

# Kingdom Kernels

## Living at the Top of the Mountain

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A number of controllable factors can prevent a disciple of Jesus from getting to the breakthrough of a movement of God: lack of effort, non-reproducible methods, and inattention to the highest value activities.

But chief among them is *lack of faith* that God will start a movement "in this place, at this time, through me." Without such faith all our efforts are in vain.

Matthew 17 paints a striking contrast between what is possible with God and what is possible without Him.



### Living at the Top of the Mountain

Peter, James and John accompanied Jesus to the top of the mountain of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-13). The pre-incarnate glory of Jesus was unveiled before their eyes, and the voice from Heaven spoke, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." The disciples fell on their faces terrified. Looking up, they saw Jesus alone.

In that rarefied atmosphere, nothing the revealed Son of God spoke to the disciples would have been doubted. No mission too difficult. No obstacle too great. No enemy too deeply entrenched.

*The heart of the Father was clear and the mission of the Son unstoppable. Period.*

Life at the top of the mountain is good. The mission is clear. The promise is sure. The power is infinite. The problem is that the disciples, as all disciples must, had to descend the mountain to the rest of the real world – a place where *competing realities mix messages and weaken faith.*

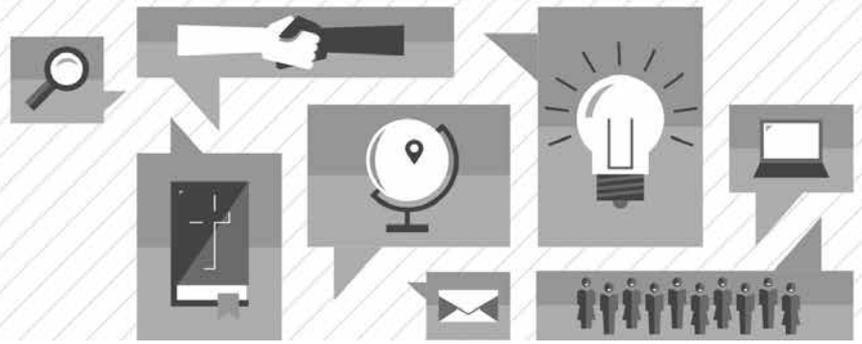
Kingdom practitioners face similar challenges. They attend conferences and climb to the top of the mountain. The heart of the Father is clear – a plentiful harvest of all peoples. The mission of the Son is unstoppable – to make disciples that can multiply generation after generation. The promises of God are enough to carry the practitioners past any obstacle. They make a good start, but eventually hit obstacles that mire them in their tracks.

Many of us live at the top of the mountain at conferences but at the bottom of the mountain in ministry.

### Living at the Bottom of the Mountain

At the bottom of the mountain, the remaining nine were fighting against another reality: the crippling bondage of the evil one (Matt. 17:14-21). The nine expended all of their efforts to cast a destructive demon out of a boy to no avail.

The twelve apostles had *already* been authorized by Jesus to cast out demons (Matt. 10:1) and



experienced great success (Mark 6:13). This was reality. But apparently in Matthew 17 they encountered a demonic stronghold that exceeded their experience and faith. I imagine the nine shouting louder and louder but to no avail. No matter what the nine tried they came up empty.

Similarly kingdom practitioners encounter strongholds that defy experience and exceed their faith. No matter how hard they shout and shove against the wall, nothing brings it down. At this point many give up and resign themselves to believing that a movement cannot occur in their contexts. End of story.

### **Perverted Thinking**

But in Matthew 17, Jesus suddenly entered the power struggle. A father knelt before him, crying out for the deliverance of his son. But Jesus' words are shocking:

*And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."* (Matt. 17:17, NASB)

We reserve the word "perverted" for only the most heinous of sins. It is not that someone is simply off track (sin) but that they have taken the divinely created order and turned it upside down (twisting or perverting). A man lying with a woman who is not his wife is sin. A man lying with another man, a child or animal is perversion.

Jesus' words sound harsh until we realize the depth of the spiritual lie Jesus was challenging. At the top of the mountain no doubt existed about Jesus' deity and power. At the top it was clear. But at the

bottom of the mountain a perverted lie continued its millennia-old march: *What is more perverted than to say that the enemy, created by Almighty God, has more power to hold a child in bondage than the Almighty has to release him?*

This was taking the divine order and turning it on its head. The father believed the lie. The nine believed the lie. They succumbed to perverted thinking. And such perverted thinking is epidemic in the kingdom expansion community.

### **Three Types of Perverted Thinking**

Today kingdom practitioners exercise their minds in three types of perverted thinking.

#### **1. Not here**

They engage in amazing spiritual gymnastics to explain why their people group, city or community is an exception to the plentiful harvest principle. The more I travel around to the six inhabited continents the more I become convinced of a truth: *Missionaries and church planters think their people group is uniquely challenging, and the reality is that they are no harder than most others.* They feel their group is an exception: A CPM could start somewhere else, but not here.

*Perverted thinking!* Such thinking flies in the face of the promises of God that a multitude from every people group will stand before the throne (e.g. Rev. 7:9). In essence they are saying: "My group is too hard for God." That's taking the

divine order and turning it upside down.

#### **2. Not now**

Some practitioners take a step forward and acknowledge that God wants a plentiful harvest in their people groups – perhaps even that He wants to start a movement. But the lie they buy into is that it will be *at some time in the distant future when certain conditions have been met.* They say, "Maybe here, but not now."

Such logic flies in the face of the promises of God that the harvest is ready and plentiful now (Matt. 9:37; John 4:35). They say "four more months." Jesus says, "Now!" In essence they are saying that the barriers of this people group are too hard for the conviction of the Holy Spirit at this point (John 16:8). Perhaps another generation will reap.

