

The Kingdom: Living Within: Part 2

What we learned last week is that the **Kingdom of God is at hand**; it is here. It lives within us and goes wherever we go. The impact of this truth is incredible. Wherever we go we bring people into an encounter with the Kingdom of God and they are held accountable to what they choose to do with His Kingdom. This accountability, surprisingly, is reflected in how they choose to treat us—the true citizens of the Kingdom. If they receive us into their lives, they will be blessed as we bless them. If however they reject us, they will undergo judgment as we are to “wipe the dust” of our responsibility for them off our feet.

And with the Kingdom of God being at hand and dwelling within our souls, we can be confident that God has indeed given us everything we need for life and godliness. Now it is up to us to add to our lives, with all diligence and haste, what He has already given us: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. However, for many of us, we have no idea what it practically means to “add” anything to our lives; thus, we remain stuck and are like: “cool sermon Steve;” although, still totally clueless when it comes to applying any of what I just taught. This is something we have to remedy.

Obviously, no one can just wake up in the morning and say, “Today, I am going to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.” Many have tried and most have failed. We have to learn how to add these things to our lives as an exercise of faith. We have been over this many times and in many different ways, but we are going to do it one more time. After all, like Peter said, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you

already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. Therefore, I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder (**2 Peter 1:12-13**).

Practically, “adding” to our lives what God has already given to us centers on our having the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. For instance, according to **2 Peter 1:2**, God is able to multiply grace and peace in your life through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. So if there is an area of your life in which you constantly struggle and do not yet have the victory of faith, go back and study the **Name** of God. We studied the **Name** in “*Faith, Hope & Love, Part 3 through Part 19*” of our study in the Kingdom of God. I guarantee you that there is at least one aspect of His character and nature—found in His **Name**—that you simply refuse to believe is true for you. Find that **Name** and start asking God to reveal to you how that **Name** is always true for you all of the time regardless of what you are going through and what is happening around you. You see His **Name** holds the key to our understanding who our God is and why we can trust Him. His **Name** captures, both in words and pictures, the glory and excellence of our God; and is, therefore, the basis for all our promises, all our hope, and all that we can expect to experience from Him in this relationship. Furthermore, His character and nature are unchangeable. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (**Hebrews 13:8**). Thus, His **Name** both transcends and supersedes time, circumstance, and even our own views of who He is. He is the “I AM;” that is His **Name**. You need to understand this **Name** and know what it means for you. This is critical to your ability to ever truly grow in Christ and to stop cycling over and over again around the same mountains of doubt and fear.

Once you honestly explore the **Name** of God and understand which **Name** you

refuse to actively believe, it is time to make it all a matter of faith. To cut to the quick, each area where you refuse to believe His **Name** is going to be linked to the parts of your life that you do not like or have not liked; the areas where you feel God should have done, or should be doing, it differently. So exploring His **Name** and comparing His **Name** to your “fight” should not be that difficult. But if it is, just ask God; He will gladly show you what you are upset about and why you have not wanted to believe. But when it is all said and done, He will ask you to choose to believe in His **Name**. He will even show you how you can bet your life on His **Name** believing it to be true all of the time. But it is not magic. It will be a choice made through reconciling your desires for your life to God’s purposes for your life. One passage that really helped me in dealing with applying His **Name** to various areas in my life is found in ***Isaiah 55:8-9***.

Isaiah 55:8-9

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.

I remember when I was really struggling giving up my self-protection, especially when it comes to all the ways I would fight to protect and preserve my reputation—which was always so important to me. I first had to accept that if Jesus is the Lord (**El Shaddai**)—if He was my Lord (**Adonai**)—then everything that was happening “to me” was happening because He ordained it and ordered it even. ***Lamentations 3:17***

posits the questions, “Can anything happen without the Lord’s permission?” The implied and obvious answer is no, for if something could happen that He did not direct, He would not truly be Lord. His Name—**El Shaddai**—would not be true. But since, “He directs the affairs of the human race as each new generation marches by” (*Isaiah 46:10*), I can trust that He is also directing and ordering my steps. Hence, *Psalm 37:23* accurately proclaims, “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, and He delights in his way.” See also *Amos 3:6*; *Job 31:4*; *Proverbs 16:9, 20:24*; *Jeremiah 10:23* for even more scriptures which confirms that Jesus is truly our **El Shaddai**.

