

John and Elaine McLachlan 2016

LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION

We have now been doing our ministry for 10 years, first with Paul Locke as part of his team and then, for the last 4½ years, as our own ministry. When you do street ministry, you do not have a "captive" congregation, so evangelism, which should be teaching people

about living in the Kingdom of God, should be approached quite differently, but the churches, in our experience, are not looking for strategies to do this important work. There are many people who do not wish to "join" a church for a multitude of good reasons. We believe God has decreed each person to be sovereign of their lives. Even Apostle Paul writes that we work out our salvation, because it is God who works in us and will act according to His good purpose. (Philippians 2:12&13) Unfortunately those who are not yet in God's Kingdom are subject to the evil desires of their own sinfulness and the devil's whims because they are actually in his domain by default.

We have a great concern that the teachers in the churches do not teach about living in God's Kingdom. In each church there is a certain culture dictated by the pastor or leader and based on traditions in that denomination, just as the Pharisees of old, who were condemned by Jesus. Those who attend that church are obliged to hold to the taught ways as if these are the ONLY way. Some of these, when challenged by another view, become quite aggressive, which demonstrates that they have been indoctrinated rather than having received God's revelation for themselves. People outside the church look in from the outside and feel that this tradition or that custom do not suit them, so they will not enter where they might also hear the gospel message. We ask how they will be saved if they are not in a place to hear because the word of God says that faith comes by hearing. This need we have perceived drives us to GO, even though we are in our mid to late seventies. How can they hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14)

1. TO BE BORN (into God's family)

God plants seed. In the natural, man has seed which he plants into his wife to produce fruit. This fruit is in the likeness of the seed, which is "fallen man", who is under the rule of the devil because of the sin of Adam. This is our "original sin" or "iniquity". It is not something we have done wrong, but a propensity to go our own way, rather than God's way. **Jesus says we must be born again** (John 3:3) **or we cannot enter the Kingdom of God.** This means that we must receive the seed of God, just as Mary did, by the power from on high. (Luke 1:35) Attending a church does not implant the seed of God in a new believer. There are no church rituals and ceremonies that can do this. **Only the Holy Spirit can do this.** It is very plain in Jesus' teaching. (John 3:5-8)

John's gospel is very emphatic from the beginning. "To those who believed in His Name, He gave the right (power) to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." (John 1:12&13) Until one is born one is not physically in the world, and until one is born from above, similarly one is not in God's "world" either. Everyone who is "elect" by God is "in utero" and waiting for spiritual birth, and many of these are not church members. Some do not even know that God has chosen them from the foundation of the world because they come from places where the gospel is not preached. They might sense it and begin to seek after God, perhaps in unusual ways, conceived by customs and practices of the local "religion". But they must hear the

Truth to know how to come into God's family and lay aside the old way when they hear it.

This is why we, in our ministry, invite people to receive the Holy Spirit, after only a very brief invitation. The Bible promises that He guides us into all truth. (John 16:13)

It is quite funny that we believe we can catch someone else's disease when we go near them and similarly that we can "catch" Christian belief when we go to church. But real Christianity is a new heart towards God. Yes! Knowledge of the gospel is necessary but this is imparted much more than taught to the mind. When Jesus preached people "felt" or knew in their deepest being that what He was saying was Truth. It had an authoritative ring which caused them to comment, because it carried the anointing of His Father. It is not common to hear this authority in the average sermon in these days because most teachers just impart information without a challenge to respond, to relate the teaching to the hearers' lives. Many have spent many hours preparing from commentaries and other sources and we admire their diligence, but how many have sought the revelation from God to receive new insights from God's heart? How many have wanted a fresh revelation to stir the hearts of the people in their church?

The other alarming aspect whereby we know that many people in churches are not born again is the emphasis on being a sinner. We have noticed that almost every mainline church we have attended in the last 9 years has a prayer to admit to God that they are sinners.

Pentecostal churches usually do not have a prayer like this, although sometimes the preacher says so.

We want to declare openly that a sinner is one OUTSIDE of relationship with God, no better off than Adam and Eve after they had sinned. Yes! God still loved them and watched over them but there was no fellowship. God was God but not Daddy. Yet the whole reason for Jesus to go through such a painful and ignominious death was to restore us to fellowship with such a loving and caring God. He had imputed to us who receive this message a righteousness (right standing with a Holy God) that we can never earn or deserve, a gift so marvellous that it is beyond understanding. We are no longer sinners who are unworthy to come before a Holy God because all our iniquity is in the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:19) We still make "mistakes" for which we must repent and say "sorry", but God does not cancel His "contract" with Jesus who has paid the price for all sin for all time. God has bound Himself to forgive us because of Jesus. (1 John 2:182)

The Apostle, John, clearly writes that no one who lives in Him keeps on sinning, and no one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. (1 John 3:6)

2. TO GROW

God's seed has been planted in a human heart! Even the angels in Heaven are excited! (Luke 15:7) But what sort of ground is it in?

