

# Through Many Trials We Enter God's Kingdom

by Zac Poonen

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**Scripture:** Romans 14:17, Acts 14:22, Philippians 4:4, Hebrews 4:9, Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:4

**Topics:** "Pursuit of Righteousness", "Joy in the Holy Spirit"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Let's bow before the Lord, Heavenly Father. We know that you are the giver of everything good. Nothing evil can ever, ever come from your hands.

Nothing that can ever harm us or hurt us or even slightly prevent us from becoming more like Jesus. Nothing. We thank you, Lord.

We've got this. This is our faith. And you said to us, according to your faith, we want to live on earth, trusting you, believing your promises.

I pray that your Holy Spirit will move in our midst and give us faith, Lord, to receive your word today and to speak your word. So in your presence, I pray, bring a blessing to be glorified in our midst, in Jesus' name. Amen.

So what is the ultimate purpose of every meeting that we have? I've thought of that. And to answer that, some of us may have different answers to it. You know, we basically, we're all children of Adam.

And we have this thing called the flesh, which is our self-life. In God's great wisdom, he has not eliminated it when we were born again. Sometimes we wish, boy, if God had just eliminated the flesh the day we

were born again, how wonderful our life could be.

You know, we think like that, that's because we have not yet aligned our mind with God's mind. There's nothing God cannot do. The day we were born again, he could have eliminated this wretched flesh which has caused all of us so many problems in our life.

And yet God in his great wisdom, and not only great wisdom, in his great love for us, does not destroy it, does not eliminate it from our lives. We retain it till we die or till the day Jesus comes. And it makes so many believers fall into sin.

It makes so many believers fall away from the faith and lose their salvation altogether. And Paul says, in my flesh dwells nothing good. Romans 7 is clear.

In my flesh dwells nothing good. And this thing which contains nothing good, God has allowed it to remain with us even after we are born again, even after we are filled with the Holy Spirit. But it says that the Holy Spirit fights against this flesh, and the flesh that is our self-life, we have to work with it to fight against the flesh.

The flesh fights against the spirit, and we have got to take sides with the Holy Spirit against our own flesh. This is the way of Christian growth, that throughout our life we take sides with the Holy Spirit against our self-life. Against our self-life, it urges us to defend ourselves, urges us to say unwanted things, urges us to retort in the same way that somebody speaks to us, and so many wretched things.

The thing that causes conflict between husband and wife, conflict between believers, which causes so many divided families and fights and quarrels and murders and all types of things. Yeah. So, when we come together in a meeting, we have our flesh with us, but the purpose, when we come together in a meeting, how are we going to be helped? Sometimes we think, boy, that is a word to my heart, exactly according to my needs.

Sometimes God speaks to us like that, but sometimes even if it is not a word exactly according to some need we have or we think we have, there is something else. I have always felt that the primary purpose of every single meeting, we think that the Wednesday, the Sunday meeting is more important than the Wednesday meeting. I just want to let you know that the weekly calendar is not ordained by God.

All days are just the same to Him, and if you have a meeting on Monday morning or Sunday evening, they are all the same to Him. What is the purpose of a, what should be, when can we say, well, this meeting accomplished God's purpose? Turn with me to verse 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Please turn in your Bibles and see that for yourself, 1 Corinthians 14.

You know, it says here about, it's one of the very few places in the New Testament where it says, in verse 23, when the whole church assembles together, and he's saying, well, if it's a sort of a Pentecostal meeting, everybody's speaking in tongues, and there's no interpretation and nothing, and the main thing is speaking in tongues there, it's the thing you're excited about. Somebody coming in will say, you're mad, you're crazy. So if you go to a church and you find everybody speaking in tongues, the Bible calls that a mad church, crazy church, and that's what I'd call it too.

But if, now this doesn't actually happen, but if every single person in that church prophesies, that means speaks out something that God has spoken to him and he's in touch with God. I don't think there's a single assembly in the world where everybody's in touch with God. But supposing there were, where every single

person, maybe a small church of 30, 40 people, and every single person in touch with God, and God speaks to everyone, and then every single one prophesies, and a man comes in, he's convicted by what he hears, the Word of God brings conviction, and he's called to account for his sin.

The secrets of his heart are made manifest. And finally, he falls down and acknowledges, God is certainly among you. That I see is the main purpose of our having the church meeting.

That at the end of it, people can say, God is certainly among you. Do you see that? He'll fall on his face and declare that God is among you. So we need to ask ourselves, is that what we expect in a meeting, that we say, Lord? Not that it was a fine word that we met with Jesus.

