

*I have been watching you guys and I have noticed your amazing deeds. You work so hard for Me, you truly do, and you have persevered through so much. I especially appreciate that you don't run after, or even put up with, wicked wannabe apostles who claim to be something that they are not. It shows good discernment on your part. You haven't only persevered, but you have endured real tough times for My name, and you have not grown weary in the least. Thank you. I want you to know that I've noticed. I really have.*

*That is why it is so hard for me to tell you that I am holding something against you. Yes, I am. In fact, I'm so serious about this that if you don't change I am going to take steps that you will not appreciate. I am going to remove your ability to see into the spiritual realm—I'm going to take your lampstand away.*



*If you are wondering what it is that has hurt Me so much, it's simply this: You don't LOVE Me anymore!!! I can hardly believe how far you have fallen out of love with Me. Your life is clean, but it is cold, and I can't stand it. To Me, love is everything! While I appreciate your hard work, perseverance, and faithfulness, those things mean nothing to Me when they come from cold hearts.*

*Think back to the old days when you used to love Me, back when your heart moved. Take a minute and try to remember the things you did back then. Think about the things that stirred your heart toward Me. Try to remember the way you used to show Me that I mattered to you. Do those things again. Do the things that move your heart, because those are the things that move My heart.*

*I hope you've got your ears on and that you've heard what I just said. There is a big reward for you if you are victorious in this area of your life – in falling in love with Me again. What is the reward? If you succeed in intimacy, I will let you eat from the Tree of Life which is – get this – in the paradise of God! You want in?*

Water always flows to the lowest point, to the deep places. While you cannot see it with your natural eyes, the Kingdom of God does the same thing. It flows to the deep places – and the deepest place is *love*. If you are lovesick for the Lord, the Kingdom is on its way. While you are seeking Jesus, the Kingdom is seeking you! It is attracted to those who love Jesus well.

## **Doing Devotions**

Probably the worst thing that ever happened to *devotion* was when we replaced it with *doing devotions*. Doing devotions, for many, is nothing more than a religious discipline of reading a certain number of chapters of the Bible each day, and possibly

praying through a prayer list. Spending regular time in the Word and in prayer are both very important disciplines, but they need to be seen as a means to an end and not the end itself.

The goal of devotion, or *doing devotions* (if you like to call it that), is to get our hearts to move. That should be our motivation. People who live Kingdom lives certainly do make quiet time with the Lord a daily priority, but not for religious reasons. Their purpose isn't just to get through their three

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chapters of the Bible, or to knock prayer off of their daily To Do list. They aren't simply putting in time to try to win points with God. They know that He isn't impressed with sacrifice anyway (Ps. 51:16).

Kingdom people spend time with God for the purpose of spending time with God! Their goal is intimacy, deeper friendship, and real heart connection. They haven't "done their devotions" until their hearts move. That is what devotion is!

I have always been a little jealous of Enoch. Not much is said about him, but what is said reveals that he had a relationship with God that was above and beyond that of the average churchgoer. You just know that there is an amazing story that God is not telling us, but instead He simply says:

*Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him*  
(Genesis 5:24).

Well that is definitely the short version of the story! What happened? God *took* him? Where? Your guess is as good as mine, but I have a theory. I believe that Enoch loved the Lord so much that He became God's very best friend on the planet! I

believe that Enoch's devotion to the Lord was so intense that it kept drawing God's attention toward him. I believe that God finally said, *That's it! I can't live without you Eno! You're coming with Me!* Enoch had a third Heaven experience and never came back!

While the Bible says very little about Enoch, one thing is made abundantly clear. Hebrews 11:5 says that before God took him, he was found to be a man who was *pleasing to God*. That's almost all the Bible tells us about old Enoch, that he *pleased God*, that God enjoyed him. Those words were written for our benefit. They teach us that if we please God He will take us places!

While God loves everyone, He doesn't enjoy everyone. He isn't pleased with everyone. The Kingdom is for those who please Him, and if we desire to go places with God like Enoch did, or like Paul, John, Peter, Daniel, and so many others have, then we have got to *learn what is pleasing to the Lord* (Eph. 5:10). And while I could make a list of things that God enjoys, there is nothing – absolutely nothing – that pleases Him more than when we fall in love with His Son.

Most of us can relate to that. If my son fell head over heels in love with a young woman that he was dating, but I could tell that she didn't really love him back, I wouldn't like her at all. If I could tell that she was dating him only to get something from him, or that she was using him to connect with his mother and I, I wouldn't want to have her around. Why would I want to have her over for dinner? Why would I invest in her? I wouldn't think of taking her on a holiday with our family.

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**If we please  
God He will  
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places!**

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If, however, I could see that she adored him as much as he adored her, that she was filling his heart with love and affection,

and that he beamed in her presence as a result, I would want to have her around! I'd take that girl places. She would have a seat at our table. She might even get to come on the Hawaiian family vacation. Why? Cause she loves my boy!

*For the Father Himself loves you, **because** you have loved Me* (John 16:27).

Do you love God's Son? Does your passion for Jesus make the Father want to take you places? If you're not sure where you are at in the "loving Jesus department," take a minute and do a self-evaluation. Consider these two things:

### **1. Are you obeying God?**

Obedience is like a windsock. It tells you which way things are going. Don't get me wrong, God doesn't measure your love for Jesus by your obedience. God measures your love by measuring your love! He can actually do that. He can also measure wind direction without looking at a windsock. But you and I benefit from keeping an eye on windsocks – and obedience – to tell us which way things are going. As we saw in Revelation chapter two, it is possible to obey the Lord without loving the Lord. It is not possible, however, to love the Lord and not obey Him (John 14:21). The measure of your love will never be more than the measure of your obedience. If you love Him you will obey Him. Obedience is a very good sign.

### **2. Are you lovesick?**

Do you long for time spent alone with the Lord, or would you rather watch TV? Be honest. Do you daydream about Him, or is it usually about something else? Does your heart ache a little bit when you don't have the opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord? Do you miss Him on days like that?

If you are not answering yes to these questions your devotional life is not working and you need to try something else. Find out what moves *your* heart. Try a bunch of stuff. Hang out with people who love Jesus more than you do and see what they are up to. When you start to feel lovesick, and you find yourself willing to do anything to be in the Lord's presence, you have figured out what moves your heart. Keep doing whatever that is. You will like where it takes you!



SIXTEEN

## Keys of the Kingdom



In my own pursuit of the Kingdom – whether I am praying for someone who needs a miracle or simply wanting to enjoy a little time in God’s presence – I often find myself bumping into *locked doors*. The Kingdom of God is *at hand*, but that doesn’t mean that it is always easy to grab.

Have you ever found a promise in God’s Word that didn’t seem to work? Be honest. You knew that it was true, because God said it, so why wasn’t the promise being fulfilled in your life? All God’s promises are true, but seeing them fulfilled often requires access to a Kingdom with doors that are locked shut. That would be discouraging if it weren’t for one very important fact. We have the keys! In Matthew 16:19, Jesus says:

*I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

Keys have a purpose. They are for locking and for unlocking. While Kingdom keys are supernatural keys, they are as real as the nose on your face. They can lock things up (bind), or they can unlock things (loose). We can use the keys to *bind* sickness, disease, depression, poverty, wickedness, temptation, and demons – all the bad stuff. Or we can use them to *loose* healing, joy, prosperity, righteousness, strength, and even angels – all the good stuff. We can bind and loose, lock and unlock, with the Keys of the Kingdom that have been given to us *if* – and this is a big *if* – *if* we know what they are and if we know which key to use in a given situation.

On every key ring there are a few keys that get used more than the rest. The same is true with the Kingdom. I have spent a great portion of this book focusing on the most foundational Kingdom keys, things such as sanctification (dealing with your sin), surrender (selling all), obedience (saying yes to God), and intimacy with Jesus. If you do those things you are going to see an explosion of Kingdom activity in your life.

But there are many other keys as well. I could write chapters on prayer, faith, authority, worship, thanksgiving, forgiveness, praise, baptism, communion, fasting, and the list goes on. The Bible gives us a multitude of keys that unlock the supernatural realm. It is actually a little daunting, possibly overwhelming, until you discover what the greatest key is. The greatest key – and don't forget this one – *is to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and to use the key that He tells you to use when He tells you to use it*. That is the greatest key of all – to do whatever He says!

Without the Holy Spirit you might as well be standing in front of a locked door with a thousand keys in your hand and no clue which one to use. You could try one at a time, but that might take a while! It is faster, and easier, if you ask for help.



Doors start opening up when we learn to hear the Holy Spirit's voice saying, *Use this key right here*. He is called *The Helper* for a reason!

I will warn you ahead of time that you will not always enjoy all of the keys. I certainly don't. If your child needs a healing, and the key to their healing is for you to fast for a week, all the praying in the world won't heal your kid. You have to use the right key. I enjoy fasting about as much as I enjoy a good gall bladder attack, but I will fast if the Holy Spirit tells me that fasting is the right key to open a specific door.

Only God knows what is keeping you and I from connecting to the Kingdom in a given situation. To unlock the Kingdom

you might have to forgive someone that hurt you twenty years ago. You might have to release someone from a financial debt. You might have to repent to your pastor for years of muzzling the ox, or even put a big cheque in the offering plate. You might have to confess to your spouse that thing you did twenty-six years ago. You might have to move to another city, change jobs, get baptized, join a church, leave a church, or even give up chocolate! I cannot stress this to you enough: *obedience to the Holy Spirit is the master key!* Your ability to unlock the Kingdom could be dependent on absolutely anything imaginable and therefore hearing and obeying His voice becomes an absolute necessity. Many people die six inches from the cure that would heal them because the cure is on the other side of a locked door. Worst of all, the key is in their hand!