These grounds are clearly described by Jesus. (Matthew 13:18-23)

- There is a <u>path</u> which has been well-trodden and can be very hard. A life can have endured many evil things, and not knowing that we have an enemy, the devil, who likes to send tragedies and ugliness our way, that person can become bitter and angry. Because understanding of the things of God is by faith, hope and love, the word they received dries up and is lost. This is a sad thing but Jesus teaches that it is a possibility.
- There is <u>rocky ground</u>. Rain has fallen from Heaven into a thirsty place and it is so welcome. In our travels we have seen huge trees that have apparently grown in rock but these have usually come from a nearby tree that has sent roots under the ground. On a rock that is exposed to the wind and rain there is no soil, and therefore no nourishment for a seed. Since nourishment is essential for growth, this seed will also wither up and die eventually. Jesus says that when trouble and persecution come because of the word, these people will quickly fall away. The little seed was maybe exposed to "winds of teaching devised by the craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming". (Ephesians 4:14)
- There is thorny ground. We have seen so much thorny ground on our travels. It is quite useless to grow anything because the

thorns grow wild and unchecked and they choke out any seed that is planted there. The seed would fall through to the earth. but if it took root the plant would be very stunted. The inherent potential of the seed would not develop. Jesus says that worries of this life and deceitfulness of wealth signify this thorny ground. We have talked about Jesus to people who are focussed on their worries and no matter what we say, they always say "but..." As for the "rich", many consider that they have no needs therefore they do not need God either. Timothy was advised by Paul to command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth. (1 Timothy 6:17) He also wrote that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil and can cause people to wander from faith. (1 Timothy 6:10) Recently we visited some Christians who live in the Northern Beaches, a magnificent and beautiful part of Sydney, where many people own boats and lovely houses. These friends said that many people in their neighbourhood did not think they needed God because they have "everything".

• There is good ground. Good ground has been well prepared. It has been ploughed and had all the weeds removed. It has also been watered (by prayer?). Good ground is ready and waiting for the seed. Many people are waiting for the seed of the word. When they are given a seed they understand, because God always sees a hungry heart. God has already promised, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6) This person

will produce a harvest because God has decreed so. The crop could be large, medium or small. This will depend on the amount of nourishment the growing seed receives and perhaps the potential within the seed. When Jesus talked about talents He plainly says some receive more than others according to His choice and their ability to handle them. (Matthew 25:14-23)

3. TO LEARN

We assume that the new-born baby Christian is hungry. All babies are hungry unless something is very wrong with their natural instinct. At first a baby is not mentally conscious that they are learning because they are too immature. This is why it is ideal that they are in a place where they can see how to behave. Therefore churches need to be places where people can witness how to be a Christian. At many churches people cooperate with the leader of the service but are unchallenged by the Holy Spirit who leads us into all truth, so the message has gone in one ear and out the other. Afterwards, at morning tea, they talk about the weather, the sport, their ailments or any small talk, but they seldom want to talk about Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2) They are seldom, after the service (of worship), enthusiastic to spur one another on towards love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24) They have not failed to meet together but they do not much encourage each other with that sense of urgency that Jesus could come any time. So the hungry baby is watching to see, and all it sees is complacency; taking our salvation for granted – "I'm OK" syndrome. In good churches prayer is offered at the end of the worship service, but why would a complacent person bother? This must be why churches like Hillsong prosper. The enthusiasm is attractive. People are learning to be excited by their salvation, and enthusiastic about the opportunity to worship together. Raising one's hands, dancing and clapping are not "Pentecostal". These actions are seriously Biblical. (Psalm 47,134,149, 150) These actions are so people (and God) can see our sincerity.

In the street, with our eyes shining and our voices ringing with the joy of being "in Christ", people who have no interest in religion are amazed and challenged as they see what Jesus means to us. We pray that they will want to join a church and many ask us which is our church. Their curiosity has been aroused. Most churches offer good Bible studies and teaching, but learning in the Kingdom is to renew the mind to conform to God's perfect will. (Romans 12:182) Knowledge, even of the Bible, for knowledge's sake, puffs up. (1 Corinthians 8:1) Bible study is to learn God's precious promises and His will for each one of us. It is definitely not for arguing different points of view and dogmas. The Apostle Paul's instruction to Titus makes this very clear. "Avoid foolish controversies... and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless." (Titus3:9)

There are lots of things that are interesting to study, but a new baby needs to learn the basics. These topics are mentioned in Hebrews. (6:1&2) The foundational teachings are –

- repentance from acts that lead to death
- faith in God
- instruction about baptisms
- instruction about laying on of hands
- the resurrection of the dead
- eternal judgment.

The writer to the Hebrews says this teaching is like milk for infants, who need to understand our righteousness before a Holy God. From this we can interpolate that until we really understand our right standing before God, a gift that Jesus freely bestows on a new believer, we are not trained to distinguish good from evil.

