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THE PRIORITY OF THE KINGDOM

There once was a man who visited the doctor because, as he told the doctor, his entire body hurt. From the top of his head to the bottom of his feet he was in pain. Every single place he touched brought great pain to him.

The doctor looked him over and then said, “Well, this seems very unusual. I don’t see anything wrong.” He proceeded to ask the man to touch different places on his body such as his forehead, nose, elbow, and knees. Each time the man touched a different place on his body, he cried out in pain. “It hurts, it hurts,” the man complained.

After a few minutes of going through this process, the doctor deciphered the issue.

“Sir,” the doctor said with a bit of a sigh, “you have dislocated your finger.”

While it felt like everything was wrong with this man, only one thing was wrong. His finger was dislocated, thus causing pain any time he touched a different part of his body. If this man could ever fix this one problem, then all of the pain he thought he was going through elsewhere would be fixed as well.

A number of us are going through life with a lot of different issues that are painful, disappointing, or frustrating. We experience this in our world, lives, direction, purpose, relationships, and all else. It seems like the entire thing is a mess. However, the solution for getting all else functioning properly in your life boils down to one primary principle found in God’s Word. If you can get this one thing right, you will get everything else right simply because this one thing affects everything else.

The longest sermon Jesus preached while on earth is recorded in the Bible and is called the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon takes up three full chapters (Matthew 5–7), and it is addressed to believers—originally to His disciples. Christ’s Sermon on the Mount is primarily a sermon about the kingdom.

The centerpiece of this sermon revolves around one verse.

In fact, this one verse is the centerpiece of kingdom living altogether. We read, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Before we take a look at the word I want to focus on from this verse—the word “first”—let’s visit the concept of the kingdom. We can’t understand how to align ourselves underneath God’s comprehensive rule if we don’t first understand the kingdom where He reigns.

His is a kingdom without borders and a kingdom without time. To apply the rules, precepts, and writs of this world to this very unearthly kingdom would be similar to bringing a horse and polo stick to a football linebacker, and instructing him to get on with it and play. The rules and tools of this earth do not govern the rules of God’s kingdom. As King He sets the way it is to both operate and function. There is one Ruler—God. The rest of us are subject to His rule. He sets the standards, makes the laws, determines the consequences, and establishes the blessings.

In God’s kingdom power goes to the weak, who recognize their weakness and humbly look to Him. Forgiveness reigns preeminently, and the amount of money matters less than the heart that offers it, as we see in the case of the widow and her mite. Significance in the kingdom is connected to service. Hope comes through helping others who may need it. Destiny is realized while advancing the purposes of the King.

Jesus spoke plainly of the kingdom when He told Pilate the ways of His kingdom do not reflect the ways of the kingdoms on earth: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

He said, “If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36 NIV).

When His followers asked Him to tell them who was the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus pulled a child close to Him and then replied, “Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Continuing on—rather than requiring and demanding the pomp and circumstance typically befit for a King—He instructed His subjects how He would like to be approached as their Ruler and Lord: “And whoever welcomes one such child in my name,” Jesus said, “welcomes me” (Matthew 18:4, 5 NIV).

Unfortunately, many of us either don’t understand the kingdom or have chosen to live our lives apart from it. We are living as followers of a King whom we seek to dethrone, though maybe not outright, through more subtle ways of complacency, autonomy, independence, or simply through a lack of a connection to Him, His Word, and His rule.

As a result, we experience what anyone in any kingdom living apart from the rules of the King would—in our personal lives, homes, churches, communities, and nation: the chaos that comes from rebellion.

In a kingdom life is to be lived under the rule and authority of the King. The blessings of the covenant of our King in His Word, imbued with the authority He gives us through His promises and His *chesed* love, come when we live all of our life under God. Our King and His kingdom have an agenda, and that agenda is His comprehensive rule over every area of life.

The beginning point for living according to God's kingdom agenda can be found in the word from the passage we opened the chapter with: "first." It is the diminishing of the value of "first" that has led to the diminishing of the experience of God's best in many, if not most, areas of our lives.

SEEK YE FIRST

To live life to its fullest and to accomplish and experience all God created you to do, God and His kingdom must be first. God is not to be one among many; He is to be first. The problem in most of our lives today is God is merely in the vicinity; He is not first. I often hear people tell me they don't have enough time for God—which means they are really telling me God is not first place in their lives. This is because a person will always make time for what is first, for what matters most.

Over and over in Scripture we read about God and the offering where He asks for the "first fruits" of all He has given

us. As just one example of many, we read in Proverbs, “Honor the LORD from your wealth and from the first of all your produce . . .” (Proverbs 3:9). When Jesus reproved the church at Ephesus, as recorded in the book of Revelation, He chided them for having left their first love (Revelation 2:4). Jesus wasn’t saying they didn’t love Him at all. In fact He applauded them for being upstanding people who have “perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary” (v. 3). What He was saying is they had left their first love. They no longer regarded Him as first in their hearts or in their lives.

In Colossians, this point of Christ’s preeminence over all things is further emphasized where we read, “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have *first place* in everything” (Colossians 1:18). God makes it clear here and repeatedly throughout Scripture that He belongs first in our lives.