The Lord was in our midst. And whether we got a word according to our need or not, we were refreshed by the fact that we met with him. Jesus was in our midst.

He has said, where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst. And he was in our midst. Boy, that's been my longing always.

Lord, if I speak in a meeting and people don't sense the presence of God, I have failed as a servant of God. That's how I feel about it. I think there's something in me that prevented the presence of God from being in a meeting.

So I want to say to all of you, dear brothers, if some of you are asked to share briefly, even a couple of minutes in a meeting, don't feel that you have to say something very profound and wise and clever that makes everybody wonder, wow, what a message. Those are all for people who are seeking honor. It's a sin to try and speak in the name of Jesus Christ and say that you're seeking his glory and actually all along you're seeking your own honor.

That's a terrible sin, because I'm touching the glory of God. It's almost like making people worship me. And I tell you, a lot of preachers are guilty of that.

And you may not be a preacher, but if there's anything you do that draws people's attention away from Jesus, to yourself, that is your longing that people should admire you and think you're a great guy, I want to lovingly say to you in Jesus' name, there's something wrong with you. You haven't understood what it is to be a Christian. A Christian is to be what Paul said in Galatians 2.20, it is no longer I, but Christ that lives in me.

That's what happened on the cross. Jesus did not only take our sins on the cross. Many people understand that, but I believe in a new covenant church like ours, one of the primary things we need to understand beyond Christ taking our sins on the cross is that he took us and potentially he got rid of our self-life on the cross.

It's like Paul said, I am crucified with Christ, he's no longer I, but Christ lives in me. Just think of it, my dear brothers and sisters. I'm not saying this to condemn anyone.

I'm just saying this to encourage you. Think if every one of you, even the 20, 30, or 40, 50 in a meeting, and we all have really sought to eliminate self-ruling in our lives and want Christ to be manifest more and more and more and more. Even if we don't have any profound word to share, even if somebody asks you to share and you can't share more than one sentence by the goodness of God, imagine that you brought the presence of Christ into a meeting.

That's the greatest thing you can do when you come to a meeting, to so, to the best of your knowledge, seek nothing for yourself, but that Jesus Christ may be manifest through you at that meeting. And there, we're all equal, I may be a believer a longer time than you are, but we're all equal when it comes to bringing the presence of Christ into a meeting. I want to say to you in Jesus' name that you can bring the presence of Christ into a meeting.

And when it says here, that is the ultimate purpose. When you come together and we go away from the meeting, we say, boy, God was there. We met with Jesus.

You remember in the closing chapters of Luke how whenever Jesus was after the resurrection, whenever he was present, it made such a difference. Even if it's two people walking to Emmaus from Jerusalem, it's a very interesting passage there. Many times it comes to my heart.

What the presence of Jesus can do. Come with me to Luke's Gospel chapter 24. This must be our experience.

Please turn in your Bibles, Luke 24. The first thing I want you to notice here, which I often emphasize, it seems to be an irrelevant point, but there's more to it. In verse 13, it says, the distance from Emmaus to Jerusalem was seven miles.

Now, the Bible says we must read and we must meditate. Now, what do I get by meditating on the fact that Emmaus to Jerusalem was seven miles? The Bible is not some tourist guide or something. It's to tell me that they walked together for three hours.

Because if you're on a leisurely walk, you don't go more than about two miles an hour. They were not running. They were not speed walking.

They were slowly walking. So, the main thing, one of the main things I see here is Jesus walked with them for three hours. So, I get something from meditating on just that one verse.

And then, it says here, he explained the scriptures to them. It says here, in verse 27, when he walked with these two people to Emmaus, beginning with Moses, that is Genesis, and all the prophets, that means up to Malachi. That's all the Bible they had.

Let me read it like this. Beginning at Genesis and going all the way to Malachi, he explained to them all the things concerning himself in the scriptures. Now, we see Jesus in many pages of the New Testament, but to see Jesus in the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi, that must have been quite a Bible study.

So, it was a three-hour Bible study that they had. It teaches me how I should read the Bible. Because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

And if you have missed it, brother, sister, this is how your day should be. And whenever you open the Bible, your attitude should be like those disciples. Lord, you opened the scriptures and explained it to them.

I remember as a young man, and people told me when I just left the Navy, people said, you've got to go to Bible school before you can serve the Lord and people will accept you. And my answer was always, none of the disciples went to a Bible school. I think they'd have all failed the examinations.

The Pharisees would have got 100%. The disciples would have all failed. So, maybe Judas was carried for a few months, but all the others would have failed.