4. <u>UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE</u>

The culture of God's Kingdom is not always mirrored by the church. God is LOVE, so this quality should be primary. The Apostle, John, writes that this is how we know who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil – anyone who does not do right and who does not love his brother is <u>not</u> a child of God. (1 John 3:10)

God is generous (Matthew 7:11) and gracious so these qualities should also be evident. In some churches we have attended they tell visitors they should let the "collection plate" go by. Why not say instead, "God is generous and we can experience that by an offering to God in this way because He will see our hearts"? God is a giver so He expects His children to be givers too. Paul describes LOVE

as patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, rude or self-seeking and is not easily angered. LOVE does not keep a record of wrongs or delight in evil. LOVE rejoices with the truth, always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

There is so much in the New Testament about the expected qualities of a Christian. "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1&2) The Bible goes on — no immoral, impure or greedy person... has any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Victory over these ungodly traits, and the ability to follow Paul's injunctions on how we should behave, are only possible in the strength of God and by the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught very extensively about the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. He begins by stating, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near." (Matthew 4:17)

In the beatitudes He states that the poor in spirit and those who are persecuted because of righteousness will receive the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 5:3&10) The world's way is totally opposed to God's way because in this world the devil is trying to control what he stole from Adam and Eve by trickery. John sums up the world's way as the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does. (1 John 2:16) In Kingdom culture, rather than wanting all the time we are giving, rather than puffing oneself up with pride, we are modest and thankful to God for every blessing. We

are not racist or elite, expecting others to serve us because we think they are less important. The Pharisees were rebuked because they wanted the place of honour, and deference to their status. (Matthew 23:687)

Jesus told many stories about what the Kingdom is like. He expects us to do the will of the Father. (Matthew 7:21) How can we know the will of the Father unless we have a personal relationship with Him? Otherwise we will strive in vain, thinking we are pleasing Him but never hearing His "Well done".

It is very important to Him that He has workers in the Kingdom, and that they come when they are called, (Matthew 20) and they come by faith, and do what He has shown us to do. He told us that His mandate from the Father was, "The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". (Luke 4:18&19) When He sent the first workers out (first the disciples and then the 70) He told them to do these things in His authority. This number, 70, represents God's "governmental number", so Jesus meant all His disciples to do the same, to the end of the age.

We have already written about the sower and the ground but Matthew 13 has more stories about the Kingdom. Jesus warns us that the enemy has sown weeds among the wheat. (v 24-30) They will grow alongside each other until the end of the age. They are known by their fruit. (Matthew 12:33-37) This fruit is well demonstrated by the

words we use, and the words we sometimes hear in the street, even by "Christians", are quite shocking. Jesus says these words come from the heart. Paul suggests we focus our thoughts on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:8)

Another story is the mustard seed, such a small seed, but, when planted it grows into a large tree and shelters many. (v31&32) Yet another is the yeast in a large amount of flour that spreads through the whole loaf of bread. (v33) He had already taught that the Kingdom of God is advancing forcefully, and that forceful (or passionate) people lay hold of it. (Matthew 11:12) Nothing can stop the extension of God's Kingdom because His original command was to be fruitful and increase. (Genesis 1:28) Jesus also said that He had chosen and appointed us to bear fruit – that will last. (John 15:16)

Two other stories in Matthew 13 are of hidden treasure and a priceless pearl. (v44-46) When we find a treasure that is so good, we will want to acquire it as soon as possible and will be willing to part with lesser treasures. We pray with many Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. When they hear the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ very simply they are happy to receive Him even though they might have to change what they have believed up till that point. This is the story in which we take God at His word. If these few words in the Bible are a decree of God then we have an expectancy that He will meet our faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus

my Lord...I consider them rubbish, that I might gain Christ and be found in Him". (Philippians 3:7-9)

The last story is about the net that was cast into the sea. Many fish are caught but some will not be "edible". When our "fish" are not hungry to learn what they have accepted, seeking after God with their whole heart, they will be sorted out by the angels at the close of the age. Hebrews has a solemn warning. If we <u>deliberately keep on sinning</u> after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment. (Hebrews 10:26) This deliberate sin (or separation from God) is termed "trampling the Son of God under foot and insulting the Spirit of grace". (v29)

God promises supernatural supply and Jesus demonstrated this in the feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14) and of the 4000 (Matthew 15:29). These are some of the ways in God's Kingdom.

5. **ENJOYING THE CULTURE** – (advantages)

We have a Heavenly Father who is the most loving, generous, patient and forgiving of all fathers. He really cares about us; our welfare, our dreams, our health, both physical and mental, and our relationships, with Him and with other people. He guides us, disciplines us for our good, is there with us all the time and tries to keep us out of trouble. This does require us to believe in faith because we seldom see Him with our outward eyes.

Because God has made wonderful promises to His family members we can claim them for ourselves and for those we love. He asks us to "abide" in Him. This is a very interesting concept. Abiding in Him really means knowing our family membership, knowing our Daddy and our big Brother. We ask "in His Name" or according to His ways, His character, His heart, His whole being. Abiding actually precludes "going our own way", so this keeps us from sinning because our intention is to only do the Father's will.