Dance is a key that I do not naturally gravitate toward. I feel self-conscious, insecure, and just plain weird when I dance.

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**Without the Holy Spirit you might as well be standing in front of a locked door with a thousand keys in your hand and no clue which one to use.**

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I'm six-foot-four, not very graceful, and therefore I look like a very large idiot when I dance. I don't particularly enjoy watching other men dance either.

I remember a time, years ago, when I was in the front row during a worship service and a man began to dance in the altar area directly in front of me. He was jumping, twirling, and bouncing around like a ballerina. As he spun in circles at helicopter speed he almost hit me in the face two times with his flailing arms. I found him to be both distracting and annoying. At one moment in his dance I mumbled under my breath, "This is WAY too flamboyant!"

As I was mumbling to myself, the Lord shouted in my spirit, *That's nothing Steve! You should see Me dance! I'd really make you blush!* It was a cute rebuke but I got the point. I apologized and closed my eyes for the rest of the worship service.

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**Many people die six inches from the cure that would heal them because the cure is on the other side of a locked door.**

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A week later, alone in my den, I was worshipping the Lord and asking Him to allow me to experience His presence. I wanted to sense His closeness and to hear His voice. I wanted to connect with the Kingdom – with the glory realm. I wanted to enter in. As I was worshipping, the Lord spoke to me and said, *I've got a key for you Steve!* When I asked Him what it was, to my horror he said, *Dance for Me!* I explained to the Lord that I don't dance, that it just isn't who I am. I was hoping that He might give me something else to do, something that might be a better fit for me. Instead, He simply said, *Okay, stay out! But if you want to connect with the Kingdom today, you have to dance for Me.* You should have seen me twirl! To be honest, it may have been a little flamboyant.

Many people have a favorite key, something that has worked for them in the past and offered them access to God's presence or God's power. My wife and I really like the prayer of intercession (standing in the gap repentance). I learned the prayer of intercession in my twenties and it radically changed my life. We have seen numerous instant miracles in our family, our businesses, and in the lives of people that we have interceded for. As a result of the success we have had with the prayer of intercession, it is an easy key to want to grab first. Sometimes, however, it doesn't work. Why? Because there are times when intercession is not the right key. There is no use going into intercession when it is the prayer of faith, the prayer of agreement, or (God forbid) a prophetic *dance* that is needed to unlock a situation. Sometimes your favorite key needs to stay in your pocket.

When one of your kids or someone that you love is sick, what do you do? Do you *plead the blood of Jesus*? Do you declare healing over them? Do you shout at infirmity as loud as you can, putting special emphasis on the words *in the Name of Jesus*? Do you beg God on your hands and knees? Or do you just give them a pill? What do you expect to work?

Have you ever considered asking the Holy Spirit what is needed to unlock the situation? Have you ever assumed that the Helper would like to help you? We don't have to get all excited to unlock a door. We don't need to beg God to open it for us. We don't need to scream at the door in Jesus name. We simply have to have the right key, and lightly turn it—unless, of course, the key *is* to yell and scream!

When you want to experience God's presence, what do you do? Do you sing? Do you dance? Do you seek God with others? Do you meditate on the Word, play the guitar, go for a walk with

Him, or pray on your knees? There are many ways to seek God. If what you are doing is working, great. Keep it up. If it is not, then ask the Holy Spirit for another key. He will help if you ask.

God isn't trying to withhold His presence from us. He wants to be close to us, but we have to come to Him *His way*. You could live in a prayer room for twenty years and never enter the Kingdom of God if you don't use the right key. God loves you deeply, and He wants for you to experience His love, but His love does not negate the fact that the right key is necessary.

What would you think of me if I stood outside the door of my house, trying to unlock it with the key to my truck, and then got mad at God for not loving me? God's love is not the problem. That, however, is what many Christians have done. They have remained disconnected from the Kingdom, unable to experience the presence of God, and have assumed that it is because God doesn't love them. Other people have believed themselves to be too cerebral to experience God's presence. They say, "I'm just not a feeler." The truth is that if they had the right key, and could unlock the Kingdom, they would be feelers and they would love it!

The spiritual breakthrough, miracle, or open door that you need may not come to you until you try a key that you have never tried before. I once had the Holy Spirit tell me, during a spiritually dry season, that I needed to be re-baptized in a particular way. I had already been baptized as a teenager, so it seemed redundant. What would people think of me, if after twenty years of ministry, I got baptized like one of the newbies? I shared it with spiritual leaders that I knew, and even they told me that it was unnecessary. God, however, kept pressing me on it. He gave me a prophetic experience where I saw a burnt fuse. Then the Holy Spirit said, *That is your first baptism!* He said that

when I changed the fuse I would access more power. So... I got dunked again, and He was right!

The very day that I was re-baptized we not only had a string of huge financial breakthroughs (I always seem to get money miracles when I touch the Kingdom), but best of all, I began having prophetic dreams *every single night*, and it lasted for months! I would wake up with detailed information about people and situations that I had no business knowing about and would later find out that it was exactly correct. It was amazing!

After a few months, however, the dreams stopped. You can't imagine my disappointment! I was getting used to having nightly encounters. I was becoming one of those "prophetic people" who always seems to have a fresh word from God. And then... it just stopped. The door to the revelatory realm that was becoming so exciting to me was locked again. You may laugh, but I was actually tempted to get baptized one more time! Knowing my frustration, the Holy Spirit gave me another key. He said, *Just eat vegetables and drink water for a few days and the dreams will kick in again.*

I think my response was, *Hub?* I wouldn't have thought of that. It didn't seem like very spiritual advice. But did it work? Like a doozy! As soon as I started my veggie fast I started having prophetic dreams again *every single night!* A few days on vegetables and water seemed to prime my prophetic pump and get things flowing again. Veggies! Who would have thought? I would have preferred donairs, but whatever.

What do *you* need to do to go to the next level? Only God knows. It might require a baptism and a veggie fast! Ask the Holy Spirit. You may have to deal with some area of disobedience. You may have to learn a new way to pray. You may have to learn how to soak your soul in worship. You may

have to sing, shout, or take a trip to Israel. You may have to give a million dollars to me (I take cash). You may have to spin like a ballerina in front of a judgmental redneck evangelist. It could be anything. The Lord once told me that *many of His best leaders* cannot enter in because they won't obey Him in what they eat.

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**The Holy Spirit tends to talk to people who talk to Him.**

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Can you imagine finding out that the reason you never saw angels or experienced the glory was because you couldn't say no to French fries? What a horrible trade!

Whatever your key to breakthrough is, the Holy Spirit knows and He wants to let you know. It is not a guessing game, and you don't have to be perfect. You simply need to hear His voice and obey. You are very unlikely, however, to hear His voice if you are not talking to Him regularly and asking Him for keys. The Holy Spirit tends to talk to people who talk to Him.

*You do not have because you do not ask (James 4:2).*

## **Go Get It**

Sometimes the key to experiencing more of the presence of God is to go somewhere that His presence is moving in a greater way. Some people are holding keys that would unlock Kingdom doors, but there is not a whole lot of Kingdom in their town. The measure, depth, and intensity of the Kingdom of God isn't the same everywhere. God's manifest presence increases in places where His people have come together in devoted prayer, worship, and praise. There are also places in the world – call them portals, hot spots, or thin places – where spiritual encounters seem to happen quite commonly. We don't always know why, we just know that they do.

Back in the nineties, in the height of the revival that occurred in Brownsville, Pensacola, my friend Graydon and I decided to fly there to take in some meetings. I remember the words of a well-meaning older gentleman. He said, “You don’t have to fly to Brownsville to find God! Don’t you know that God is everywhere?” He had a good point. I didn’t know what to say. All I knew was that people were getting more blasted in Brownsville than they were in my town, and I wanted to get blasted too! I went, and I was touched by God. It was awesome.

The old guy was right *and* he was wrong. God is everywhere, but the *manifest presence* of God isn’t. There are places in the world right now where you can experience God with less effort. It may not seem fair, but it is a fact. There are places where His presence feels thick, where His glory is impossible to ignore, and where extraordinary miracles are a common occurrence.

If the Kingdom of God were intense everywhere, Jesus wouldn’t have taught us to pray *Thy Kingdom come*. One day the knowledge of God’s glory will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2:14). One day the Kingdom of God, which starts out as small as a mustard seed and grows from there (Mark 4:32), will cover the whole earth. We should look forward to that day, but *one day* isn’t here yet. Like clouds, the Kingdom is presently heavy in some places, and light in others. Yes, we should seek the Kingdom wherever we are, but why not also go and visit places where God is moving in powerful ways? When revival breaks out in Ohio (and it is going to happen), then Ohio here I come!

If you go to a lot of conferences, or fly to places where revival is breaking out, other Christians are going to roll their eyes at you. Do it anyway! I do. It’s fun. I love going to places

where I can experience more of His presence. It is a little different everywhere you go, too. The Kingdom of God in Kansas feels a little different than the Kingdom in Redding, or Toronto, or Israel, or the town you live in.