They were not great scholars. They were fishermen and ordinary people. But Jesus, I read this passage and I said, I don't have to go to a Bible school.

And thank God I never went. Because in my entire life, I mean, between you and me, I'll say this, I have never in my life been blessed by anybody who's gone to a Bible school. I'm not saying that as an exaggeration.

But I've never seen a man minister Christ who's gone to a Bible school. The people who have blessed me the most in my life are people who never went to a Bible school. Whether it's Tozer or David Wilkerson, they are people who finally, they did in their unconverted days or they didn't have much life.

The people who have blessed me the most are people who primarily they knew Christ. And if they didn't go to a Bible school like Paul did, they unlearned all that and didn't know Christ. It's very important that I read the Bible to know Jesus.

And I used to read this verse and say, Lord, why do I have to go to Bible school? You explained everything from the cover to cover to these people. And you showed them Jesus in every page of the Old Testament. Now, do the same to me.

I want to prove that you are the same yesterday, today, and forever. And I'm sure they were eagerly listening because when they finished, it says that, see verse Luke 24, 32. Didn't our hearts burn within us while you were speaking to us on the road, when you explained the Scriptures to us? And when you read the Scriptures, it's all boring.

Well, you can be pretty sure the Lord is not speaking to you. Because however much the best speakers in the world may be boring, Jesus is never boring. And I'll tell you that.

Whenever he speaks, there's always life in it. And it says their hearts were burning within them. And I wanted to be like that when I read the word of God.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. I think faith has got a lot to do with it. But the Bible says he who comes to God must believe that he exists.

Please turn to Hebrews 11. Whenever we read the Bible or whenever we pray, here's a good verse for all of us to keep in mind. Hebrews 11.

He who comes to God. Isn't that what you do in prayer? Isn't that what you do when you open the Bible to read it? It should be. When I open the Bible to read it or when I pray, it should be written, I have come to God.

He who comes to God must believe, first of all, that God exists. That Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. I must believe that.

And not only that, that this Lord is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. So if God did not speak to me like he spoke to those disciples in Emmaus, I say, Lord, maybe I didn't seek you diligently. Maybe I was looking for something clever to share with somebody else.

Maybe I was searching the Bible for a message for others and not for me. Very often that happens. Particularly those who get a chance to speak in a meeting, they're always reading the Bible to get a message for somebody else.

I used to be like that in my younger days. But as I've come to know the Lord more and I say, Lord, I don't want a message for somebody else. I know it's me.

Like the old spiritual says, it's me who's standing in the need of prayer. It's me. It's me who's standing in need of the Lord.

And I want you to speak to me, Lord. I don't want a message for other people. I'm not preparing a message when I read the Bible.

I want to be like those disciples to Emmaus. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, forever. And he's with me here.

And he wants to speak to my heart. I want to encourage you, my dear brothers and sisters, please read the Bible like that from now on. Think of the disciples walking to Emmaus and Jesus opening up the scriptures, walking with them, and their hearts burning within them for three hours.

Imagine reading the Bible for three hours and your heart burning all the time. The Holy Spirit can do that for us today. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Imagine if all of us come to a meeting like that, even if you don't speak. I told you that the greatest thing, the result of a meeting must be at the end of it, they say, people should say, well, God was certainly with us today. That Jesus, we met with Jesus today in the meeting.

Whether it's a Zoom meeting like this or a physical meeting in a church building, oh, we met with the Lord. That's the greatest thing. Not we heard a great message or something that stirred us, but we met with Jesus.

Sometimes some very clever, interesting messages, people don't meet with the Lord. They just admire the speaker. They say, boy, what a great speaker he is.

That's not our aim. In my early days as a preacher, that was my aim, I'm sorry to say, when I didn't know the Lord. But that's no longer my aim.

I'm not interested in people thinking I'm a great speaker at all. I want to meet with the Lord because I want people to meet with the Lord. Because that's the only thing that will bless them.

That's the only thing that can never bless them. My words can never bless them. It may impress them for a short time, and they go be impressed.

But long-term blessing can only come if they have met with Jesus. And I say, Lord, the person who can hinder Jesus from being present is me. It's my self-life.

And I don't want that to interfere with you manifesting yourself in the meeting. I believe that you want to manifest yourself every time two or three are gathered together, or 20, 30, or 40, 50 are gathered together, whether on Zoom, or actually, Lord Jesus, I want you to manifest yourself. And I want to say to you, you may have no gift of speaking.