Because we are "adopted" into His family we need to realise our position. There is no difference in status between legally adopted children and natural-born ones. There are actually no natural-born ones in God's Kingdom because every member must be born from "on high". We cannot even consider ourselves in His intimate family if we are not. Even the Jewish people at this present time must acknowledge Jesus, because God has allowed a "spirit of stupor" to overwhelm these people until the full number of "Gentiles" (those outside of Covenant with God) to come into the Family. (Romans 11:8&25) He really desires that we are in His family, being changed from glory to glory as we submit to His training. Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:11) Although Jesus came to His own (the Jewish people), His own did not receive Him. (John 1:12) There were many who followed Him for a while and then turned back. (John 6:66) There were 150 in the upper room at Pentecost but only a few at the Crucifixion, yet He ministered to thousands in His three years of ministry. People followed Him but did not continue. When we have decided to "abide" we cannot imagine why they did

not, yet we meet many who say they are Christian but obviously have no personal relationship with Jesus. Most of these people have given up attending church because they could not see the point of it. Many people have only heard "religion", a set of dogmas and rules to obey, but this is not true Christianity, and God has already tried the Ten Commandments on His people and they did not keep them.

The culture of Christianity depends on our relationship with God through His Holy Spirit. One of the most exciting and glorious facts is that we are no longer "sinners", because we have been given a righteousness we do not earn or deserve, as a gift from Jesus. This fact has been made very plain by the Apostle, John. "No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him." (1 John 3:6) There is no one "greater" in the Kingdom than another, although there are different gifts and these bring responsibility.

5a. Disadvantages?

How could there be disadvantages in living in the Kingdom of God, in His presence and under all the advantages? Well, as far as the writers are concerned, there are none, but outside the Kingdom, when people are looking in, having God as "captain of your ship" is threatening, because they like to have their own worldly ways. Their experiences have bred mistrust, and they have seen some who call themselves Christian but who have not truly been born by the Holy Spirit so are not holy, and that witness is not attractive. Many

people we speak to go on (and on) about this Christian or that Christian, behaving in a way that is "not as good as they are", as if their way was perfectly acceptable according to society's standard. Many who look in from the outside ask where God was when... such and such happened, and why did He not intervene. Therefore the most serious disadvantage is if we do not abide in Him. Our Christian profession does not work for His glory. The writer to the Hebrews gives great advice. "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." (Hebrews 12:182)

Jesus tells us, "I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains (abides) in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing". (John 15:5) If we are not filled with God's love we are a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal, (1 Corinthians 13:1) to which people block their ears, or shudder as their nerves are jarred. When Jesus spoke His voice was full of love. This is why people were so attracted to Him.

The King does not give gifts that we cannot use for His glory. The story of the talents demonstrates that not using the gift(s) with which we are entrusted brings judgment. (Matthew 25:14-30) This story is a solemn warning which many Christians do not seem to take seriously. According to the Bible we demonstrate our love for Jesus by obeying Him. (John 14:15) It has been said that if Jesus is not Lord of all He is not Lord at all. Christianity simply does not work properly in our lives if we are half-hearted, and worse, our witness

does not bring glory to God. The letter to the Laodiceans warns that God will spit those who are luke-warm – neither hot nor cold – out of His mouth. (Revelation 3:15) This is a curious saying, that a luke-warm Christian gives God a bad taste in His mouth. Our human response to tasting something disgusting is to never want anything to do with it again. God is always ready to hear "Sorry" so that He can cleanse us from all unrighteousness because He is so gracious and knows that His forgiveness wipes away guilt that would otherwise cripple us, and cause us to "hide" from Him. (1 John 1:9)

6. THE AUTHORITY AND SUPERIORITY

The children in God's family have been given God's authority. Jesus has already said that those who believe in Him will do even greater things than Jesus Himself. (John 14:12) He wants us to do these things that He did as a continuation of His work, begun while He was here on the earth. He chose His disciples (right up to the modern day) and appointed them to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. (John 15:16) These acts are to and for the Father's glory, showing that we are disciples of Jesus. (John 15:8) We are a new creation (born again by the Spirit of God) so that we can demonstrate God's message of reconciliation – in Christ the world has been reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19) There is no sin that can be counted against us because Jesus paid the price of the death sentence for <u>all</u> sin for <u>all</u> time. (Hebrews 9:26-28)

It is very exciting that, because we are filled with the Spirit, we are expected to KNOW the power within, to be His body in this world, to do the works He has prepared for us to do. (Ephesians 1:19 & 2:10)

What is more, He will do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. (Ephesians 3:20) But this authority is according to the original plan – to be fruitful and increase in number, to fill the earth and subdue it, to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. (Genesis1:28) God does not mention people so if we have some (God-given) authority over people we have to look to Jesus to see how to do this. We have authority and superiority over the creation but only some authority over humans. The "world" has badly twisted this decree to give animals rights that God did not intend. Perhaps God, in His wisdom, has withdrawn the knowledge of our superiority over created things in the world's thinking, which has resulted in proliferation of viruses, germs and other things that make us sick. This has also resulted in lack of knowledge of Satan's wiles and strategies which are causing havoc with people's lives.