I recommend that you get to as many anointed meetings as you can, even if it means a bit of travel. Those are great opportunities to experience the glory, to connect with other believers, to be prayed for, prophesied over, and to work on your dance and your shout! Life is short, and you are going to wish that you travelled a little more anyway. If you are a senior citizen, retired, and just killing time – stop it. Go somewhere that you might get knocked down! Enter in before it is too late. Make it your goal to see the goodness of the Lord *in the land of the living* – and as much of that goodness as possible.

God may even call you, for a season, to go and live somewhere spiritually hot where you can be immersed in the presence of God. A lot of young people these days are taking a year or two to drench their souls in revival culture, or the prayer movement. I think that's great. Those types of seasons in our lives – seasons set apart for radical devotion – are often the seasons where we experience God in the greatest ways.

I've noticed that most of my spiritual heroes had their greatest God encounters in their younger years. Why? I can't say for sure, but I've wondered if it was because they were living more radical, set-apart, and distraction free lifestyles. When you grow up and get a big ministry it is a little harder to find time to pray for eight hours a day at the riverbank! Even the Apostle Paul's greatest encounter (when he was caught up into the third Heaven) occurred when he was younger, in his near silent years, before he became the great leader that we know him as. Not much is said about him during those years. I believe that he was



just pressing in, soaking in the Spirit, and having daily personal revival.

Maybe God will call you to take a year or two to seek Him on the back side of the wilderness. Your greatest encounters may just happen there. And when you leave that season, if you have to, be careful not to grow up too much (in the negative sense). When Peter Pan grows up he can't see Neverland anymore. Many of God's great leaders can't see the Kingdom anymore for the same reason. "Big important successful people" tend to lose their childlike hunger and desperation, and when you lose that you lose the Kingdom. It is hard for the rich to enter in, and riches come in many forms.

At least once or twice a year I try to get away by myself for a few weeks to seek the Lord, to get centered, and to shake off any ties that bind me. Sometimes I go to a Kingdom hotspot, and sometimes I just go somewhere that I can be alone, but I go. I set aside dedicated and quality time to seek the Kingdom. It is a top priority in my life.

## Family and the Kingdom

I should mention the sacrifice that my wife has made to let me live this way. I won't lie to you, pursuing the Kingdom can tax your family, and Jesus addressed that cost a number of times. I live in the real world, just like you do, where travelling costs money and children do not raise themselves. With five small kids at home, it does not go unnoticed when Dad vanishes for a week or two! Even my normal day-to-day life with God includes incredible amounts of solitude that is not always convenient to everyone around me. It

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costs my wife something to let me go, and I am spiritually richer because of the sacrifice she makes. I don't take it for granted.

Is it worth it to her? Absolutely. My connection to the Kingdom has made me a far better husband, father, minister, and even a more anointed businessman, so she is definitely getting her money's worth (literally). It is a sacrifice, but it is worth it. I think that she's just glad that I am drunk in the Spirit these days, instead of drunk in the garage!

Here is a strange little Kingdom verse that never used to make sense to me until I began to see the Kingdom in this new light. Jesus said:

*"Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life"* (Luke 18:29-30).

Now if you are thinking about dumping your wife and children and never coming back, this is *not* a scripture for you to stand on! It does, however, reveal to us that *for the sake of the Kingdom of God* we may have to leave our families behind *at times*. We may have to go places without them. Jesus addressed this because He knew that it would be an issue.

Some people will go places to connect with the Kingdom, and some will go places to bring the Kingdom to others. It is a sacrifice that God asks certain families to make. The next time that your favorite prophet comes to town to bring the Kingdom your way and to pour into your spiritual life, remember that he probably has a wife and kids at home missing him. They all made a sacrifice *for the sake of the Kingdom*, so that *you* could be blessed. You might keep that in mind when the pastor takes an offering for his ministry!

## Kingdom Giving

Speaking of offerings, giving is a pretty big Kingdom key as well and we need to be Spirit-led in that. While I realize that there has been a lot of abuse and manipulation by preachers in this area, and therefore many squirm at even the mention of money, I'm going to go there anyway. Keep in mind, however, that I have nothing to gain by telling you any of this. I am not going to take an offering at the end of the chapter, your pastor never paid me to say it, and I don't want you to mail me a cheque. Are you ready? Here it is... *giving matters*. You cannot live a Kingdom life until God owns your money!

Until you submit to God in the area of finances He will never truly own your heart. Jesus said:

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

If your money isn't God's, your heart isn't God's. Not completely anyway. It is one of the most difficult areas for most believers to surrender to the Lord, but it is a battle that must be won if the Kingdom is what you are after. While I believe that everyone should faithfully support their local church (you have to feed your pastor) we ought to give anywhere that the Spirit leads us to give. Obedience is the key, and if you are pursuing the Kingdom, you will be tested on this one for sure.

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**If your money  
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heart isn't God's.**

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I cannot tell you how many times God has asked me to give at inconvenient times. Before God began to trust me with significant wealth, I told Him that "if He made me rich" I would be really generous. He thought that was funny. He let me know

that He would never trust me with big wealth until I learned to obey Him with little wealth – and then began the testing.

God would ask me to write cheques for hundreds, then thousands, and then even tens of thousands of dollars. Sometimes He would make me give them to people that I didn't even like! When I went to buy nice things for myself, He would

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sometimes say no – as if it was *His* money. When I disobeyed Him, which I often did, He disciplined me in obvious and uncomfortable ways. At other times, when I felt generous and I wanted to give to a particular person or cause, He would sometimes say no. He made it very clear that He was in charge

of the cash, and that my job was to obey.

Please understand that God doesn't need your money. God has money, lots of money, and He knows how to get money where He wants to get it. If He can't find a Christian to pay a bill, He can make the Devil pay it. He is very resourceful. God doesn't have money problems, and neither do people who surrender their money to Him.

When God asks for money, it is about *your* need, not *His*. He's not trying to get something from you, but rather to you. When you say yes to God in the area of money, He not only trusts you with more, but you enter into a place with Him that very few find. Your heart changes. You take a giant leap toward wholeheartedness, which can't happen any other way. It is impossible to give God your whole heart without giving Him your wallet, they are just too connected to each other.

If there was just one thing that I could say about winning with God in the area of money it would be this: *Hear His voice and quickly obey!* Generosity is a good thing, but even generosity will get you into trouble if it doesn't bow to obedience. *To obey is better than sacrifice* (1 Sam. 15:22). If you can't hear the Holy Spirit's voice you will never win this battle. In fact, you will probably get suckered a lot. You will be tempted to empty your bank account every time someone says, "This offering will break poverty off your life!" And if you are that gullible God will never trust you with great wealth. We need to hear the Holy Spirit's voice, ignore all the others, and do what God says.

I know this truth hurts, and I don't like to hurt people. It is very likely that you know in your heart that you are not obeying God in this area. Most people aren't. This is where 80% of believers draw the line and give up on the Kingdom life. Like the rich young ruler, it keeps many from entering in.

## **Too Many Keys to Count**

This chapter would never end if I attempted to include everything that might be a key to the Kingdom. Like I said, the key that you need today could be anything. Don't try to create a list of *do's* and *don'ts* for entering the Kingdom. If you attempt to create a checklist (out of chapter four verses) that says, *be childlike, don't envy, don't slander, don't be selfish, don't be greedy...* you will never keep to it anyway. You will only become a law-centered Pharisee, and the Bible says that the door of the Kingdom of God is shut to the Pharisees and to those who follow them (Matt. 23:13).

Keep it simple. Just keep asking the Holy Spirit, "What do You want from me today? What is the key to unlock this situation? How do I get to the next level?" I would bet that He

*Access Granted*

has already told you what He wants next, but that you are hoping that it isn't what you think. It is! Do it! And if you obey, He will lead you further. He will give you the keys that you need for today and the keys that you need for tomorrow. I only hope, at least one time, that He asks you to twirl like a helicopter in church!

## Praying Prayers that Cannot be Refused



I want to introduce something that has the potential to change your prayer life forever. While personal experience may lead us to believe the opposite, prayer was never meant to be hit or miss. It was always intended to be hit, hit, hit, and it becomes just that when we enter into the revelation that I am about to share. If it is an idea that is new to you, and seems a little abstract, I would encourage you to test it with the Word of God and see if it doesn't line up exactly right. On top of that, test it in your personal prayer life as well and see if you don't begin to have incredibly new results when you pray.

It is a simple truth, but it may leave you scratching your head until I flesh it out. Here it is. *The Kingdom of God and the name of the Lord are two sides of the same coin.*

Early in 2014, while reading my Bible, I came across John 14:14 and had to smirk. Have you ever found a scripture that just seemed too good to be true? Have you ever read a promise

in the Word and then caught yourself mumbling, “I wish!” John 14:14 is one of those verses. Jesus is speaking, and this is what He says:

*If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.*

After reading those words I rolled my eyes and sarcastically said to the Lord, “Do You promise?” The words hadn’t even left my lips before I could feel the Holy Spirit frowning in my direction.

I said, “I’m sorry Lord, I shouldn’t be sarcastic. It’s just that I have asked for You for hundreds of things in Your name, and You *don’t* always ‘do it.’ In fact, I don’t know why You would even make a promise that bold if You weren’t willing to keep it. I love You with all my heart – and I don’t hold it against You – but You don’t do *everything* that I ask in Your name.”