This was a hard truth to stomach because it obviously cut against my justice issues and my thinking God was simply not fair and not just. Honestly, I was mostly just afraid of what He might allow in my life in the future, since my past had been so rough. My pain had in some ways shattered my trust. But in talking to Him about how I felt, I could not reconcile my feelings with: *Daniel 4:37*, which says all His works are true and His ways just; *Deuteronomy 32:4*, which says His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; *Psalm 97:2*, which says righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne; or *Romans 12:2* which says His will for my life is good, pleasing, and perfect. Therefore, after seriously staring at His Word, it had become obvious to me that I had an attitude issue and it was in my way of growing in Christ and “adding” anything to my life that He had already given to me. I knew could not deny His Word; besides, I had committed to each of you to let the Word of God be my ultimate authority. So I had to make the choice to deny my feelings, my sense of right and wrong, as well as my fear of the future, and decide that maybe He did know more than me; and, maybe—just maybe—as the God who sits outside of time

and knows the beginning from the end, He was wiser than me.

In essence I had to relent of my fight, my anger, my disappointment, and truly repent. I knew His *goal* for my life was to separate me from this world, to circumcise me, so I could live free as an alien and stranger doing only what He has for me to do. Thus, it was now time for me to accept His *goal* for my life. I had to embrace His *goal* fully knowing that once I did I would have no more excuses, for I knew that everything that had ever happened in my life was explained perfectly by His *goal*. If I was to be like Him and partake in His divine nature (**2 Peter 1:4**), then in His wisdom He would do, and has done, whatever it would take to effect that *goal* in my life. Therefore, in this instance of people slandering me and lying about me, I had to choose to believe that He was my protector and my defender even if my present circumstances could not practically substantiate that statement. To me it had to become an issue of faith.

If my Lord was authorizing gossip and slander against me, then it was part of His good, pleasing and perfect will (**Romans 12:2**). Thus, in some way, shape, or form, even though I may not be able to figure it out, He was acting in a protective way over my life, and honestly over each of your lives. He was literally allowing people to come against me so I might choose to surrender up my desire to secure my reputation in this world. He wanted me to realize that I do not need the platitudes and acceptance of those who have chosen to make their abode in this world; and, I no longer needed to live in fear of man. After all, there is no end to that fear—no end whatsoever. It just keeps going and going and going. Thus, He told me to let go of that fear because He wanted both freedom for me and a well-worn pathway in which each of you could now choose to walk. He wanted to remove your excuse

and prove to you that it was possible to be ok in the midst of scorn and rejection. Accordingly, He told me:

Isaiah 51:7

Listen to me, you who know right from wrong you who cherish my law in your hearts. Do not be afraid of people's scorn, nor fear their insults.

Isaiah 51:12-13

I, yes I, am the one who comforts you. So why are you afraid of mere humans, who wither like the grass and disappear? Yet you have forgotten the Lord, your Creator, the one who stretched out the sky like a canopy and laid the foundations of the earth. Will you remain in constant dread of human oppressors? Will you continue to fear the anger of your enemies?

Isaiah 51:15

For I am the Lord your God, who stirs up the sea, causing its waves to roar. My name is the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

Isaiah 51:22-23

This is what the Sovereign Lord, your God and Defender, says: "See, I have taken the terrible cup from your hands. You will drink no more of my fury. Instead, I will hand that cup to your tormentors, those who said, 'We will trample you into

the dust and walk on your backs.'" "

Besides, in **2 Samuel 22:2-3, 33; Psalm 18:2, 61:3**, He said He was my rock, my fortress, my stronghold, my shield, my deliverer, and a tower of strength; therefore, if I was going to let His Word be authoritative over my life, I had to conclude that I was safe regardless of what it felt like and notwithstanding who was talking about me and what rumor they were passing around. The truth is, I was ok, all of the time. I just had to choose to rest confident in His **Name—El Shaddai—**assured that He was working out His will in my life. Besides, I had come to learn that those who gave themselves the right to gossip and slander me would be held accountable for their choice; and instead of knowing His peace, they would know His judgment—all on my account. If you think about it, that is pretty amazing.