BUT GOD'S FAMILY DO HAVE AUTHORITY. It is God-given to use to enforce His will in His world. When we are confident of God's plan and purposes, of His calling and anointing, He actually expects us to use it. He does not even seem to mind if we make a mistake as we learn to use this authority. Jesus gave His authority to 70 followers. Who were these? Had they been with Him like His chosen twelve disciples, hanging onto His every word? Our book

("He sent Seventy-two") enlarges on this topic. One thing is for certain, Jesus was delighted with the results that His followers achieved, reminding them and praising His Father that the Holy Spirit had spoken through them. (Luke 10:21)

It is also very interesting that Jesus chastised His disciples for not calming the storm (Mark 4:40) or delivering a boy from an evil spirit. (Luke 9:41) He also commended a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:28) and a Roman centurion for their great faith. (Luke 7:9) They were not included in the Old Testament Covenant (which was through circumcision) because, until Jesus died on the Cross to open the way for all people to come to God, they had to receive favour from those who were. However the Old Covenant plainly gave encouragement to the "contrite and lowly in spirit". (Isaiah 57:15) God's PROMISES work for anyone because it is He who does the work in answer to our faith.

7. MATURITY (representation of the culture)

How good it is to shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation! Children of God who are pure and blameless! (Philippians 2:15) Hebrews explains that the mature in Christ have trained themselves by constant use of God's word and by obedience to it, to understand God's righteousness, so that they can distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:13) God's goodness is not the world's standard of goodness. People like to think (and often tell us) that they are good

people and do not harm anyone and even do "good". We have stated in a previous chapter (3) the elementary truths as listed in Hebrews 6. This is a very interesting list and many denominations teach these differently, and sometimes quite dogmatically

The first is repentance from acts that lead to death. (Hebrews 6:1) The Apostle, John, states that if anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life, but that there is a sin that leads to death. (1 John 5:16) Jesus has said to the Pharisees that they would die in their sins if they do not believe that He is "I AM", the One who is sent by God. (John 8:24) The other statement of Jesus is about speaking a blasphemous word against the Holy Spirit. That person will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:32) It would seem that every other sin can be forgiven if we repent. One of the final promises written in the Bible is. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city". (Revelation 22:14) Eternal life begins when we accept Jesus into our lives and continues to the end of the age. So the mature repent regularly even though they do not sin – one of the paradoxes of the New Covenant!

The second elementary truth is **faith in God**. This seems plain but the devil will confuse us if we do not understand this truth. This requires an intimate knowledge of God's character, which is learnt by putting our trust in Him in all circumstances and believing His word above these very circumstances. Paul puts it clearly. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in

despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed". (2 Corinthians 4:889) Jesus warned His disciples, "... wars... nation against nation... earthquakes... famines... brother will betray brother... children will rebel... all men will hate you because of Me". (Mark 13:5-23) Standing firm against all this is a demonstration of our faith in God. Jesus was very sad when many of His followers turned back and no longer followed Him, because they were uncomfortable with His teaching. (John 6:66)

The third truth is **baptisms**. This topic is a hot potato because different denominations have very strong beliefs and defend these beliefs against those who think differently, even insisting that those who join their church go through the ritual as they see it. Yet plainly there are at least 3 baptisms; the Father's baptism, the baptism of the Son and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19) Jesus was baptised in water to fulfil all righteousness. (Matthew 3:15) Yet John's baptism was for repentance. (Acts 19:4) The Ephesians were baptised into the name of Jesus and signs followed. (Acts 19:5&6) However, in Samaria, they had been baptised into the name of Jesus and yet had not received the Holy Spirit until they received the laying on of hands. (Acts 8:16&17) We were baptised into Christ's death so that our old flesh life is dead and our spirit life is alive. (Romans 6:3) We are now "clothed with Christ". (Galatians 3:27)

This is the robe of righteousness and is a testimony that we belong to Him. It is the full truth about baptism that demonstrates our salvation – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a

good conscience towards God. (1 Peter 3:21) We have an article about baptisms on our website, (munumin.com).

The fourth truth is concerning the **laying on of hands**. This action was primarily for blessing (eg, Genesis 48:14). It was also for spiritual transfer (of sin) (eg, Leviticus 3:2, 4:24&33) as ordained by God before the blood sacrifice. Thirdly this action was for commissioning, in God's name. (Numbers 27:23) Job felt a longing that someone would lay his hand upon him "to remove the rod". (Job 9:33) The ruler who came to Jesus believed that if Jesus put His hands on the daughter who had just died, she would live. (Matthew 9:18) Jesus touched the leper and he was healed. (Mark 1:41) The command to the disciples was to place their hands on the sick and they will get well. (Mark 16:18) It would seem that God honours those who touch people in faith and they become a channel on God's behalf.