You may be a sister who just sits in a meeting quietly. Do you know that you can bring the presence of God, the presence of Jesus into a meeting just by sitting there, even in a Zoom meeting? I mean, you don't believe it. It's a different thing, but I believe it.

The Bible says, according to your faith, be it unto you. And you can bring the presence of the Lord into a meeting because the presence of God does not manifest only through words. The Holy Spirit can manifest the presence of Christ even if you never open your mouth.

It's like that. So seek to come to every meeting saying, Lord, I don't have any gift of speaking, but I want to bring your presence into a meeting. I want there to be a difference in the meeting because I went to it.

Imagine if all of you say that. Lord, I'm walking with you. My conscience is clear.

I have no quarrel or fight with anybody in the world. Everything is settled between me and every other human being, between me and my wife, between me and my husband, and I'm going to the meeting seeking to bring your presence into the meeting. I'm not a gifted speaker.

You haven't given me that gift. That's okay, but you live in my heart. The great thing is not to hear a great message in a meeting, but at the end of the meeting, people should be able to say, I met with Jesus.

Lord, I believe you can manifest your presence through me. Imagine, please take this seriously, if from now on you went to a meeting with that desire, Lord, I want to bring your presence just like Mike sitting in the last bench or the last chair in a meeting, right at the back, and I bring your presence there. It will make a difference.

I believe that. I have sought to do that in meetings where I don't necessarily have to speak. I say, Lord, by my presence, I will bring the presence of Christ into the meeting.

Every believer can do that because as we read in 1 Corinthians 14, that is the primary testimony that people must have when they leave the meeting. God was with us. Jesus was there.

We met with him. He ministered to us. Yeah, it's wonderful.

But in the early days, the Christians did not expect comfort and ease and all types of things that we expect in a generation that is spoiled by luxury and comfort and all types of things which we think have become essential for our lives. The early Christians never had the luxury and comfort which we in our generation, particularly in the United States, think is essential for our lives. It wasn't essential for them.

And I'll show you a verse of Paul encouraged the early Christians. It will surprise you. Turn with me to Acts chapter 14.

Acts 14. You know, Paul often had stones thrown at him when he finished speaking. He didn't come and congratulate him or shake his hand.

You read in Acts 14 and Paul had just finished speaking. I mean, some people thought when they came and did a miracle and this is Acts chapter 14, verse 8. And Lystra, a man who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, was sitting there. And as Paul spoke, Paul spoke to him to stand up or stand.

And the man was healed. And as soon as the crowd saw that, they said, boy, God has come to us. I mean, this is not the type of thing I'm talking about when you say the presence of Christ must be in a meeting.

These people are completely ignorant. They saw a miracle and said, the gods have come to us in human form. And they began to worship them.

They brought garlands and all types of things. And Paul and Barnabas rushed out to them and said, hey, listen. Why are you doing things? We're ordinary people like you.

It's God. It's God who has raised this, healed this man. And they tried to restrain the crowds from verse 18, from offering a sacrifice to them.

They refused to take any glory to themselves, even though the man was healed through them. But earlier on, Paul had preached in Antioch and Iconium, verse 19. And those people had created a lot of problem for him.

And they came all the way from there, here to Lystra, when they heard these people were all admiring. And they turned the minds of these people so much that the same people who were almost worshiping them in verse 18, they stoned Paul, dragged him out. See how people's minds change so quickly.

One moment they were going to worship this man, thinking he's a God. The next moment they were ready to stone him to death. And they took out stones and stoned him and dragged him out of the city because as far as they could, he was dead.

And, you know, I sometimes wonder, you know, where Paul says in one place, I knew a man in Christ about 14 years ago. He writes in 2 Corinthians 12. He was taken up to heaven, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know.

I wonder if it was here, when he was half dead or whatever it was, that while he was being persecuted by others and stoned, the Holy Spirit took Paul up to heaven, to paradise, right into the presence of God. He says in 2 Corinthians 12, I was taken up into the immediate presence of God. Now, I can quite believe it.

When God sees a faithful servant of His, utterly faithful, not seeking anything for himself, not seeking money or honor, and being persecuted and stoned, the Lord says, let me just give him an encouragement. Let me just bring him right up into my presence. And he says, I heard unspeakable things.

I can quite believe that our Heavenly Father did that to Paul right here, while others were stoning him to death. And for all apparent, as far as people could see, he was dead. He was taken up to heaven and then came back.

He doesn't know. He doesn't tell us how long he was there. But just one point here.

There's a difference between the way Paul was taken up to heaven, and you read stories nowadays. People write books about my trip to heaven and back and all that type of stuff. But there's one big difference.

