

to “be there” for people as they encounter challenges with raising children, being married, and trying to make ends meet. While Ellen will never be the object of a testimonial dinner, she is storing up treasure in God’s Kingdom. She loves with what she has been given - and expects nothing in return.

This is the simplicity of Kingdom Spirituality. The King over all has come to the earth. His Kingdom is being planted in the hearts of men and women in every century. As we turn from our separation from God (repent) and turn toward this great Light (Jesus) we are given a choice. “Come, FOLLOW ME, and I will make you fishers of men.” This transformation occurs from the inside out. Rather than merely re-training ourselves behaviorally, the core of our being begins a genuine change. True peace begins reforming the priorities of our hearts - and such impact transforms the essence of who we are.

All of my life as a spiritual person I have been haunted by the incompleteness of religion. We have a root heart problem transcending any philosophical, social, economic, or racial issue. Admitting this was one of my first steps in allowing myself to be overtaken by Fusion. If I can separate Jesus from what is done in His Name, then I can once again see the purity and simplicity of what God is trying to accomplish on the earth. Like Ellen, I can carve out my own kingdom life and present it as an offering as I enter the life to come. I can kick out the props of religious living and embrace the energy of Kingdom spirituality!

How do you feel about your connectedness with the King of the earth? In what ways has religion helped this process? How has it obscured the Kingdom for you? Have you opened your own reciprocal conversation with Jesus? These are key questions if you desire authenticity in your life.

*Kingdom faith: King - next Kingdom - then church. In what ways is Jesus entangled in religion in our society? In the current representation of the church? Do you believe that Jesus is the King of the*

*earth? How would you describe the current status your faith?*

## FRIENDS AND COMPANIONS



The words we speak are powerful. We either carry words of life or words of death. Words of life spur others on to something greater. Words of death discourage, stop people in their tracks, and fuel insecurity and hopelessness. Kingdom spirituality teaches people to become strong in giving words of life!

We were designed to thrive in relationships but interpersonal isolation is more common in the world in which we live. If the Kingdom is to grow in our lives we need to invest significant time with people who share our values - including those who have yet to embrace the Kingdom. The following “one another’s” were excerpted from letters of the followers of Jesus as they attempted to live genuine Kingdom spirituality among people from “every nation under heaven.” They are all fruits of the “men of peace” to whom Jesus refers.

### **Our Life With One Another** (Romans 12:3-21; 14:10-23)

John the apostle was very clear. “If we cannot love our neighbor whom we can see, how shall we love God whom we cannot see.” This principle is key to breaking the cultural isolation which keeps us from joining others in pursuit of genuine faith.

Our community has learned a lot about love through the years. It is easy to love people who love us, but much more difficult to love impartially. True love really does bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things.

You learn most about the love of others when you are weak or fail in some way. Enter the jackals when you are overcome by weakness, accused falsely, or come face to face with your shortcomings! Through years of sifting we have found friends and companions who are principled in their loyalty and who love us even when we don't measure up. They have helped us press the questions: How strong is my ability to love? Am I willing to sacrifice part of myself to see others excel and grow? (1 Peter 1:22; 4:8)

### **Consider One Another** (Hebrews 10:24)

We have a friend who is very discerning and has a God-built ability to be sincerely interested in people of different backgrounds and ages. It is fun to be around her because you can count on Diane to engage relationally. She is willing to take risks, put herself out there, and draw people into the circle of meaningful conversation. When she is absent from our lives for periods of time we suffer for it. People like this bring out the color in human existence, and turn drab landscapes into a beautiful wash of life and energy.

### **Build Up One Another** (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

We walk with a couple who are about as practically helpful as you can imagine. Not only do they serve others in Christ's body, their life and home are opened and intertwined with their neighbors. As Dennis and Cheri raise their three boys and daughter they have built us up and refreshed us many times by their willing participation. If it needs to be done, they will be there. They have an uncanny sense of overcoming when it comes to participation in the mission, and they are willing to re-shuffle their lives for the benefit of others. And they do all this with the challenges of a special needs child in their home. They inspire me to ask the questions: What do I have by way of experiences, abilities, and personality that can

benefit others? What can I do to support and strengthen other people?