A fifth elementary teaching is the **resurrection of the dead**. It is absolutely essential to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20) The Apostle, Paul, goes into great detail about why it is important. If we do not accept this fact "our faith is useless." (1 Corinthians 15:14) This fact is also the greatest demonstration of God's power, (Ephesians 1:19&20) and declaration that Jesus is who He claimed to be, God's Son. (Romans 1:4) This resurrection guarantees that when we have been baptised into His death, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:4)

The sixth teaching is about **eternal judgment**. Jesus has decreed that, at the end of the age, the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin

and all who do evil. (Matthew 13:41) There are other parables and stories to warn us that there is a judgment at the end. God's intense love for people longs that they will accept the wonderful promises He has made for those who will receive His Son. He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9) But God's holiness will burn up evil. He is like a refiner's fire. (Malachi 3:2)

When we understand all these "elementary teachings" and put them into practice we are mature, confident that we are keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:26)

8. THE HEART OF THE KING

Obviously the heart of the King is primarily one of love, for God is LOVE. (1 John 4:8) But He is also HOLY. (1 Peter 1:15) These two glorious strengths of God are only reconcilable because He IS God. Sin is repulsive to Him and He cannot go near because His holiness will utterly consume it, just as a good housewife will clean every spot she sees or a good gardener will cut off every bad shoot on his plants.

Yet God's lovingly created world is FULL of sin and the devil is running rampant, encouraging even God's people to do more. As for those who are outside His Kingdom, they are virtually the devil's puppets and are only relatively safe if they have been brought up with Godly principles, which they choose to keep. The Bible states how God sees this situation. (Genesis 6:6) "The Lord was grieved...and

His heart was filled with pain." Paul states that the Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) and lists a number of sins – bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. In the first example these were people who had rejected God but Paul was talking to those who say they love God, so this must be more painful to God.

God, in His love, had a solution ready as soon as Adam and Eve lost their authority to the devil, but, because God does nothing without revealing His plans to His servants the prophets, (Amos 3:7) and He had given His authority by His word to mankind, man had to speak the solution into being. This became a very slow process as God looked for those who would believe and honour Him. This is the interesting story of the Old Testament and God's Covenant with a chosen people, and shows how very patient God is. Peter echoes this when he writes, "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance". (2 Peter 3:9) Peter is assuring his readers that God waits and waits – for US to respond to His wooing!

Yet in the fullness of time, when the prophecies where completed, God did send His Son to reconcile fallen man to Himself. God has made the way but He cannot MAKE us take it because He gave us freewill. God is love so He cannot use any other power to change the way we think and respond. What agony He must feel when man despises and rejects His "Love" solution!

One of our (the writers') delights is when we ask a person we have just met if we might bless them with the Holy Spirit, and they say "Yes", without hesitation. In our ministry we are conscious that God has called us to be His ambassadors, God making His appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20) This person has just said "yes" to God Himself and we sense God's delight that this person wants to receive all the blessings that God is ready to pour out, because He is so generous. Isaiah wrote about God, "All day long I have held out My hands..." (Isaiah 65:2) This is being said to obstinate people who would not receive, and provoked God to His very face. But God's plea had been, "Here am I, here am I." (Isaiah 65: 1) God really wants us to be reconciled to Him.

All we need to understand is that we cannot "clean up" ourselves. Humility is coming to God on His terms and acknowledging our sinfulness – that, on a regular basis, we want to turn away from and have victory over our iniquities and weaknesses. Jesus died for SINNERS. (Romans 5:8) When we are born again by the Holy Spirit our new genes lead us into holiness. Christians really need to WANT to be holy, just to demonstrate their love for Jesus, who has, by shedding His blood in such a horrible way, set them free from bondage to sin and the devil. When we know the Father's heart this will be our desire.

9. <u>THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN</u> (our behaviour in relationship)

"Be holy for I am holy".

One of the most tragic things to witness is hypocrisy in the church. Those outside the Kingdom are watching all the time. This must be inspired by the devil. "Watchers" are judges. They look to see faults so that they can take advantage, especially for themselves. Godly watchmen are looking for the strangers to lead them to the shepherd. (John 10:3) In the Old Covenant the watchman must give warning of danger and, because he is chosen, he is held accountable for the life of those in his care. (Ezekiel 33:3-6) But in the New Covenant, because the price for sin is paid, no one is accountable for sin, but for their relationship with Jesus. People must be led to Jesus and receive Him. Jesus asked for workers, as many as possible, because the harvest is large and it will not be brought in without harvesters. (Luke 10:2; Matthew 9:38)

Without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14) This statement has a double thrust. It has to do with our relationship with God but also our witness to "all men". Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God". He also said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God, and blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven". (Matthew 5:8-10) Those "watchers" might judge us, but if it is for our righteousness then they have actually been convicted by the Holy Spirit.

The other equally important trait for those in the Kingdom is love. The "world" and the media in particular, portray love as lust, expressed erotically. This is not God's meaning of love. God's love is defined well by the Apostle Paul. "Without (this) love we are resounding gongs and clanging cymbals."

LOVE is patient and kind. It does not envy, does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, self-seeking and not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs nor delight in evil but rejoices in the truth. It ALWAYS protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. LOVE NEVER FAILS (to work the restoring and healing miracles that God intended).

We meet so many people who have been hurt by leaders in the church. The Bible warns that those who are strong must bear with the failings of the weak. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. (Romans 15:1&2) It goes on to say that even Christ did not please Himself.