Paul could not even speak one sentence about his trip to heaven. He says in 2 Corinthians 12, I heard unspeakable things, which we are not allowed to mention. You read that in 2 Corinthians 12.

That people who actually go to heaven and come back to earth are not permitted to speak one word about what they saw or what they heard. That's what Paul says to the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 12. And that is why I say all these books written about people who have gone to heaven and come back is fake.

All the things you see on the Internet of people who have gone to heaven and come back is fake. It's fake because if it is real, the man will not be permitted to speak one word. Why does he write a book on it? See, if you don't read the Bible, you'll be deceived.

Some of you may have been very excited to read about this book written by a person who went to heaven and tells us all that he saw there. I throw away such books. I would never pass it on to anybody because I say the whole thing is fake.

It's like you passing out a counterfeit currency note to somebody. If you knew a \$100 bill is counterfeit, would you give it to others as a Christian? Would you pass on to others a book about somebody who has gone to heaven and come back to try and convert him? I wouldn't do it because I say the whole book is fake. According to 2 Corinthians 12, a person who has actually gone to heaven is not allowed to speak a single word about what he heard or saw.

I mention it because it's possible. I believe it's possible. This is the time Paul went to heaven when he was stoned.

I can imagine God giving him a reward like that. Then the next day he got up. I mean he got up pretty soon after.

He got up and entered the city. The next day he went with Barnabas to Derbe. Listen to this.

Listen to his message. After he has come back from heaven and speaks to the people, he returned, verse 21, to Lystra, according to Antioch, and they strengthened the souls of the disciples. Now, how would you strengthen the soul of a disciple if he had just gone to heaven yesterday and come back? I'm sure you'd say, I'll tell you something, brothers.

It's amazing what's up there. It says, how did he encourage the disciples? It's a great word. This is his message to encourage the disciples.

Through many trials and tribulations, we have entered the kingdom of God. Is that an encouragement? For those Christians, it was. Because as I said, they were not used to the luxurious, comfortable lifestyle that we are used to.

They wouldn't think of trial and tribulation as a message of encouragement. It says there, read that word. He encouraged them.

He strengthened them. There are two words used there. He strengthened them and encouraged them to continue in the faith.

Imagine a message today to encourage and strengthen me by saying, you're going to face a lot of trials, brothers. The next week and the next year, you're going to face tremendous trials and tribulations. And you say, wow, that was an encouraging message.

Great. That's how those early Christians were. Because through those trials, I'm going to be a little more like Christ.

I'm going to enter into God's kingdom, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. You know, the wonderful message of the gospel is that we can enter God's kingdom right now, not after we die. Romans 14, 17 is a great verse that says, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit brings heaven down into my life. And that is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, in my spirit. And whatever happens to my body, trial or testing, doesn't make a difference.

Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit becomes mine as I go through these trials and testings. And I'm encouraged. So that's how Paul, who had faced these things himself, encouraged all those disciples those days.

Brothers and sisters, let me say a word to encourage you. You're going to face a lot of trials and tribulations in the next few months. That's how you're going to enter God's kingdom.

And those Christians were encouraged by that. Great. God must be having a purpose in taking me through all this.

So I say, you know, those Christians, they were not used to a comfortable lifestyle where they sit back and listen to nice messages and always wanting some word to say something nice to them and encourage them and challenge them. Yeah, brother, you'll be healed and your sickness will go. Or those problems you're facing in life will all disappear.

That's not what they said. You probably will have more problems now that you're a Christian. But the Lord will be with you.

And he'll make you more like him through it all. That's what they wanted. So great.

So that becomes our goal as well. As Jesus opens up the scriptures to us, we will be encouraged. Please turn now with me to Hebrews 11.

Sorry, not Hebrews 11, Hebrews 4. There's a phrase here which I want you to see. In Hebrews 4 and verse 9, it says, There remains a rest which the Old Testament Sabbath symbolized for the people of God. A rest that comes through tribulation and trial.

You see, Paul experienced it. I believe there's a strong possibility that Paul himself wrote in a slightly different lifestyle than his other writings. But Paul experienced entering into God's rest in the midst of trial.

And you can see that over there, that he was stoned to death almost. And he gets up and says, Hey, fellas, that's how we enter into God's kingdom, man. Through many trials.

So here's a person who is at rest in the midst of all types of trials. We don't face 1% in our life for what the Apostle Paul faced. And to see that that is how God treated his greatest servant at that time, allowing him to go through trial and be stoned almost to death and to be whipped so many times and whipped on the back and through many shipwrecks and all types of things, what he went through.