### **Be Devoted to One Another** (Romans 12:10)

I have friend who is truly a loyal partner in life. His wife has even described him as having the faithful qualities of a golden retriever. He lives to serve others in practical ways. He and I have pioneered many things together. We have cleared land, built buildings, and developed things where there were only ideas and very few resources. Together we have tackled these tasks without looking back. I deeply appreciate Karlen. I can count on him to stay focused and to have my back. He helps me to ask the questions: How committed am I to sticking with other people? Am I willing to overcome interpersonal obstacles that will develop lasting relationships? Am I willing to serve others and move forward, whether or not I receive recognition or a tangible reward?

### **Accept One Another** (Romans 15:7)

Patty is the consummate defender of the helpless. In her profession as a physical therapist she chooses to work with families with significant needs, and has gone to many painful funerals. Her work has actually cost her some of her physical health. What is cool about Patty is that she always looks for reasons to accept others. God has given her a profound energy to hope for the best, and has blessed her in overcoming some of her painful past, which would be crushing and debilitating to many people. Her husband John (who many people consider the "nicest" person they know) completes their home of acceptance by being one of the most approachable, non-judgmental people that I know. They constrain me to ask the questions: Do people have to measure up to my standards to be acceptable to me? How tolerant am I of others' differences? Can I overlook other people's shortcomings?

### **Care for One Another** (1 Corinthians 12:25)

I have enjoyed the privilege of walking with some discerning, compassionate men over the last number of years. Together we have done our best to be faithful to God and impartial in our care for the people God brings our way. It is interesting to me to see the willingness each of these “elders” as they have cared for people – some in pressing and even dire need, as well as encouraging many others engaged in the grind of trying to build lives of substance. And some of their most lavish love is painfully rejected! Sometimes love costs us way more than we are willing to give, and we must humble ourselves as we entrust the needs of others to God’s impartial care. People who care make me ask the questions: Am I able to provide practical care for others’ needs? By whom do I feel I am being cared for and toward whom am I actively giving care?

### **Admonish One Another** (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)

Truth-speaking is risky today. We all want friends but often define a friend as someone who will agree with us or tell us what we want to hear. Speaking honestly to another requires a huge amount of security on the part of both parties. A good friend tells you the truth about what they see and hear, both when the input is positive as well as negative. The very nature of admonishing produces and inspires a course correction. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend!” Caring truth-speakers make me want to ask hard questions I would prefer to not think about: Am I willing to take the risk of being truthful with others when there is an opportunity to grow? Am I willing to receive the thoughts of others when there are things that need to be said to me?

### **Comfort One Another** (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

I have an old friend named Mike I run into every now and then, usually when people we have in common experience a crisis. When life is hard, people feel very alone. What I really appreciate about Mike is that he has no barriers when it comes to stepping in and doing what he can to help when people he knows are in distress. People like Mike make me brave in what are for me very uncomfortable situations. They make me ask questions like: How do I break through my natural barriers to care for others when they are hurting? When they are sinking? Am I willing to set aside my comfort levels in order to reach out and care for others, even when situations may seem hopeless, or when I feel inadequate?

### **Serve One Another** (Galatians 5:13)

It is easy to serve to be seen. True servants shy away from recognition. They often choose more difficult, less visible ways to bless others. Our friend Sarah is like that. She is so content to work behind the scene. Making a wedding dress, planning a week’s food for 80 (in the woods), dropping off a piece of material, organizing a birthday party – I really could give a long list. While I know Sarah likes to be thanked on a personal basis, she truly loves the process and outcome of her serving. She uses whatever project or event to draw out, connect, and care for others. She inspires me to ask questions which are foreign to my nature: What are other people’s love languages? How do I discern what a person really needs? Inasmuch as serving does not come naturally, how does a person learn to become servant-aware? Why in the world did Jesus choose to wash His own disciples’ feet?