In fact Jesus put out real challenges -

- to be poor in spirit
- to be repentant (to mourn)
- to be meek
- to hunger and thirst for righteousness
- to be merciful
- to be a peacemaker (Matthew 5:3-9)
- to be light and salt (Matthew 5:13&14)
- to be reconciled to those whom you have offended (Matthew 5:23&24)
- to be determined to avoid sin (Matthew 5:27-30)

- to be pure, honest and generous in relationships (Matthew 5:27-42)
- to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:47)

This is just a short list of His advice about living as members of God's Kingdom, from His "sermon on the mount". His whole ministry was a demonstration of how to live in God's Kingdom, in perfect unity with the Father's heart. Such purity is not always appreciated, but as His brothers and sisters we ought to try to follow His example. Just as Jesus kept in step with the Holy Spirit, this is our challenge too. The Apostle, John, had to warn his church not to run ahead. (2 John v 9) David prayed that God would keep him from presumptive sins, (Psalm 19:13) and there is a warning not to add anything to the words of the Book. (Revelation 22:18) Paul warns the Colossians to "see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." (Colossians 2:8)

Our responsibility is to read the word of God and to seek His revelation through the indwelling Holy Spirit. As (Holy) Spiritual people we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:15&16) "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess." (Hebrews 10:22-23) Paul encourages us. "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... all of us who are mature should take such a view." (Philippians 3:12&15)

10. RELATING TO NEW BABIES

The original command was to be fruitful and increase in number. (Genesis 1:25) God wanted His family to be BIG! He wanted His family to be a glorious LIGHT in His beautiful world that He had created with such love and care – an example of what having a relationship with Almighty God does in one's life. He told Abram that His family, Abram's offspring, would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, (Genesis 15:5) and this was after sin came into the world. God has not changed His desire down through all the ages. Jesus says He came into the world to seek and save what was lost. (Luke 19:10) What was lost? All those whom God had destined from their conception to be in His family, and who were under the rule of the devil by default, had lost their connection with the Heavenly Father. God chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. (Ephesians 1:4) This is our predestination, but God has also given us freewill, to make the choice to receive Him into our lives, our hearts. Just as He gave the Jewish people their choice He also gives it to everyone. "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life." (Deuteronomy 30:19820) "If serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15)

There are more people in the world and more who are caught in the devil's power than ever. People have, perhaps in ignorance, chosen spiritual death because they have not heard or witnessed the good news that Jesus brought to us. Jesus showed His disciples the way to remedy this.

The good shepherd left the 99 to go out and look for the lost sheep. (Luke 15:3-7) The Bible story says that Jesus left the 99 in the open country. So urgent was the need to rescue that lost sheep that He did not consider it necessary to take the others home first. It seems strange that there was such rejoicing in heaven over one lost sheep, but this little sheep must have been so thankful that it was found before the wolf killed it. We meet desperate people in the streets. Everything has gone wrong and they feel there is no one to help them. Often God has brought them to us and we pray with them and they thankfully accept our prayer and renew their hope. They feel the love of God touch them and they sometimes give us hugs and kisses of thankfulness.

Jesus told another parable about the wedding banquet. All those who were originally invited were too busy when the day of the banquet arrived and they refused to come. (Matthew 22:1-14) He is speaking to the chief priests and the Pharisees who were there and He was telling this story after He had spoken about the landowner who sent his son to collect his fruit. (Matthew 21:33-46) They knew He was talking to them but reacted badly. In Luke's gospel he mentions the excuses the original guests gave. (Luke 14:15-24) Every excuse was valid for not going to war (Deuteronomy 20:5-8) so what did they think

the banquet was for? Their refusal made the king enraged. He intended to go ahead with the banquet so he sent out servants to gather both good and bad people who were willing to come. Each was offered a wedding garment (symbolic of the robe of righteousness) to wear at the party. Apparently one refused to lay aside his soiled clothes. He had decided that he would be OK as he was and he had no answer when asked why he did not have a clean garment. According to the story it was OK to be a "bad" person as long as you wore the wedding garment. The man in the soiled garment could have been a "good" person but he was thrown out of the party.

There are so many people in churches who are good people but are they wearing the robe of righteousness that Jesus has offered to us? Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (Romans 10:4) For the Kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17) Anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God.

Each person who is born again by the Spirit of God is just a new spiritual baby who needs guidance, teaching and training, but especially loving care. No matter how old they are in the world's count, in spiritual things they know next to nothing and, if they are not young in years, have a lot of unlearning to do. They are not often "cute" like a real baby, and often show the worst traits that a child can do, but without the humility of a child. Nevertheless they will not grow up unless they are shown the way so "mature" Christians need to have patience.