I sat there staring at John 14:14, wanting for it to be true, but feeling like there was just too much evidence pointing in the opposite direction. If only it had the word *if* in it – then I could possibly believe it. John 15:7 is similar, but at least it has a big *if* connected: *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.* It was a little easier to believe that one because if my prayers weren’t answered God still had an out. He didn’t look like a liar. I could blame myself for not *abiding* enough, or for not having enough of His words in me. My failure to qualify for the promise left God looking innocent.

Matthew 21:22 is another similar passage that also includes a condition: *And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.* It is saying that *if you believe* you will receive. I could accept that one as well. Once again, there was a way for me to oh-so-nobly disqualify myself from the promise and in the process protect God’s good reputation! (Yes, I’m that nice of a guy.) I could blame myself for not having enough faith, and let God save face.



John 14:14, however, stumped me completely. I wanted to believe it, but I couldn't. How could it be true? It was just such a big blank cheque. *If you ask Me ANYTHING in My name, I'll do it!* No *ifs*, *ands*, or *buts*? It's a beautiful promise, no doubt, but it seemed way too good to be true and way too easy to disprove!

As I mulled it over in my mind, an old church song came bubbling up inside me. It is taken from Proverbs 18:10. This is how it goes:

*The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe.*

## Praying In Jesus Name

In order to pray prayers that cannot be refused, we must first understand that *the name of the Lord* is not like any other name. The Bible says that you can actually *run into it*. Isn't that a little odd? In all your life, have you ever run into a name? Have you ever found shelter in a name? How would you even do that? My name is Steven. Like the name Jesus, it consists of two simple syllables. How do you run into two syllables? Or even three? It's impossible.

Why is it impossible? Because we can only run into *places*. We run from one place to another place. We run into the grocery store, the mall, the church, or the school, but we never run into syllables because syllables are not places. Therefore, if the Bible is true – that the name of the Lord is something that we can run into – then we must accept that the name of the Lord is a *place*. It is a realm. It is not just *something*, it is *somewhere*. Like a strong tower, or a big house, it is something that you can enter into, or exit out of. It is a destination. It is so much more than syllables made with your mouth.

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**We must accept  
that the name of  
the Lord is a place**

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All through the Bible we find the name of the Lord being spoken about in ways that reveal that it is far more than syllables. We are not only told to *run into* it, but to *praise* it, to *magnify* it, to *worship* it, and even to *fear* it. Is God wanting us to run into, praise, magnify, worship or fear certain syllables or sounds? Look at how Solomon spoke about the name of the Lord:

*Now it was in the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord said to my father David, 'Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son who will be born to you, he will build the house for My name' (1 Kings 8:17-20).*

If I built a beautiful house and then told my wife that it wasn't built for her, but rather for "her name", she would rightly assume that I had a screw loose. Who does that? Who builds a house for a name? Names don't need houses. People need houses. Yet the Bible says that the name of the Lord needed a house. It needed somewhere to dwell.

Why? Because the name of the Lord is a *place*, a *realm*, and more specifically, *the realm of God's glory*. It is God's manifest presence and power on the earth. It dwells in places, but not every place. When Solomon finished building a house for the "name" of the Lord, it wasn't syllables that moved into the house. The Bible says, *and the glory of the Lord filled the house* (2 Chron. 7:1). Solomon built a house for the *name*, and *glory* moved in. Why? Because that is what the name is!

We can take John 14:14 to the bank. Jesus meant it when He said, *If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it*. He wasn't blowing smoke or exaggerating in the least. It is a promise that He has never broken – not once – but to understand it you might find it helpful to read it like this: *If you ask Me anything IN*

*MY GLORY, I will do it!* In other words, get in the glory, and *then* ask. He never refuses a prayer that is prayed from in there.

Most Christians assume that they are praying *in Jesus name* simply because they end their prayers with these four words: “In Jesus name, amen”. That is *not* what it means to pray in Jesus name. Tagging those four words to the end of your prayer does not make your prayer impossible to refuse. It is a Biblical way to pray, and I recommend that you do, but millions of unanswered prayers every day end exactly that way.

Praying in Jesus’ name has nothing to do with *what you say*, and everything to do with *where you are standing!* The name of the Lord is a strong tower. If you get inside that tower and sing, you are singing *in* the name of the Lord. If you get inside that tower and dance, you are dancing *in* the name of the Lord. If you get inside that tower and prophesy, you are prophesying *in* the name of the Lord. And if you get inside that tower and pray, you are praying *in* the name of the Lord!

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**Praying in Jesus’ name  
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If, however, you stand just outside of that tower and pray, you are not praying in name of the Lord, even if you say His name at the end of your prayer. Why? Because it is not about what you say, but rather where you stand. You yourself have to be “in the name” to pray in the name. That is how it works. How many promises have we failed to access because we have stood just outside the tower?

*“These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17-18).*

## **Worship Is Prayer's Best Friend**

When we understand all that, we quickly realize how important worship is. *We enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise* (Ps. 100:4). It is often in times of high praise and worship that we experience the glory, and it is in the glory (which is His name) where our prayers are most powerful. Only Heaven knows what is available to a group of faith-filled passionate believers gathering in corporate worship. We ought to take the worship leader literally when he says, “Come on folks, lets enter in!” That is exactly what we need to do. We need to enter into the glory. We need to enter into His name – and *then* bring our requests to God.

*Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have **gathered together in My name**, I am there in their midst* (Matt. 18:19-20).

I was on my way to church recently and was praying for my mother-in-law as I drove. She was awfully sick that day. As I prayed quietly in my heart, the Holy Spirit said to me, *Wait until the middle of the worship service and THEN pray for her*. I often forget how important it is to press into His presence before I pray. God wanted me to pray “in” Jesus’ name. He wanted me to get into the glory first. I attend a church where it is not uncommon for wholehearted worshippers to experience God’s presence during worship. I pressed into worship, waited until I could sense a little glory, and *then* I prayed for her. She was immediately healed.

Do you ever wonder why you are so easily distracted during worship? Why your mind so often wanders? Why you catch yourself singing about Jesus while daydreaming about lunch? I’ll tell you why. The Enemy works overtime to distract you any

time you attempt to worship the Lord! He does this because he knows that if a wholehearted follower of Christ will only press into worship they will access a realm of glory that he does not want them to know anything about! If the Devil had his way, every Christian would be late for church, miss the worship, and only hear the sermon. We would be really smart, and completely powerless. We would never enter into the name.

## The Kingdom and the Name

A lot of this book has been dedicated to selling the point that while eternal life is free gift given to all who believe, the Kingdom is a little more challenging to enter into. It costs us everything, and therefore many are not willing to pay the price to access it. The same can be said of entering into the name of the Lord. Why? Because the Kingdom and the name are one and the same. I am going to say that again to make sure you don't miss it: *The Kingdom and the name are one and the same.*

I'll show you in the Word.

In Luke 18 we read the story of the Rich Young Ruler, a wealthy man in whom Jesus saw something that He really liked. The Lord invited him to live

the Kingdom life, but as we looked at earlier, the price was too high and he chose to pass. After he walked away, Peter said to Jesus, "*Behold, we have left our own homes and followed You.*" Jesus' reply was:

*...there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times as much at this time and in the age to come, eternal life (Luke 18:29-30).*

When you compare that story to Matthew's account of the same day, however, it is slightly different. In Matthew chapter

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**The Kingdom  
and the name are  
one and the same**

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19 we also find the story of the Rich Young Ruler. Matthew also follows it by mentioning Peter's comment about how they had left everything to follow Jesus. After that, he too mentions Jesus' reply but there is an interesting difference at this point that I want to draw your attention to. Look at this:

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms **for My name's sake**, will receive many times as much... (Matt. 19:29).*

You see the difference? Luke's account has Jesus talking about people making sacrifices for the sake of the *Kingdom*. Matthew's account of the same story has Jesus talking about people making sacrifices for the sake of the *name*. So which one was it? The Kingdom or the name? What did Jesus actually say that day? Who is right? Who is wrong? Did we just find a mistake in the Holy Bible? Not at all. It was just Matthew being Matthew.

I can tell you with complete certainty what Jesus said that day. The words that Jesus actually used were *the Kingdom of God*, but as I mentioned in chapter five, Matthew tried to avoid that phrase. He only used it four times in His gospel, even though Jesus used it continually. What Matthew would do, to get around it, was to replace it with another phrase that meant the exact same thing. He usually chose to say *Kingdom of Heaven* instead. In this circumstance, however, he chose a different phrase that also means *the exact same thing* as the Kingdom of God. He chose *the name*. If the Kingdom and the name were not the same thing, then Matthew's gospel would be flawed!

What Jesus was saying that day, after that rich man walked away sad, was that those who are willing to count the cost and pay the price to access *the glory realm* (the Kingdom, the name, Zion, God's manifest presence) will certainly receive their reward in both this life and in the next. Going after the Kingdom

will cost you, but it will be worth it, and I know that both Matthew and Luke would say *amen* to that!

## Baptized in the Glory

When we understand that the Kingdom and the name are one and the same, many scriptures come to life in a whole new way. Take baptism for example.

In the book of Acts almost every water baptism is followed by an incredible supernatural encounter with the Holy Spirit. Powerful things happened after water baptisms. Reading the New Testament would lead most to believe that the quickest way to have a power encounter with God would be to get baptized.

Today, however, things are usually a lot less dramatic. Most Christians these days get baptized as an “act of obedience” and see the whole ordeal as a symbolic act. For many, it is simply a way of saying, “I gave my life to Jesus and I’m not ashamed to let the world know.” That’s nice, but why have things changed? Why is it that early church water baptisms were followed by power encounters and yet most present day baptisms are followed by... a towel?