### **Bear With One Another** (Ephesians 4:2)

There are certainly people who are easier to love than others! Burnadette and I will often laugh that the only truly “normal” people seem to be us. We do this tongue and cheek, of course, but it is ironic that we all have pretty significant uniquenesses, quirks and idiosyncrasies. Sometimes we must bear with the weaknesses or immaturity of others. Often we must allow ourselves to be outshined by their superior strengths.

I remember as a young man someone a little older than I was (and with more spiritual experience) told me that I took myself too seriously. I have never forgotten his comment. I try to be deeply sincere, but at the same time try to be able to lighten up and laugh at myself and others. How can I become the kind of person who makes room for the growth of others? Am I patient to wait for others to come to where they need to be (or where I need to be) in order for us to be in harmony? Am I able to set my needs aside for another person’s welfare?

### **Be Kind to One Another** (Ephesians 4:32)

Several years ago our family significantly let down some friends. I can still remember wanting to vomit as this dad began to tell me about the offense. It was one of those precarious moments where our family was completely exposed. As our friend talked through what had been done and what he wanted to have happen to rectify the wrong, I was overwhelmed with the grace of such a principled man. Though his family had been offended significantly, he was willing to be obedient to God and merciful and kind to us. The offense was devastating, but his kindness was humbling. People like this make me want to extend kindness to others. How can I choose to do the kind thing rather than be offended or obsessed with getting even or having a “right” to my anger? How can I learn to be sensitive to God’s greater purposes and treat others with

kindness?

### **Speak and Submit to One Another** (Ephesians 5:19, 20)

One of the beautiful things about having varying gifts is that we can provide protection for one another. One of my most faithful friends in the Good News is Andre’. He and I had the privilege of starting the first spiritual music radio station in our city. Before we launched this 20 year odyssey, I asked our elders what they thought. It was not an easily received idea, inasmuch as they knew what such an effort would require from me and our community of friends. One week later we met to make a final decision – and all of us were in favor of moving forward. By praying, our skepticism had been removed (it could have just as easily multiplied into a definitive no).

Many times over those next months and years Andre’ and I had differing viewpoints. Sometimes our opposing views put a strain on our relationship, especially because the financial pressure was intense. But because Andre’ was the kind of man who was willing to speak his mind in love and strength, God used him to protect me and provide a partner every bit as committed to our mutual submission to God’s will as to our success in the effort. God used our relationship to bless many people. Andre’ is the kind of man who makes me willing to take the risk of submitting to the other people around me. He helps me ask and teach others to ask the questions: Do I have the courage to find submissive truth? It is easy to submit to those with whom we agree, but how do we speak truth and submit to one another even when we are in disagreement?

### **Regard One Another** (Philippians 2:3)

Skip is a successful relational evangelist. He has helped me to understand that the work of sharing the good news is

one of building bridges wherever God reveals a chasm. He is comfortable among many people groups, and he is good at asking questions. Somehow he seems to get away with having spiritual conversations all of the time. He designs his life to be inclusive, and he has learned the art of ongoing personal conversation.

I have watched Skip carefully over many years, and I have come to the conclusion that he succeeds because he has a high regard for people – even if they are very different from himself. Muslim, Jew, atheist or agnostic – professional or everyday working person - Skip sees a person's shared humanity. He has regard for each man or woman's intrinsic worth, whether they agree with him theologically or not. By his example, Skip has taught me not to dismiss people who fail to measure to my standards or function as I do. It is easy to mask our natural aura of self-importance. But holding others in high regard produces amazing results while building Kingdom relationships.

#### **Be at Peace with One Another** (1 Thessalonians 5:13)

Strife and agitation come naturally for humans. Over the years I have worked with many musicians, and they can be a particularly testy people-group. My friends Dean and Diane have been a part of this network of relationships, and I have watched them be taken for granted, imposed upon, and treated poorly on numerous occasions as people have come and gone. Through all of this they have been at peace with this very diverse group of people. They go about their business with joy, and are content to live peacefully with others and to provide an atmosphere of grace.