#### **3. Not through me**

Some practitioners become convinced that this is God's time for their people group or city to be the recipient of a movement of God. But when they look inward they say: "I can see it happening through \_\_\_\_\_ (some well-respected practitioner), but not through me."

Such thinking twists the divinely created order. It is as if they are saying that spiritual increase lies with us when the reality is that only God brings the increase (1 Cor. 3:6-7). As human servants, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The God who makes

two copper pennies worth more than all of the treasures of the wealthy can bring a harvest through any humble servant of God (Mark 12:41-44).

*At the bottom of the mountain, the heavenly reality becomes obscured and it is all too easy for us to succumb to perverted thinking.*

### **Problem: Lack of Faith**

The contrast between the top of the mountain and the bottom of the mountain is evident in what occurs next:

*And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. (Matt. 17:18, NASB)*

The “at once” nature of Jesus’ solution demonstrated how deep had been the perversion of the attempts of the nine disciples.

In private the nine asked Jesus why they could not overcome this stronghold. Jesus summed it up: the littleness of their faith.

Kingdom practitioners all over the world face a similar problem – a lack of faith that God will launch kingdom movements. The chief problem is a lack of understanding of what faith is.

Faith is not *the force* of Star Wars fame. Many disciples think that if they can just believe more strongly, feel more deeply, speak more loudly or utter the right words, the problem will be solved. That is not faith; that is the force or magic.

Faith is not *manipulating* God. Many disciples think that if they pray more fervently, they can twist God’s arm to do something He does not intend to do. That is not faith; that is manipulation.



Faith is not *presumption*. Like the children of Israel in Numbers 14:40ff where some presume that they can claim the promises of God without meeting their requirements. That is not faith; that is presumption.

### **Faith is REST**

We have all heard faith defined many ways. But I find its essence clarified in one word: **REST**. I have the most dependable man on Planet Earth to thank for that – my father.

I am an exceptionally blessed son. In my five decades of life, I can remember no instance in which my father promised me something and failed to deliver on that promise.

In the first mission field in which I served, I had to register a legal business for visa purposes. I was at a loss for how to start and filled with tension. I remember calling my father, who was a businessman thousands of miles away, and asking him to register a business for me in the U.S. I still can hear his response: “I’ll take care of it!”

At that moment all of my fears fled away. I was at complete rest. My dad was doing his part. I began doing my part (busier than ever) – filling out application forms and printing business cards – with a heart at rest. I knew that when my father said “I’ll take care of it” he meant it. Not a shred of doubt remained. Rest!



Faith is the quiet, assured expectation that our Heavenly Father will do what He has promised. If you have no faith in my earthly father, it is because you do not know him. If you have little faith in your Heavenly Father, it is because you understand Him too little. ***Our chief problem is a low estimate of our Heavenly Father and what He is about. We don't understand His heart.***

### **A Little Bit of Faith in a Great God**

When Jesus presented the solution to His disciples he told them they only needed faith like a mustard seed to move mountains (Matt. 17:20). Jesus pointed to the essence of faith which

is not the one believing but the One believed in. Faith is not about the believer but the object of belief.

For most of my life, my image of Jesus in this episode was one of frustration with His disciples. I imagined Him throwing up his hands in the air and crying out about their lack of faith. I imagined him castigating His followers: “Come on, guys! If you just had *this* much faith, you could do it. When will you ever learn?! What will I do with this motley crew?”

Watching the movie *The Visual Bible*, Matthew’s presentation of this scene transformed my image. In that video, Jesus scratches His disciple’s head playfully. With a huge grin he gives a pep talk that feels like this: “Come on, guys! Cheer up! All you need is faith the size of a mustard seed. *Just a little faith in a great God* and He will move this mountain for you!”

Too often we make faith about our faith (literally *faith in our faith*). Faith is about our God. Faith is about the object we believe in. *It is not about how strongly you believe but how strong is the God you believe in!* The devil is not afraid of your shouting but he is afraid of your God.

And so I repeat, our chief problem is a low estimate of who God is. This is the cause of our lack of faith. ***What God do you worship?*** Is He the God of the Bible or an impotent, truncated, era-limited shell of His former self? Know your God and rest!

### **Faith that Grows and Expands**

If faith is about the nature of our Heavenly Father and not about how strongly we can conjure up feelings of faith, then faith can only grow as

our understanding of God expands. Like a mustard seed grows into a mighty tree, so our faith grows as we understand our Father’s heart – his majestic nature, intentions and promises.

Such understanding comes as we mine the depths of the Word of God and rest in that Word. Such understanding comes as we examine the works of God (Psalm 111:2-4) and ponder how this God has worked throughout history.

***If you want to increase your faith, increase your understanding of God!*** At times my faith wanes being at the bottom of the mountain and my view of God gets clouded. In those moments, I love to listen to our departed brother S.M. Lockridge recite “My King.” Search for it on the web, close your eyes and listen. Recall with him the majesty of your God and let your faith soar again to a biblical, mountaintop reality.

### **Moving On to Victory**

This obstacle at the bottom of the mountain served as a launching point for the nine to move to increased faith. As the disciples were sent out on a new mission with many others, they returned with joy declaring to Jesus: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” (Luke 10:17, NASB) The prior barrier served as an occasion to examine their perverted thinking. With a fresh sense of the majesty of their God, they pushed through the barriers and on to victory. With hearts full of rest!

Where will you choose to live? At the top of the mountain or the bottom? Let the King unveil His glory in your presence. Know your Father’s heart and REST! 