The reason is simple. The apostles understood that they weren’t just baptizing people into water, but rather into *glory*. They baptized people into *the name!* Jesus said:

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them **in the name** of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit... (Matt. 28:19).*

Most people read those words and assume that Jesus was giving us directions on “what to say” when baptizing people. Many believe that He was basically saying, *When you baptize them,*

*say it this way: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."* If that is what Jesus meant, isn't it a little odd that none of His disciples did it that way? Have you ever noticed that? Not one person anywhere in the entire Bible was ever baptized with those words being spoken over them. Not one! Even the Apostle Peter, who held a baptismal service for thousands of people just days later (Acts two), completely failed to mention the words *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* when he baptized them! Did he forget the instructions that he was just given by the Lord only days earlier? Not likely.

Jesus wasn't telling them what to *say*, but rather *what to do*. To baptize people *in the name* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit means to baptize them into the *glory* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus never said to baptize them into the "names" (plural), but rather into the "name" (singular). Even if He had said "names" it wouldn't make sense because *Father* isn't a name and neither is *Son*. Those are titles and job descriptions, not names.

Once again, when Jesus said to baptize people *in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit*, He was telling us to baptize people into God's glory. That is what the apostles did, and that is why people had glorious power encounters following their water baptism. They weren't simply dunked into water, syllables, and titles, but rather into glory! They were baptized into the name of the Lord!

The most important part of a baptism, therefore, isn't what is *said* while a person is being dunked, but rather what they are dunked into, and I'm not talking about the water. We need the presence of God there! We need the glory. I recommend that people fast and pray in preparation for a baptism. You may say everything wrong, but if you baptize them into the glory, something good is going to happen!



## So What Should We Say?

I know what you are wondering, and although I'll probably lose a few friends over it, I'll go there anyway. I must preach the Word. You want to know what we are we supposed to "say" when we baptize people, right? Rather than giving you my opinion, I'll just tell you the words that Peter used. I will also tell you what Philip and Paul said when they baptized people, and you can do whatever you want with it.

First, let's look at how Peter baptized. He said to thousands of people on the day of Pentecost:

*Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of **Jesus Christ** for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself (Acts 2:38-39).*

Peter baptized people in the name of "Jesus Christ" and promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who would repent and be baptized into that name. In fact, Acts 10:48 says that he *ordered* that people be baptized in that exact way. He was a stickler on this one.

As for Philip the evangelist, he did it a tiny bit differently. Acts 8:16 says that those who were baptized by Philip *had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*. So while Peter said "Jesus Christ", Philip said "Lord Jesus".

As for the Apostle Paul, he did it like Philip, in the name of the "Lord Jesus". The Apostle Paul may have actually been the most radical of them all on this issue. In Acts 19:1-7 we find that he met some believers that had no power on their lives – no Holy Spirit – and the *first* question he asked them was, "Into what then were you baptized?" Apparently it mattered! Because

they weren't baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, he actually re-baptized them even though they had already been baptized by John! Can you believe that? Personally, if you were baptized by the same guy who baptized Jesus Christ, I'd call it good enough! But it wasn't good enough for Paul. He dunked them again, *in the name of the Lord Jesus*, and they came out of the water filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying. They got the power that time!

While Peter, Philip, and Paul didn't say it exactly the same, they did have one common denominator. There was one name that they all used. Did you notice which one that was? It wasn't Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. Surprisingly, it is a name that is almost always *absent* from water baptisms in the church today. What name? You guessed it. *Jesus*.

Why did Peter, Philip and Paul baptize in the name of Jesus? There is a one-word answer for that. Power! Jesus is the name that all the power is hung upon. We don't pray for the sick *in the name of the Father*. We don't cast out demons *in the name of the Holy Spirit*, or even by saying, *in the name of the Son*. I don't want to offend any of my Catholic brothers and sisters out there, but this one is black and white in the Word of God. No apostle, prophet, or any Christian in the entire Bible ever prayed a single prayer using the phrase *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*. It sounds really spiritual, but it has no power whatsoever. Peter said to the crippled beggar, "*In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk!*" And when the people wanted to know how the crippled man had been so radically healed, Peter said, "*It is **the name of Jesus** which has strengthened this man* (Acts 3:16). That name is the hook that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit hang all their power on!

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**Jesus is the name  
that all the power  
is hung upon**

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*in the name of the Father*. We don't cast out demons *in the name of the Holy Spirit*, or even by saying, *in the name of the Son*. I don't want to offend any of my Catholic brothers and sisters out there,

When Jesus told the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he expected them to know which name He was talking about. They did. Just look how they all baptized. They all baptized in the name that is above every other name, the name of Jesus (Phil. 2:9-10). The Devil won a huge victory when he convinced us stop saying *Jesus* during baptisms. We should probably do something about that.

## **A Minute on the Inside**

A few years ago, as I was first beginning to understand that *entering into* the Kingdom was significant and worth pursuing, I had an experience that I will never forget. I had been praying all morning in my den and had just come upstairs to change my clothes and to get ready to go out. While walking through my bedroom the atmosphere changed.

I didn't know what it was, but I liked it. And while I didn't see anything, I definitely felt something, and I froze. It was like something in the air was different. It was thicker, or heavier—it is hard to explain. Whatever it was, it was impossible to ignore. The atmosphere around me became as real to me, even more real, than anything else in the room. It was like I stepped into something. I don't know how else to describe it.

I stood there wondering to myself if I had possibly just *entered in*. How does a person know if they have *entered into* the Kingdom, as opposed to simply being touched by the Kingdom? What does the inside look like, or feel like? As though I had asked Him, the Holy Spirit interrupted my thoughts with an answer to my question. He said, *Well for one, when you enter INTO the Kingdom your prayers cannot be refused.*

I liked the sound of that! But could it be true? My next question was an easy one, and it was directed at Him this time.

I said, “Something in this room feels different. Am I inside the Kingdom right now?”

His answer came quickly, *Yes*.

It took me a second to do the math, and then my heart leaped! I thought that I had won the lottery. I felt like I had just been handed a blank cheque from God with an unknown time limit to fill it out. I figured that I had better ask for something quick before my time ran out.

I wish that I could say that I asked for world peace. I wish that I picked something noble like Solomon did when he was offered anything and chose to ask for wisdom. I have to confess, however, that I asked for money. We were in a tight spot financially and our oilfield rental company hadn’t had a job in quite a while. The phone had stopped ringing, and we needed it to ring soon or we would be in trouble.

My intention was to pray, “In the name of Jesus I ask for angels to be released to bring me a job. I’m asking for a new customer to call, and I want for him to rent a combo unit and an office trailer.” That is what I intended to say, but that is *not* what came out of my mouth.

As I was praying I felt the Holy Spirit leading me. He told me not to ask that the customer rent a combo unit and an office trailer, but rather a combo unit *and a light tower*. It was an odd adjustment to my prayer because a combo unit already has a light tower on it. It would make us more money, but the person would end up having two light towers instead of one. We get those calls, but they are rare, especially in the summer when there is a lot of light outside (which it was).

All that to say this: The Holy Spirit tweaked my prayer in mid-sentence and I prayed, “In the name of Jesus I ask for

angels to be released to bring me a job. I'm asking for a new customer to call right now, and I want for him to rent a combo unit and a... light tower!"

When I finished my prayer I held my phone in my hand and stared at it, waiting for it to ring. You might laugh, but I actually held my breath! I wanted to see if God would answer my prayer before I took my next breath.

After about thirty seconds I gasped for air and thought to myself, *Nuts! I thought I was onto something!* Disappointed, the atmosphere changed, and the presence was noticeably gone. I was about to leave my room, but just as I took one step from the spot that I had been frozen in, my phone rang.

My heart exploded! I thought to myself, *It's statistically impossible, but if this is a brand new customer calling to ask for a combo unit and a light tower I may actually faint! God is ten seconds late, but I'll let it count as a goal!* Nervously, I peeked at my phone to see who was calling me and was deflated once again when I saw that it was only my wife. She was at the office, and probably had a question. I tried to hide my utter disappointment as I answered the phone.

I'll never forget the sound that I heard on the other line that day. My wife squealed with joy, "Woohoo! I have great news! I just got a call from a brand new customer! He wants a combo unit and a light tower!" Her words literally knocked the wind out of me. She had no clue what I had just prayed or experienced. She probably received the call while I was holding my breath! I could hardly speak so I just said thanks and hung up.

I stood there in my room and sobbed. Not because of the money, although that was nice. I wept because it worked! It

*Access Granted*

actually worked! I couldn't even believe it! The Lord heard my prayer – even controlled my prayer as I prayed it – and then answered it immediately. I had entered *into* the Kingdom! I had entered *into* the name, made a request, and He gave me exactly what I asked for just like He said He would. He said, *If you ask Me anything **in My name**, I will do it.*

After gaining my composure I looked up to Heaven and said, *Ok God, You've got my attention. I'm listening. Teach me more about this Kingdom.*

*Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*

John 16:24

## Do You Believe?



Perhaps the greatest challenge that you and I will face in our pursuit of the Kingdom is the challenge to *believe*. I'm not talking about believing in Jesus, but rather believing in the Kingdom itself, the realm of the supernatural here on Earth. We claim to believe the Bible, and we call ourselves *believers*, but when it comes to the realm of supernatural, the church today is a little lacking in the faith department. Sure, we believe that these experiences may have happened to Peter, James, and John, but we just can't imagine them happening to George, Fred, or Lisa, and certainly not to you or me.