Furthermore, when I brought this issue to God and started talking to Him about how I felt, He showed me that such attacks on my reputation was proof that I had entered through the narrow gate of faith on to the road of tribulation that leads to life and peace. This kind of persecution was my evidence and my confidence; therefore, it was a reason to rejoice. This persecution, as unpleasant as it may be, confirmed that I was indeed blessed of God and mine is the Kingdom of heaven (**Matthew 5:10**). After all, I had done nothing to deserve their scorn, I had done nothing to them personally; I don't even know most of those who talk bad about me. They just hate what I stand for and the intensity of which we, in this body, are willing to choose to let the Word of God be our ultimate authority. For some reason they internalize what I teach and how we live and take it all as a personal attack. It took me some time, but eventually I realized their scorn and vitriol really has

nothing to do with me. Moreover, if they persecuted Jesus and did not receive Him, why should it be any different for me? The Spirit says that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (**2 Timothy 3:12**). I had to accept that it was what I signed up for and be ok with it. Besides, your lives and the glory of this body is the fruit of my true reputation before the Father. And in this I had to learn to rest for wisdom, God's wisdom, is vindicated by all of her children (**Luke 7:35**).

In essence, I chose to believe that He was doing His job as my Father, my **Adonai**, and as my **El Shaddai**—my Lord God Almighty. I chose to no longer obsess on what reputation I have in the eyes of this world and just let it go. God said I was blessed and that became what was important to me. Now, I obviously still don't like being slandered and lied about; but, oh well, that is just a feeling. I have learned to push beyond my feelings and worship the Lord for proving out my faith in Him and proving to me, and to you, that He always lives up to His **Name**, because His **Name** is part of His character and nature.

Let's now circle back and make the tie-in to the fact that in this one area of my life, God gave me the perfect opportunity to add virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. God wanted me to add virtue (or as we studied last week, in the Greek, to man-up and do the right thing). In other words, He did not want me to take matters into my own hands and try to be my own defense and my own protection, He did not want me to either pick a fight with those who were slandering me or start to attack them back in my own less than subtle ways. He knew that if I took things into my own hands, what they said and what they do would eat away at my mind and my soul and I would have no rest. It would occupy me and consume me. Besides, I had walked that path for

many years and I never found freedom. So I had to add virtue and choose to let it go trusting that God would always live up to His **Name**.

After that, I chose to add knowledge; and that is where I chose to believe that Jesus was in control; He was actually and truly my Lord; He was good; and His plan for me was good, pleasing, and perfect. It was a fight, as I had to put down my feelings of justice, anger, hurt, and my desire to say just the right thing at just the right time to really stick it to those who feel the freedom to slander me; especially those to whom I had given so much. But instead of focusing on them and the things they have said, God asked me to focus on how big He is. He realized that if I set my eyes on Him, I could delight in Him no matter what was going on around me. The knowledge that He was my Lord and He was my God—the one whose thoughts and ways are so far beyond mine—was so comforting. It made my concern over my reputation seem like nothing and entirely irrelevant.

This is where I had to choose to add self-control. For example, the other day, I was having lunch and one of the people who has trashed me around town was at the restaurant hanging out with one of the other local pastors who had saw me and opened his arms up for me to come in for a hug. So there was no avoiding this encounter. I had to choose to let my virtue and knowledge of God have its place in my life and go right up to that person and shake his hand and say hi. Wow, I could not believe that God had provided to me such self-control, when everything in my body wanted to just lash out in retort and say something, anything, to let him know that I know what he had done. But because my view of God had become so large, I was ok. It was up to God to deal with this person, not me. I chose to believe that God was my defender, my protector, and my avenger. So I was free to engage and

not hide in fear, self-protection, or go froth in anger. He gave me the power of self-control and I chose to add it, by faith, to my life.