But in it all, he experienced the Lord. And that's why he would say to others, through many, many trials, we're going to enter into this life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's the meaning of entering into God's kingdom.

He read that, Acts 14, 22. Through many tribulations, you enter into the kingdom of God. And there remains a rest.

When you enter into God's kingdom, one proof of it is you have rest in your spirit. This is not true in the early part of my Christian life after I was born again. I didn't care much for always being at rest in my spirit, but it's become very real and important for me as I've come closer to the Lord.

That to be at rest, isn't it? My great desire is not to accomplish great things for God in my life. No. I say, Lord, that's up to you what you want to do through me.

It doesn't interest me. I want to live a life where I'm always at rest in God, no matter what happens on the outside. So it says here there remains a rest for the people of God, and that is the purpose with which God established the Sabbath, to teach people, I want you to come to a life of rest in me.

Your testimony was once a week. We're supposed to experience the spiritual reality of that every day. Every day.

Live a life of inner rest in God. That could be through tribulation, could be through anything. It's a wonderful thing if you have experienced that.

And I want to say to every one of you, if you're a new believer or you've failed many times in your life, I want to say to you in Jesus' name, there remains a rest for you. And it says in verse 11, let us be diligent, really seek earnestly. If you're not in that life of rest, my dear brother, sister, that is the most important thing I would urge you to seek.

Let us, verse 11, be diligent to enter into that rest so that none of you will fail to enter it. And he says that is the purpose of the Old Testament example. You know, the whole chapter, beginning in chapter 3 and verse 16, chapter 3, 16, who provoked him when he came out of Egypt? With whom was he angry for 40 years? You know that God is angry with the people he brought out of Egypt.

Why was he angry? They had obeyed him. They put the blood on the doorpost just like we put our trust in the blood of Christ. They were baptized in the Red Sea just like we have been baptized in water.

We think God must be very happy with us. But it says God is angry with them because they did not enter the land of Canaan. God was so eager that they should enter the land of Canaan that two years after he brought them out of Egypt, he brought them to the borders of the land of Canaan.

He said, go and possess it. And out of all those 600,000 men, only two people believed that they could possess it. Joshua and Caleb.

And they did possess it later on. But they wandered and wandered and wandered and wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. And these things are written for our instruction, that you can believe in the blood of Jesus and put it outside, like they put it outside the door.

You believe in the blood of Jesus and you've gone through baptism. And yet, most of you who listen to me right now, you're born again. You believe in the blood of Christ cleansing you from sin.

You've been baptized in water. You've been baptized in the Holy Spirit too. That's a picture of the cloud coming down over the Israelites.

But he was angry with them. He gave them the cloud and fire to lead them in the wilderness, but he was angry with them. God's blessing on our life does not mean he's happy with us.

It only proves that he's a good God. He wants us to enter the rest. And with whom was he angry? Those, verse 18, he swore that they would not enter his rest.

So what is the lesson there for us? Chapter 4, verse 1. Let us fear. Let us live in fear that a promise has been given to us of entering his rest, and you seem to come short of it. You don't seem to enter into that life of rest.

As I said, the most important thing in the meeting is that you met with Jesus and you heard him. I personally believe the most important thing for my daily life, it's not even to read the Bible. The purpose of reading the Bible is this, that I might, from the morning throughout the day, have an inner rest in my life.

Every day must be a Sabbath for me and for you. It's not once a week Sabbath like the old covenant, but an inner rest every day. And like we read in Acts 14, that's how Paul encouraged them.

Through many tribulations, we enter the kingdom of God. Let's turn to that verse again, so that you don't forget it. Paul had just been stoned to death almost, and he gets up from there, and it says in Acts 14.22, he strengthened the souls of the disciples.

Please read that verse, Acts 14.22. He strengthened, and if Paul was in our midst, this is what he would say. Brothers and sisters, I want to strengthen you, not by some promise that all things will work together for good. You'll get that job you've been waiting for, you'll be able to buy that house you long to buy, or you young people, you're going to marry the girl you really had your eyes on.

No, no, no, that's not how God Paul encouraged people. He said, you guys are going to have a lot of trials. Yeah, he encouraged them saying, you're going to have many trials, Acts 14.22. Not you're going to get the house you wanted, or you're going to get the job you wanted, or you're going to get the girl or the boy you want to marry, no.

He encouraged them saying, you're going to get through many trials, but through it you'll enter the kingdom of God. And I want to say to you something that you probably have not understood. The kingdom of God is not heaven.

No. Jesus once said, the kingdom of God is among you. So let me define the kingdom of God.