11. EQUIPPING THE NEXT GENERATION

The next generation is not only the young but also those who have just been born again. Paul's letters to the churches give insight into God's way to do this. God has appointed a fivefold ministry to work as His team, with defined strengths and gifts of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 4:11) Their direct responsibility is clearly stated – to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:12&13)

It is significant that Paul wrote these words to the Ephesians who had originally had the amazing experience when Paul went to Ephesus and placed his hands on the early disciples in that place. They had received the Holy Spirit with tongues and prophesying powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit. As with Saul, (1 Samuel 10:6) they would have been changed into a "different person", and had confidence that God was with them. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he castigated them for being "worldly" – mere infants in Christ. (1 Corinthians 3:1) Now there is nothing wrong with being "an infant in Christ" to begin, but many people stay there. I'm OK, they say, and do not bother to attend the prayer meeting or the Bible study. This is not God's plan and because He loves His new babies He will discipline them. (Hebrews 12:5-13) This is often HARDSHIP and we are warned it is not pleasant but painful. (Hebrews 12:10) Job's hardships give us many examples of what can happen. (eg., Job 1:13-22) This book is a wonderful study of what to do and what not to do. But babies in Christ (who are of an age of understanding) need to know why God does this disciplining.

Just as one's child is vulnerable to those who hold different values from the parent, so also is a young Christian. Paul begins his instruction to Timothy by warning against false teachers who promote controversies rather than God's work. (1 Timothy 1:4) He emphasises that God's work is by faith and love. One of the things that confuses people outside the church is that one denomination disagrees with another and promotes themselves that they are right and the other wrong. We are very careful in our ministry not to criticise any denomination or religion, but to love them. Even Jesus taught His followers to do what the Pharisees teach but not what they do, because they do not practise what they preach. (Matthew 23:3) It is very important, therefore, that we demonstrate what we teach.

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote that it is important to live to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1), to be holy and behave honourably. Those who are new in the faith are watching to see how to behave. Many have rejected God because their mentors have compromised with the "world". Our training of the young in Christ should be a challenge to them to "follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ". (1 Corinthians 11:1) Paul is especially teaching morality and sexual purity. This area is where humankind is most vulnerable to the devil's attacks and their own flesh, and this is where our modern world has become very "tolerant". There is even promotion of tolerance to the point of acceptance as wrong of what God has decreed as right. Jesus died for sinners. (Romans 5:8) But we do not

stay there, because God's seed has been planted in our hearts, and if we live in Him and He in us we do not keep on sinning. (1 John 3:6) This verse tell us that if we continue to sin we have not seen or known Him.

The young Christian has presumably met Jesus, by faith, and tasted the goodness of God. When they are filled with the Holy Spirit they should thirst after righteousness and the presence of God, just as any growing baby wants to please its parents and to be near them.

12. GROWING OLD

Those who have been in the family for a long time have much experience to share, but right to the end they need to keep on growing into the likeness of Christ. This should never cease.

It is a wonderful thing to wake up each morning and "look to Him to be radiant." (Psalm 34:5) He wants us to carry His fragrance, for we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved...the fragrance of life. (2 Corinthians 3:14-16) We are confident that our citizenship is in heaven... and He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body. (Philippians 3:20&21) They will reflect what is described in Revelation. "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire... His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." (Revelation 1:14&15)

It seems rather ridiculous to think that this could be, but He has no envy within Him. He wants us to aspire to this. He has prophesied that this is how it will be. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father." (Matthew 13:43) In fact this thought that His disciples would become like this encouraged Him to face the ordeal of the Cross. "After the suffering of His soul, He will see the Light and be satisfied." (Isaiah 53:11)

The Bible says that grey hair is the splendour of the old. (Proverbs 20:29) "Humility and the reverence of God bring wealth, honour and life". (Proverbs 22:4) "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Because he loves Me I will rescue him... protect him (says the Lord). He will call upon Me and I will answer him... I will deliver him and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him My salvation." (Psalm 91:1&14-16) The glorified Jesus also gives messages to the churches of the rewards of overcoming.

- will be given the right to eat from the tree of life
- will receive the crown of life
- will be given some of the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it
- will be given authority over the nations and the morning star (the devil – Isaiah 14:12)
- will be dressed in white and will be acknowledged before the heavenly Father
- will receive the name of God and the new name of Jesus

• will receive the right to sit with Jesus on His throne. (Revelation 2:7,10,17,26&28 and 3:5,12,21)

Although the younger members of God's family do not always show respect, it is beholden on the older who are "seasoned" in forgiveness and trust in God, to keep praying. Everyone is on a journey of faith and growth. Another interesting thing we have to remember is that we have sown seeds into the younger generation and we should expect that they will have more knowledge, more revelation and go further than we have. This is what we have received from those who have gone before us. We are determined to please only our God and Saviour for His "well done".

One thing we, the writers, (aged 78 and 75) know for certain. God is faithful and knows our "works" (James 2:22 and Revelation 2:2; 3:8) that we have done in faith and love for Him. He rewards us, both here in this life and especially in the life to come. But reward, however good, does not bear comparison with God's "well done" which He speaks into our hearts every time we obey Him in faith. He truly is a good "Daddy" who loves to encourage us. These experiences in our relationship with Him fill us with more love and more joy, and help us to appropriate His wonderful promises.

We can only testify that "Living in the Kingdom of God" is the Way, the Truth and the Life. AMEN.