I remember the day, while pressing in for more of the presence of God, that the Holy Spirit said to me, *I would show you more of the Kingdom if you actually believed in this stuff, but you don't! You didn't even believe your own mother!* My heart sank. I knew exactly what story He was talking about.

My father, who was a Pentecostal preacher, committed suicide when I was nine months old. He had been in a snowmobile accident and hit his head, which caused severe brain

damage. A few months later he took his own life in our basement because he could not handle the pain. My mother, who was pregnant with my sister at the time, was in the house with both my brother and I when the gunshot went off. Our whole world changed that day.

My mom, who passed away when I was nineteen years old, often told me a story about an experience that she had the year after my father's death. A woman came up to her in church one day and said, "Bonnie, I just want you to know that even though most people think that all suicide victims go to Hell, I believe that there is a chance your husband went to Heaven." My mother told me that she had never even questioned it before *that* day! She had always assumed that my father was in Heaven. But after that woman said those words my mom began to fear the worst. She began to wonder if my dad had perhaps gone to Hell.

One day, as the story goes, my mom was in her basement doing our laundry and worrying about the eternal destiny of my dad. As she was working away, Jesus Christ – *yes, the Son of God* – appeared on the other side of the room *with my father!* Jesus and my dad walked right up to her. Jesus smiled but said nothing. My dad, however, looked her straight in the eye and said, "Honey, I'm all right." Then Jesus and my dad turned around, walked across the room, and vanished into thin air. That is the story she told me.

I never believed her, and I mean *never!* I had no reason to think that she would lie to me. She was a very honest and godly woman. She never embellished the truth, and she had no other stories like it. She wasn't one of those people who get all excited every time they find a feather and assume that it *must* be from an angel's wing (because it couldn't possibly be from their pillow). She was a level-headed, down to earth, completely honest gal.



But for some reason I just couldn't believe it happened. I just thought it was too... too awesome to be true! I was a *believer* but when anyone told me anything that sounded supernatural I just couldn't believe it. I wouldn't believe it! Not even if it came from the lips of my own mother.

I said to my mom a hundred times, "Maybe you just 'felt' their presence! Are you sure that you actually 'saw' them? With your 'eyes' mom? With your natural eyes? Or were you perhaps seeing with your 'spiritual eyes?'" I tried to talk her out of it so many times, so many ways, but she wouldn't budge.

She would laugh and say, "They were *there* Steve! They were *there!* Honey, if you had been in the room you would have seen them too. They were as real in that room as you are right now!"

I didn't believe her. I couldn't. Until the day she died I always believed that she must have been mistaken. She must have imagined it somehow. She must have wanted to see them so badly that her mind created the experience or something. It couldn't have been real. Not really real. Could it?

It was like a knife jabbed my heart the day the Holy Spirit said to me, *You never even believed your own mother!* I knew it was true. I hadn't believed her. My sweet mother saw Jesus Christ – and my dad – with her very eyes and her own son wouldn't believe her.

I was deeply convicted and repented to the Lord for cultivating a judgmental, critical, and unbelieving heart. Then, just as quickly as I had been convicted, excitement filled my heart as I thought to myself, *Dear God! My mother saw JESUS! With her eyes! With her EYES! On this side of the grave! If she could see Him, I want to see Him too!*

## **Do You Believe?**

What is the first thing that goes through your mind when you hear someone say that they saw an angel? Do you get excited, or do you doubt the credibility of their story? What do you think and feel when you hear about people who claim that they have visited Heaven, or heavenly places? What about those who say that they have seen Jesus, or some member of the great cloud of witnesses? Do you believe people who talk about visions, trances, or visitations? Does it peak your curiosity, or do you usually assume that the person is either mentally ill or just telling stories? Do you write those people off as being flaky?

If you lean toward positive curiosity it is because you are childlike, believing, and you are more likely to experience the Kingdom of God than others. You are also more likely to believe a lie from time to time. Can you live with that?

If you lean toward the negative responses, if you have a critical and unbelieving heart, it is pretty safe to say that you don't believe in this stuff, and therefore you will not experience it unless you change. You may see it in the Bible and agree that it is Biblical, but if you don't believe that it is happening today, then you won't be experiencing it today. Faith is one of the greatest keys of the Kingdom.

If you are seeking the Kingdom, hanging out with other people who seek the Kingdom, reading books about the Kingdom, and going to conferences where the Kingdom is preached, you are going to hear some crazy stories. Honestly, some of it will blow your hair back. What are you going to do with all of it?

Are you going to believe everything you hear? Some people lie. Are you going to roll your eyes in judgment every time you

hear a story that seems to be out of your comfort zone? How will you respond when someone starts talking about *portals* and *thin places*? You don't believe in portals, do you? I know a guy who fell right into a portal potty... sorry, I couldn't stop myself.

One subject that you will certainly hear Christians disputing in the years to come will be the subject of *the great cloud of witnesses* (Heb. 12:1). Where will you stand on that issue? What will you think when someone says that they had a visit from Moses, Elijah, or Enoch? Can that happen today? Isn't that considered *necromancy*, otherwise known as *talking to the dead*? Do you consider the great cloud of witnesses a bunch of *dead people* or a bunch of *living people*? My mother said that she had a visit from Jesus *and* my dad! Is that even Biblical? I know that Jesus and His friends had a visit from Moses and Elijah, but is my mom allowed to get a visit from my dad?

These are things that you are going to have to wrestle with if you are seeking the Kingdom of God – the realm of the supernatural. I'm not going to tell you

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**What you judge  
you will not  
enter into**

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what to believe, but I will tell you that what you judge you will not enter into, so be careful with that one. Have you ever noticed how often you hear broke Christians judging preachers who talk about prosperity? Connect the dots. God tends to give you the things that you celebrate, not the things that you condemn.

I realize that some people make up stories to get attention and so I don't swallow everything that I chew. I have, however, retired from the business of judging who is telling the truth and who isn't. I'm not a counterfeit hunter. Enough people these days seem to have that call on their lives so I'll leave that "ministry" to them. I don't want to tell you who is doing it wrong, I just want to do it right.

If a particular preacher or storyteller does not sit right with me or connect with my spirit, I just stop listening to *that person*. Even more importantly, I don't follow people who do not

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**God tends to give you the things that you celebrate, not the things that you condemn.**

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model lives of holiness – no matter how much gold dust is falling on them – but I'm not looking to judge them either. If I am a spiritual father or leader to someone who seems a little off, I will seek the Lord for discernment and say something to them. I don't, however, judge people that I don't have influence over. When I am not in the place of authority to make a difference in the situation, I don't need an opinion. I just change the channel.

We must become *like little children* to enter the Kingdom of God (Matt. 18:3). Things are a lot less complicated for children. They don't judge everything they see, or have strong opinions about things that they can do nothing about. They don't have a theory for why God doesn't heal the sick, raise the dead, or show up in our living rooms. They just believe that if Jesus said it, it must be true, and that if it happened in the Bible it can happen today. Children believe in miracles, angels, Heaven, and probably the Tooth Fairy too. They aren't perfect and they don't have everything figured out, but they have faith, excited hearts, innocence, and a desire for more. That will get you into the Kingdom of God!

This week, in a prayer meeting, I watched a woman worship the Lord with such passion and childlike excitement that it was contagious. When it was her turn to pray, she stepped up to the microphone and shouted, "Lord Jesus, I love You so much and I just thank You that Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light. I ask right now that You would CRACK Your yoke over me!" I laughed so hard that I could hardly breath. I

wanted to explain to her that that particular scripture (Matt. 11:30) wasn't talking about *that* kind of yoke (yolk), but the Lord told me to keep my mouth shut. She didn't have a clue what that verse meant, but she was hungry and she was connecting with the Kingdom because of her childlike heart. I believe that the Lord did crack something over her, and I asked Him to crack the same thing over me!

If you are all grown up, and have lost your childlike spunk, living a Kingdom life may be a challenge for you. If you have been a doubter, or simply haven't realized how grandiose the Kingdom can be, take a few minutes right now to talk to God about it. If you and the Lord come to the conclusion that you have been small-minded, critical, judgmental, or unbelieving, repent and ask the Holy Spirit to help you to believe in the realm of the supernatural—the Kingdom of God. Ask Him to give you a childlike heart so that you can believe God's Word even when it takes you out of your comfort zone.

*"I do believe; help my unbelief"*

Mark 9:24



## Final Thoughts



If I could sum up this book in a sentence it would be this one: There's more but it will cost you!

The Bible is like a menu at a restaurant. It not only tells us everything that the kitchen is serving, but it also tells us what everything costs. Fortunately, the most basic necessity – salvation – is a free gift. The reality that most will not accept, however, is that some things cost a lot and nothing costs more than the Kingdom of God. We can experience God's presence, power, and glory in this life, but He doesn't tend to sell it for cheap.

Is there something in your heart that is crying out for more of God? Do you long for a relationship with God that includes hearing His voice and experiencing His presence? Do you want to know Jesus as an intimately close friend? Do you feel pain over the fact that God promises so much in the realm of power, and yet we often experience so little? The Bible is filled with stories about angels, miracles, healings, people getting set free, translated, walking on water, seeing visions, being taken to

Heaven, and all sorts of glorious things. All these are on the menu that God has given to us for a reason – He is trying to whet our appetites!