And, although I was hoping for a little lightening or earthquake action, God did not strike that person so I knew I would have to persevere knowing that this person would leave that experience and probably continue in their twisted view of me and continue to bad talk me to others. And this is where I had to go back to the virtue and knowledge I had just added and add a little more. I had to be honest and realize that if I really wanted justice, that I would be the one dodging the lightening and jumping over the cracks in the earth that would try and swallow me alive. I realized, in that moment, that I live by God's mercy, for in reality I deserve nothing but judgment. Therefore, I could choose, I was free to choose, to have mercy over those who have hurt me. It was ok and it cost me nothing but a little bit of pride. Besides, God said in *Isaiah 51*, He would take the terrible cup of judgment from me and give it to my tormentors, so I could just rest and wait on Him; and, for my part, extend the mercy He has extended to me. This understanding of mercy is the heart beat of perseverance. I really do not think perseverance is about sucking it up; rather, it is all about perspective and it is all about His mercy which allows you to endure.

With that in mind, and the full knowledge of all that I am guilty of, I was free to choose to add godliness and brotherly kindness. I did not need to show my scorn, disappointment, or give a look of condemnation. I could choose to love. It was ok; I was ok. My feelings were hurt, but that is such a normal part of life. I did not need to let a few feelings get me all out of sorts. My God is much bigger than my feelings; and, when it was all said and done, I was free. I had lunch, I moved on with my day, and it did not follow me; I did not even think of it again. However, I know that if I

would have chosen to indulge my *flesh* and give into my desires for justice and vengeance, it would have eaten me alive all day. I probably would have even dumped it on some of you and then it would have eaten you alive.

Incorporating His provision into our lives is all premised upon faith, which is premised upon our having true knowledge of Jesus Christ and choosing to let it be our truth in the midst of our circumstances regardless of how we would otherwise want things to be. So it does not matter what issue you are dealing with: your reputation, desire to be wanted, desire to know pleasure, desire to be loved, desire to be needed and valued, or whatever. I am sure the list of things we want in this world could go on and on. Again, it really does not matter. It is time to hold on to nothing, to cut it all off, and trust Jesus to be the **I Am** over your life. This is what Jesus meant in **Mark 9:43-49** when He said, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one hand than to go into the unquenchable fires of hell with two hands. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better to enter eternal life with only one foot than to be thrown into hell with two feet. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. It's better to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 'where the maggots never die and the fire never goes out.' For everyone will be tested with fire."

Cut if off, tear it out, gouge it out, and throw it away. It is not worth holding on to anything. We were not meant to find our abode in this world. We were not meant to find our security in this world. We were not meant to find our identity in this world. We are children of God and we have been made to know and trust our Father with our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Besides, the Lord promises to

deliver you from every evil attack and bring you safely into His heavenly Kingdom (**2 Timothy 4:18**). So don't worry and fret, He truly has your back. It may seem as if others get the best of you; but eventually they will have to face Him and they will get their judgment both in this life and in the life to come. And never forget, everyone will be tested with fire. No one escapes the fire; it is how a person's faith is proven out one way or the other. The fires of testing prove to you and to others that you have indeed entered through the narrow gate of faith onto the road of tribulation which leads to life and peace, or that you have not and are still on the road that leads to death. And remember, there is no middle ground; there is no other road. Therefore, if the fires of testing prove out your faith, rejoice. As Paul said, "All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.

So now you know what it looks like to practically "add" to your life the things that God has already granted to you: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Go out and practice it yourself. Start with the much needed conversations with God about why you refuse to believe in His **Name**. Study His **Name**, know it, understand His **Name** inside and out; and then chose to decide, like me, that His Word will be authoritative over your life no matter what is happening around you. His **Name** is great; after all, His **Name** is called, the "Word of God" (**Revelation 19:13**). Trust in His Name with all your heart and no longer lean upon your own understanding; for everyone who believes in Him will not be disappointed and whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved (**Proverbs 3:5; Romans 10:11, 13**). He always lives up to His Name.

Let's Pray