I count on Dean and Diane to be a sane voice of peace in an agitated, self-centered, and chaotic world. Their grateful hearts and faithful unflappability have blessed me often, and they help me answer the question: How do I set aside agitation and even insult and enjoy peaceful relationships with people

who rub me the wrong way?

#### **Confess to One Another** (James 5:16)

It is easy to try to manage our insecurities and shortcomings by ourselves, but it is a great gift to find confidants we know will care for and pray for us - even in our dark or weak times. I have a circle of male friends whom I am very comfortable being transparent around. I can discuss my weaknesses and know they won't try to fix me, but will pray for me and care about me. They will also tell me what they think, and encourage me to overcome my issues and remain faithful to the way I have chosen. These men are acquainted with their own weaknesses and won't exploit mine. I feel quite blessed to have friends who can handle my weaknesses and care enough to lift me up when I am weak. They help me ask the question "am I connected or am I isolated?"

#### **Pray for One Another** (James 5:16)

Part of love for one another is to care about spoken and unspoken needs and issues and take them before God on another's behalf. It is easy to underestimate the power of this kind of love. When we care enough to pray for someone else with passion and regularity, we are showing a deep labor of love. It is easy to think our prayers don't matter or ultimately change nothing. But the scriptures make it clear that praying for others can be of great spiritual value.

Gretchen faithfully prays without a thought to current appearances. Connie joyfully anticipates God's hand moving even in the most immovable situations. Fervency and effectiveness are noted in the verse above, and those who pursue the quest of making a difference in prayer are incredibly valuable to the spiritual life of those around them. If for no other reason than people who truly pray are rare.

Friends such as these help me to ask the questions “what is the Voice saying to me?” and “do I care enough to listen?”

**Encourage One Another** (1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13)

We have basically three groups of friends. There are those we have known a long time, and with whom we share a backlog of experiences and battles we have fought together. We started our careers, established our families, and forged our faith lives together. They encourage me by their confident faithfulness and the way they care about me, my wife, my children, and now my grand kids.

We also have companions who are too old to be our children but have entered our reciprocal circle of care over the years. We rely upon them for their energy, their emerging passion, and their respect for our experience. They encourage us by their active embrace of Kingdom spirituality as they try to do their best to build God-honoring homes.


We are also grow increasingly excited about our younger friends. As they sift through various philosophies and make their own decisions of faith, they encourage us by their openness and their willingness to submit to God’s hand upon their lives. Their energy for life and God spur us on. Each of these generations of friends encourage us to ask the questions: How do I help someone to continue moving forward? What words will help spur others on? How can I learn to speak words of life?

There have been so many stories which have come to mind as I have written *Curious Journey* and put together *Fourthstream.com*. These are just a few of the people who have shaped our souls. There are many others. Each of your gifts has touched us in deep ways. From you (and many others like you) we have learned the basics of giving and receiving words of life. Our friends and companions have incrementally

drawn us toward fusion with my Creator.

*What relationships do you consider to be substantive ones in your journey? Who would be your top 5 best friends? Why are they? What kinds of companionship can humans experience?*

## SNAPSHOT



Sarah and Alex are learning to have a Kingdom home. They have started to build their life together with a common foundation of submission to their King, Jesus Christ. Their faith is very organic in that they try to understand what Jesus wants and then let His desires begin to take over the foundation of their hearts. They have chosen the hard path of oneness in marriage, growing in character, and pleasing God. They have decided to roll up their sleeves and engage the arduous work of building a Kingdom life.

Some of their free time is invested understanding the scriptures, praying for their friends-family-neighbors, and enjoying activities that put them into close proximity with people who know the King - as well as people who do not. Like us they work on their home, pursue their interests, keep in touch with their families, argue, burn meals, and on occasion get sick of work and life. At the end of each week they sit down and talk about what worked and what didn’t and they make plans for another week.

While Christianity and “church” is a touchstone in their lives - pleasing their King has captured their imaginations. They believe every dollar they earn, every hour they live, and every circumstance they encounter is an opportunity for God’s