God wants us to be hungry for that realm, and hungry enough to pay the price. Jesus said, *Seek first His Kingdom*. That means that we are to make it a priority. He wants us to seek Him, and not to stop seeking Him, until we find Him. He wants us to look at the price, swallow hard, and pay it whatever the cost. The Kingdom of God is like a treasure hidden in a field that costs us everything to possess. It is the pearl of great price that we must sell everything to obtain. Don't settle for a destiny that costs you nothing. The dream that God has planned for you requires total surrender.

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**Don't settle for a destiny that costs you nothing. The dream that God has planned for you requires total surrender.**

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Much of the church today resembles the church in Laodicea that Jesus spoke to in the book of Revelation, lukewarm and quite happy to stay that way. Jesus, however, can't stand lukewarm. It makes Him want to vomit. Many of us have believed that we are rich and that things are hopping, but Jesus says that our lives are a mess. His remedy for our problem is simple: *we must pay a higher price!* We must *buy* from Him some things that we are lacking.

*So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to **buy from me** gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see (Rev. 3:16-18 NIV).*



Paul Keith Davis once asked the Lord about this scripture. He said, “How can I buy something from You? What currency do I have? What do I have that You want?” The Lord was quick and to the point. He said, *I’ll take your will!*

We can buy from the Lord refined gold, white garments, and eye salve, but it will cost us our will. It always comes back to total surrender.

I especially want the *eye salve* so that I can see! It reminds me of the story of Elisha and his servant, and how God opened his servant’s eyes to see the realm of the supernatural.

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**It always  
comes back to  
total surrender.**

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*And Elisha prayed, “Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17).*

If we could *see* the Kingdom of God all around us, that is the sort of thing that we might see. You definitely want to buy some of that salve!

Allow me to close this book with a few final thoughts that I believe will help you as you pursue the Kingdom life:

## 1. Keep your glasses on

When you read the Bible, and come across scriptures that talk about the Kingdom, remember to look at them through this new set of lenses. Avoid the temptation to make everything about Heaven and Hell. It’s not. Get your theology about Heaven and Hell from scriptures that actually mention Heaven and Hell, but apply the Kingdom scriptures to this life, right now.

I understand that the Kingdom scriptures are often the “weird ones” that we like to ignore. Don’t do it! Look at each

one and ask yourself what it might mean. These are *your* keys to gaining access, so try to get a good handle on them.

Let me give you an example of a weird Kingdom scripture that almost everyone ignores because they don't have a box to put it in. It is the strangest one in the Book, so if you can get this one the rest will be easy! You have probably never heard anyone preach on this passage. I'll admit that it is way out there, but Jesus said it, so let's try to pull some meaning out of it with our new understanding of the Kingdom of God.

*Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who **made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.** He who is able to accept this, let him accept it (Matt. 19:11-12).*

I can hear every guy out there screaming, "I don't accept it!" Don't worry, I'm not going to suggest castration as a means to gaining access! I'm not going to tell you to cut anything off, but we can't just throw this scripture in the garbage either. It may sound crazy, but Jesus spoke those words so they must mean something, right?

Some translations of the Bible actually change the scripture to make it more palatable. They lead us to believe that Jesus was saying that some people would live "like" eunuchs (choosing celibacy) for the sake of the Kingdom. That may be true, but that is not what Jesus said. Jesus said that some people have *made themselves eunuchs* for the sake of the Kingdom. Yikes is right! I know exactly why I have never heard any man preach on this passage of scripture, and if I ever hear a woman preach on it I will definitely run and hide!

What is the point that Jesus is trying to get across?

I want you to first notice that Jesus never said that God asked anyone to do it. Jesus didn't say that it was right, or that it was noble, but simply that some men have done it – and done it for the sake of the Kingdom. The question in the mind of any red-blooded male is why on earth any man would even consider thinking about doing such a thing to himself?

If you see the Kingdom of Heaven as a place that you travel to after you die there is no answer to that question. Castration does not help you get into Heaven – thank God! But if you see the Kingdom of Heaven as a realm of glory here on the earth *that only the pure in heart and the sanctified can enter into*, then you might be able to understand – while you cringe at the thought of it – how a man could become so desperate that he would be willing to do anything to free himself from sexual immorality. Jesus made it unquestionably clear that the sexually immoral cannot enter the Kingdom. To enter in you have to have a pure heart, and therefore most (especially in this sex-charged culture) cannot enter in.

I don't believe that Jesus was condoning self-mutilation, and I don't personally have any spiritual practices that require a scalpel. I can, however, pull some meaning out of this passage that I used to ignore. From it I can see that sexual purity is a pretty big deal if I want to enter the Kingdom. We don't have to become eunuchs, but we do have to have clean hands and pure hearts to ascend the hill of the Lord (Ps. 24:3-4). Like eunuchs, we must live lives of radical devotion to our Master, and lives free from immoral passion and lust. Perhaps this is part of the reason why it is easier for children to enter the Kingdom (Matt. 18:3). They do not yet battle with many of these sins.

I hope that I explained that well. I know that passage is a little awkward, but I wanted to illustrate how even the strangest

Kingdom scriptures begin to make sense when you understand *what* the Kingdom is, and *where* the Kingdom is. You will find meaning in many other seemingly strange scriptures if you will keep your Kingdom glasses on as you study the Word.

Don't make the Kingdom about Heaven and Hell.

## **2. Be an inspiration, not a guilt trip**

If you pursue the Kingdom your life will probably look quite different than many of your peers, even those in the church. Personally, I don't watch a lot of movies or TV. I don't get to do everything that all my friends do. I don't always get to eat what I want, drink what I want, or go everywhere that I want. Because the Kingdom life is a very set-apart life, people will notice that you don't live like they do and they may ask you questions. Please be careful how you answer them.

Go after God with your whole heart, and do absolutely everything that He tells you do to, but don't guilt the rest of the world into doing everything that God told *you* to do. Your journey is your journey, not everyone else's. God doesn't ask the same thing from everyone anyway. God might tell you that you can never have another beer, while the guy standing next to you might just have a pint with Jesus! Don't tell him to live by the standards that God has put on you. Be an inspiration to others by your wholehearted devotion, not a guilt trip to others by your list of do's and don'ts.

## **3. Keep saying yes**

If you have heard anything that I have said in this book, I hope it is that *there is more for those who obey the Lord than for those who simply believe*. Believing in Jesus will get you eternal life, but obeying Him will unlock the Kingdom. Look at this scripture, and read it slow. Most people miss the point of this one:

*He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life... (John 3:36).*

Most people read that passage and assume that it is saying the same thing as 1 John 5:12 (*Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life*). It is not the same verse at all. It is not saying that one person has eternal life and that another person doesn't. It is saying that one person has eternal life and that another person *cannot see* the life that they have. If I were to swap the word *life* for *Ferrari* you would see the difference immediately. It would read more like this:

*He who believes in the Son has a Ferrari; but he who does not obey the Son cannot see his Ferrari.*

The point is that you can have something awesome right in front of you and yet not be able to see it if you do not obey the Lord. Obedience is the key. I have often heard Bobby Conner say, "After fifty years of ministry the best advice that I can give you is this: swift and immediate obedience to the voice of God!" That will get you in.

While reading this book you have probably asked, "Steve, are you trying to say that I have to be 'perfect' to enter in? Nobody's perfect!" I'll admit that when you read chapter four, and look at all the people who are disqualified from entering in, it makes you wonder if you do have to be perfect.

Think of it this way. If you were training to win a gold medal in the Olympics, you would most likely have a coach that would make your life very difficult. He would not only help you to get physically fit, but he would tell you what you could or couldn't eat, what you could or couldn't drink, when to get up, and when to sleep. A great coach will even tell you what to think!

If you, in frustration, asked your coach if he expected you to be “perfect” he would probably say no. Nobody is perfect. He might remind you, however, that every donut will cost you. Every missed practice will cost you. Every late night has an impact on your energy the next day. Every compromise comes at a price and it doesn’t take a lot of compromise to lose the gold medal. You don’t have to be perfect to win gold, but you would be wise to let the coach do his best to perfect you!

The Apostle Paul wasn’t perfect. Neither was Peter, John the Beloved, or Daniel the prophet. But if you met any one of them in person you would know that you had met someone *very* special! These were not average men living casual lives. These were holy men living holy lives. Compromise was not their thing. Daniel wouldn’t even eat tasty food, or drink the king’s wine, because he believed that it would defile him (Dan. 1:8). He would rather be thrown into a den of lions than miss a prayer meeting. These guys weren’t perfect, but we had better recognize that they did live radical and set-apart lives of discipline and holiness, lives that ought to make us blush.

Many people get offended when they hear that they may be disqualified from entering the Kingdom because their lives don’t measure up. We need to remember, however, that we are not talking about “how to get to Heaven.” *We’re talking about winning the Olympics!* We’re talking about entering into the Kingdom of God! We are talking angels, visions, visitations, prophetic dreams, supernatural miracles, and heavenly encounters. If you are already experiencing all those things and you disagree with me concerning the cost, great! Keep doing what you’re doing. But if you are hungry for more than you are presently experiencing, take a look at the price that *the Bible* places on the Kingdom. The most reoccurring theme in Kingdom scriptures is that it costs us *everything*.