What does it mean? Through much tribulation, you will enter God's kingdom. It's not that I'll go to heaven through many tribulations. Right now, I can enter into God's kingdom.

And I want to explain that to you in a moment. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians. It says here, the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Sorry, 1 Corinthians. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. That's what the kingdom of God is.

I'm sorry, I didn't quote the verse right. Romans 14 and 17. Romans 14 and 17.

Not 1 Corinthians. Romans 14. Romans 14 and 17.

The kingdom of God. Never forget this in your life. This is the definition in the New Testament of the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is not heaven. It's not eating and drinking. It's not living a comfortable earthly life.

It is righteousness in the Holy Spirit, peace in the Holy Spirit, joy in the Holy Spirit. That is the kingdom of God. And I can experience that right on this earth.

That is the land of Canaan, which I'm supposed to enter now. That's the life that brings rest in my heart. It's not a better house or a better job or anything to do with the God you want to marry.

It's a passion in your life. Lord, I want to enter into this. Paul says in Hebrews 4, be diligent to enter into this rest that God wants you to enter into.

Here it is. When I understood this, I said, Lord, I want this life. I want this life where I never do anything unrighteous.

Because the first principle of the kingdom of God is righteousness. If I slip up and do something wrong, hurt somebody, I'm going to set it right immediately. I want to live in righteousness.

Please determine this today that you're going to enter into God's kingdom. That's why Jesus came. He came and died that we might enter into God's kingdom.

That kingdom is defined here as righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Say, Lord, I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not to speak in terms. I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so I want to be righteous, always at peace, at rest, and full of the joy of the Lord.

That's why I want to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. That is the rest into which God wants us to enter.

And when Paul says through many tribulations you enter that rest, yeah. I go through trials, and I've been through a lot of trials in my life. I don't necessarily talk about it.

I don't think many of God's servants talk about what all they go through in their private life. But righteousness is our goal. That never in my life do I want to speak a word that will hurt somebody or harm someone or gossip.

Not even once. I want to be righteous. I want to ask you if that is your goal.

Do you want to enter God's kingdom? You can enter it right now. Righteousness in your speech, in your life, in your attitude to life, in your attitude to money. Total righteousness.

It doesn't matter if I'm living in a world full of unrighteousness. I'm going to be righteous. Let everybody be one who cheats others.

Maybe they cheat me as well. But I will never cheat anybody. I will never take advantage of anybody.

I want to be totally righteous even if it makes me a poor man. I want to be totally righteous. Even if nobody around me is paying their taxes, I'm going to pay my taxes.

I pursue righteousness with all my heart, even if it makes me the poorest man in town. Because I want to be in God's kingdom. Righteousness.

Total righteousness. Righteousness in my speech. Righteousness, absolutely righteous in the way I speak to my wife or speak to anybody else.

And immediately apologizing if I hurt somebody accidentally. Righteousness. And peace.

I have come to value peace very much in my life. This is the land of pain and suffering. Righteousness and peace.

And that peace is, the Bible says, and you often quote, you may have heard me quote Colossians 3-15, is the referee. Peace is the referee in our heart. That blows a whistle when I've done something wrong.

Whenever you lose peace in your heart about anything, at home, in your place of work, during the day, please remember, the referee has blown a whistle. Whatever is your favorite game, soccer or football or whatever. The referee's blown a whistle.

You've lost your peace. However good a Christian you think you are, you have committed a foul. Stop the game.

When a referee blows a whistle, you stop the game. And when the peace is gone from your heart, any moment of the day at any time, just stop for a few seconds. Stop for a minute at least and say, Lord, something's wrong.

So many people around me may be doing something wrong, but I'm not supposed to lose my peace. No. I want to live in the kingdom of God.

Why have I lost that inner peace? Help me to judge myself. Christ is not everything to me. Something else is also, Christ plus something else.

That's why I've lost my peace. I'll tell you a little secret. It's because you want Christ plus something else that you lose your peace.

Every time, if you wanted Christ alone, and you're happy with him alone, and nothing else, you would never lose your peace. Whether you got that job or you didn't get it, whether you made that extra money that you're hoping to make, or didn't get it, or whether you lost a lot of money when you were hoping to make some money. If Christ is everything, I'm telling you things I've gone through myself.

I say, the Lord tells me, Is Christ everything to you? Prove me, Lord. Prove me. Christ is not everything to me.

Please take me through a trial till Christ becomes everything to me, that I will never lose my peace, no matter what I lose in the world. Peace is the referee that tells you when you've committed a foul, when you lose your peace, the referee is blowing the whistle. You may say, it's because he did this, or she did this, or this happened.

No, sir. That's not the reason. The reason is Jesus Christ is not Lord in your life.

Name that the reason. Jesus Christ is not Lord in my life. That's why I lost my peace here.

And joy in the Holy Spirit. That's the other thing, the kingdom of God. Joy in the Holy Spirit.

For many, many years, I pursued one verse. I'm giving you my testimony. Because I didn't have it.

Philippians 4.4. Rejoice in the Lord 24-7. Always means 24-7. You never had that word, always, in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Sabbath was once a week. Don't do any work once a week. Don't let anybody else work once a week.

But now, a seven-day, 24-7 Sabbath. At rest in God all the time. And so, joy in the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice in the Lord 24-7. Many people don't pursue it. I pursued it for years, and I was never able to attain it.

Lord, I'm not able to come to that place where I'm rejoicing. Then I realized why I was not getting it. Why didn't I have joy 24-7? Because I was finding my joy, not just in the Lord.

It says rejoice in the Lord 24-7. Is there any time when the God is not on the throne? Philippians 4.4 is very clear. Rejoice in the Lord.

And the only thing that can prevent me from rejoicing always is if my joy is not in the Lord. It's in the Lord plus something else on this earth. Thank you, Lord, for showing that to me.

I lost my joy right now. And I say, why? The Lord said, something else on earth means more to you than me. Or is me plus something else? I say, Lord, thank you for showing me.

And the Lord showed me again and again and again and again. It was me. It was the Lord plus something else.

And that made me lose my joy. And I said, Lord, I'm determined. Please make me keep on losing my joy till I discover every single thing in my life outside of you that I'm valuing.

And little by little, it's taken years, but I've tried to eliminate from my life everything outside the Lord in which I find joy. And I assure you, my brothers and sisters, even if you were born again yesterday, you're a totally new believer, I want to say to you in Jesus' name, you can rejoice in the Lord 24-7. Make that your goal.

The kingdom of God is righteousness, joy, and peace, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And if you pursue this life to be totally righteous, always at rest, always rejoicing, I guarantee you'll be crying out for the power of the Holy Spirit every day, as I do, because you'll find it's impossible to live this life without the power of the Holy Spirit. There remains a rest for God's people.

So when you pursue all that I said, basically it's this, to have the presence of Christ with us all the time. For it is he who brings that righteousness, peace, and joy into our heart. Then what will happen? Remember the words we read at the beginning? Maybe you're not a preacher.

Maybe you don't know much about the Bible. But you go and sit in a meeting and you bring the presence of Christ into that meeting. You go and speak to a person.

You're not a great preacher. You say a word to somebody, a word of encouragement, maybe on the phone, maybe in an email, and Christ himself has spoken through you, even though you're not a preacher. In just one sentence you've said to somebody that blessed them and encouraged them and lifted their spirit.

Oh, dear brothers and sisters, I encourage you with all my heart. Please seek for this life where you may be weak and helpless. You may be in a hospital bed.

Somebody comes to cheer you and you speak a word that encourages them and they go away encouraged. What a life! That is God's will for you. Through much tribulation we enter into this kingdom where the presence of Christ is always with us.

Even if you don't know much of the Bible, it doesn't matter. The early Christians did not know much of the Bible. They never had a printed Bible with them.

They had the presence of Jesus with them. That's what you should long for. We read that in the beginning.

What is the mark of a good meeting? People come to that meeting and say, God is certainly with us. Jesus was there. We met with him.

He spoke to us. He encouraged us. And it doesn't matter if we face trial.

He encouraged us because he led us into God's kingdom. Please, I pray the Holy Spirit will take these broken words and minister to your heart in a permanent way and change the direction of your life. Let us enter into that rest God has for us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we hear so many things. We think of many messages we have heard in the past.

And times when we thought, oh, God really spoke to us. This will change our life forever. And it didn't.

We've forgotten. Help us, Lord. Even if we forget a message, we will pursue after that rest, that Sabbath rest that you want us to have.

Through trials, you will help us to enter into that rest where your presence is with us all the time and we are aware of it. And wherever we go, we bring your presence with us to everyone we meet with. Help us, Lord, to live this life that every one of us can live this life, even the weakest and the poorest among us, that our mind will not be set on earthly comforts and earthly joys, but on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Help us to earnestly pursue this. When you said we will seek the kingdom of God first, we must seek righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit first before seeking for anything on this earth. Help us.

Thank you. In Jesus' name, amen.

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