Our generation wants the big life with no money down. We want to have dreams, visions, and heavenly encounters like Daniel but we don't want to embrace his prayer life or his diet. We want to see Jesus on a trip to Heaven like Paul or John but we don't want to suffer for Jesus like they did. We want the gold medal, we just don't want to work out or eat right, and we are a little bit offended when someone says that we might not be able to have it both ways. Here's a newsflash friends: *couch potatoes don't win gold in the Olympics!* If you want the Kingdom, set your alarm clock, because you're getting up early tomorrow morning.

#### 4. Use Kingdom language

I have no desire to discredit what we have experienced in the past. It has been good at times. I believe, however, that something this generation has never dreamed possible is just around the corner. God is about to show off in the lives of hungry people. It is already beginning to happen. One problem that I perceive, however, is that to explain these things biblically we may have to redefine a few phrases that we like to use.

It reminds me of when Canada's beloved *Tim Horton's* coffee shops added a larger (24oz) cup size in 2014. A bigger cup of coffee sounded like a good idea to me – probably a *God idea* – but to add a larger cup they had to rename all the old cup sizes. They didn't want to call the new one *double extra-large*. People would feel like hogs for ordering them! Instead, it was called *extra-large*. But to do that, what used to be called *extra-large* had to be renamed *large*. And to do that, what used to be called *large* had to be renamed *medium*. And to do that, what used to be called *medium* had to be renamed *small*. And to do that, what used to be called *small* had to be renamed *extra-small*. The new *extra-large* was a little more costly, which made sense because it was

bigger. The prices of the old cup sizes never changed, only their names changed, but boy did it mess people up!

What seemed like such a small change – adding a cup size – turned our country upside down! All the Canadians who had always ordered *large* coffees were handed what they believed to be *extra-large*. All who wanted a *medium* were handed what they considered *large*. People who were used to paying \$1.75 for their coffee were now being billed \$2.00, and getting far more coffee than they wanted! Riots broke out! It was arguably Canada's darkest hour.

God is adding a cup size. I suppose that it has always been there, but He is revealing it to the church in a new way in these exciting last days. It is a realm of power and glory that most of the church did not know existed. It is more than what we are used to, much more, and it costs more as well, but to make room for the new, we may have to redefine a few things.

The new thing will be called the *Kingdom of God*. But to do that, we have to stop calling Heaven the Kingdom of God, and just call Heaven, Heaven. *Entering in* will take on new meaning as well. It will be a term reserved for very significant encounters with the supernatural realm. What we used to call *entering in* we might now call *being touched, connected, plugged in, or the Kingdom coming upon us*. We will need to avoid exaggeration, using language that articulates our experiences truthfully. Dreams are to be called dreams. Impressions are to be called impressions. Visions are to be called visions. And if you say that you had a *visitation*, something or someone actually had to come and *visit* – your imagination doesn't count.

You will be glad to know that while the new thing does cost more, the things we have known in the past are still selling for about the same price. You can still get your back healed with



faith the size of a mustard seed. You can still receive eternal life by simply believing in Jesus. You can still feel God's presence, hear His voice, and experience His love at all the original prices. There is, however, something glorious available to those who are willing to pay the price. Call me a hog if you want to, but I am pursuing the new extra-large!

## 5. Dive often

As I write these words I am at a resort in Mexico hiding in the shade because I burned my shoulders this morning on a boat that I took to go scuba diving (suffering hardships for the Kingdom). Scuba diving is one of my favorite things to do. I love the feeling of gliding through a world without gravity and seeing things that you could never see above the surface. Like the Kingdom of God, it is a whole other world within our world. I have seen sharks, chased turtles, touched stingrays, teased lobsters, and swam through schools of fish so numerous that I couldn't see two feet in front of my nose. Every dive is a new adventure.

Some dives are more exciting than others. This morning's dive was a little boring. Other than one small stingray and a couple of ornery lobsters, I didn't see a whole lot. I have actually had a lot of boring dives but I keep diving anyway because I know that there is more for me to see and that I have to keep diving if I want to see it. Those who dive the most see the most. That is just the way it is.

That is the way it is with the Kingdom too. The more time you spend with the Lord – praying, worshipping, meditating, soaking, pursuing the Lord with others, and doing those things *you* do to connect with the Kingdom – the more you are going to taste, touch, feel, and sometimes even see the Kingdom of

God. We don't *earn* the Kingdom with our works, but we will *find* the Kingdom if it is what we are truly looking for. The more you dive the more you will see.

Over the last few years the Holy Spirit has been highlighting a couple of scriptures to the Church that have emphasized how God hides things for us. Almost every prophetic preacher I know is quoting them. Here they are:

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter* (Prov. 25:2).

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...* (Deut. 29:29).

Like parents who hide treasures for their children to find, the Lord does not hide the Kingdom *from* us, but rather *for* us, and He then calls us to come and search it out. Make no mistake, He desperately wants to be found by you! He loves you more than you can imagine, and He longs for you to come searching for His presence. He promises that He will be found by you if you will search for Him *with all your heart*.

And that, my dear friend, is all that Jesus was ever after. It is all that He ever wanted. Your heart. Just your heart. He wants to sit in the seat of your affection, your love, your desire, and your greatest passion. Make Him your *one thing* and the Kingdom is yours for the taking.

## **You're Done!**

So you finished the book. Hooray! Good job. Most people don't finish books. I don't even finish many of the books I start. (I read this one though, and I really liked it.)

Did you understand it? If not, read it again! Or download the audio version and I'll read it to you. It is worth the effort to

get these truths planted deep into your heart. Don't let the Devil steal them from you. Jesus said that he would try, and you need to be ready for when he does:

*When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart (Matt. 13:19).*

While you were reading this book, God was speaking to you Himself. He told you some things that He wants you to do. He also put His finger on a few areas of your life that need adjustment. Now the Enemy will come and try to steal the word right out of your heart. He will try to make you forget. If he has to, he will even distract you with another message that is just a little less expensive. Don't let him rob you! The Kingdom is worth selling everything to possess. It is worth every cent.

Do something today to seek the Kingdom of God. Don't put it off. Go for a dive in the realm of the Spirit. Put on some worship music and dance like crazy. Meditate on a passage of scripture that you have never seen before. Or register for a conference somewhere that you think God will show up. Do something that you have never done before, and give God a bigger yes than you have ever given Him before. Maybe – just maybe – you will even give up that addiction that has bound you for years. That would jumpstart your new walk with God and kick the Devil in the teeth to boot! Don't wait until tomorrow. Strike while the iron is hot.

Enter in, or die trying.



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## AFTERWORD

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# Do You Know Jesus?

If you are not walking with Jesus right now, what in the world is stopping you? Just think about this. He is the God of the universe, He is both your designer and your creator, and He loves you more than you have ever loved anything or anyone. He knows that you are a mess, and He *still* wants you. Why wouldn't you want Him too? Connection to Jesus is the greatest honor you will ever be given. Why would anyone turn it down? I beg you, don't live another day without Him! Give the Lord the rest of whatever is left of your life – whether that is sixty minutes or sixty years – and see what He will do with it.

Some people put Jesus off for as long as they think they can. They say, "I'll give my life to Christ when I'm *really* old, when my life is done and I've had my fun!" It doesn't work like that. Jesus said, "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*" (John 6:44). You don't get to pick the day that you say yes to Jesus. The time to say yes to Him is when the Father tugs on your heart, and He is doing that right now. You don't know if He will ever do it again.

Other people put Jesus off because they have believed a lie. Perhaps the enemy has convinced you that you must "clean your life up first," or that you've gone too far, waited too long, and

that it is just too late for you. Don't let the devil smooth talk you into Hell! His reasoning may sound smart, but it is really stupid, and if you believe him you will regret it forever. Resist the devil, say yes to God while His arms are still wide open to you, and start living for Him today. You're never going to be perfect, but you can start walking with the one who is!

God loves you very much and He has made a way for you to receive eternal life – but only one way – and that is through faith in His Son. If you know you need to get right with God, please pray this prayer out loud, and from your heart:

*Dear God, it's me \_\_\_\_\_, and I know that it is time to get right with You. I'm sorry that I have waited this long.*

*I admit that I am a sinner. I have messed up, I have hurt people, I have hurt myself, and I have broken Your heart. Please forgive me.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, Your Son, who died on a cross as punishment for my sins so that I wouldn't have to be punished myself. He paid my penalty as a gift to me, and I receive that gift today. I didn't earn it, I don't deserve it, but I thank You for it.*

*Jesus, I confess that You are Lord of all and today I commit my life to You. Please come and live in me. Teach me to hear the voice of Your Spirit and to follow You. Help me to live for You and to become all that You dreamed I would be when You first created me. May Your Kingdom come, and Your will be done, in my life which now belongs to You.*

*Thank You for loving me, forgiving me, calling me, and even noticing me! Anoint my heart to love You well. In Jesus Name, amen.*

If you prayed that prayer, and truly meant it, your sins have been forgiven and you can begin calling God *Dad*. He loves you

and He has not only given you eternal life, but a whole Kingdom that you can now begin to pursue and explore!

Pray regularly, meditate on the Word, gather and worship with other believers, and keep reading books and listening to messages that will sow into your spiritual life. If you enjoyed this book, check out [oilpatchpulpit.com](http://oilpatchpulpit.com) and you will find plenty more to chew on, most of which is free. If you gave your life to Christ, I would love to hear from you. E-mail me a hello to [feedback@oilpatchpulpit.com](mailto:feedback@oilpatchpulpit.com).

God bless you friend. I wish you the Kingdom!





# NOTES

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