Many of us who own homes have what are called “living rooms.” However, these rooms are misnamed. They should be called “visiting rooms,” because the majority of us live in the den, kitchen, or family room. I remember when I was growing up in Baltimore if I stepped foot in the living room I was quickly told, in no uncertain terms, to get out of it immediately. In fact, even now when I go back to visit, no one lives in that living room at all. It’s barely used and still has

plastic covering the furniture. This is because the living room to many people is simply reserved for special times or special guests. It is called the living room few people ever live in. It is misnamed.

Many of us have misnamed God. We call Him “Lord God,” but He is only good for the visiting room in our lives. We visit Him on Sunday, and we visit Him in our devotional times, but we do not hang out with Him. We do not live with Him. We do not spend the majority of our time in His presence. What is missing for so many people is the principle of *first*. Jesus said we are to “seek *first*” God and His kingdom, above all else in our lives.

Friend, when the God you acknowledge is not treated as God, you cannot experience His kingdom and its benefits. The follow-up portion of the verse we are looking at states clearly that when you put God first, “all these things” will be given to you. The corollary of that rings true as well—when you do not put God first, you are missing out on all of the benefits and blessings of the King and His kingdom. That doesn’t mean you won’t have problems or issues in life. What it does mean is you will be well equipped to overcome or get through those problems and issues when all of life is aligned under His authority and His rule.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO PUT GOD FIRST

One of the major determining factors to know if you are putting God first in your life is to ask yourself where you turn when you have a decision to make. When you have a problem to resolve, or you need guidance, do you turn to people first? Do you turn to your desires first? Or do you look to God, His Word, and His principles first? Getting God's perspective on a matter and then applying it to the particular situation you are dealing with is one revealer of God's position in your life.

If you are a parent, do you recall saying these words to your children: "Why didn't you talk to me first? I just wish you would have talked to me first." Often parents will let their children know they could have avoided mistakes or problems in life if they would have sought and followed their parent's advice first. While this holds true in parenting, it holds even more true with God. So many people wonder why they are not hearing from God or experiencing His abiding presence and victory in their lives. God's answer to their question is simply, "Because you come to me last. In fact, you go to the world—a system that leaves me out—first. And you only come to me when none of that works out."

The key to kingdom success is found in this monosyllabic word *first*. The prioritization of the rule of God over every area of life is where the power of kingdom living is found.

PRIORITIZING THE KINGDOM

The context in which we read Matthew 6:33 is critical to understanding it. When we look at the surrounding verses, we can see a recurring theme appearing. We read:

“For this reason I say to you, do not be *worried* about your life. . . .” (v. 25)

“And who of you by being *worried* . . .” (v. 27)

“And why are you *worried* . . .” (v. 28)

“Do not *worry* then . . .” (v. 31)

“So do not *worry* . . .” (v. 34)

Did you catch the theme? Yes, worry. Right in the middle of multiple verses addressing our human tendency to worry, God places the very solution to our worry. He says if you will seek His kingdom first and His righteous standards first, He will grant you all of the things that often make themselves the focus of your worry.

Friend, you ought to put God’s kingdom first if for no other reason than to reduce your personal anxiety and worry. Over forty million US adults suffer from a diagnosed form of anxiety. Countless millions more no doubt suffer from worry or anxiety on less severe levels. Worry is a common issue plaguing people today. Whether it’s worrying about jobs, safety, health, relationships, flying, income, terrorism, the future,

or anything else—worry rots away at many people’s ability to enjoy the gift of life God has given them.

God tells us in this foundational principle for kingdom living that we actually don’t have to worry at all. God Himself—seeking His kingdom and His righteous standards—is the very antidote to worry. In Matthew 6:33 we discover the one principle that affects everything—even the level of your worry.

A man was running late and rushing to catch his plane at the airport. Worried he might miss his flight, he started weaving in and out of the crowd with moves that would make Adrian Peterson proud. Bumping into a man dressed in a flight uniform, the passenger paused briefly to say he was sorry. The uniformed man asked him why he was rushing and he told him that he was trying to catch his flight.

“Where are you going?” the man in the flight uniform asked.

“I’m going to Austin,” he replied.

“Well relax and stop worrying,” the man said with a smile. “Because I’m the pilot and that plane won’t go anywhere without me.”

Immediately the man who had been running through the airport, worried about missing his flight, was able to slow down and rest. This is because he knew where the pilot was. Knowing where God is located—knowing what He promises when you look to Him first—will change your anxiety, frus-

tration, irritation, and exacerbation on all levels.

Of all of the problems you face—whatever the category—and of all of the issues that keep you in perpetual defeat . . . have you placed God first in that area? Have you looked to honor Him first in your heart, attitude, choices, and thoughts? Have you sought His wisdom and will for you on how you are to respond to that situation? If you haven't, go ahead and worry, because you will need to worry. But if you have, then rest—God's got it.

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Chapter six of Matthew closes with the verse that many of us have found easier to commit to heart rather than commit to practice. It says, “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (v. 34).

Most people are being crucified between two thieves: yesterday and tomorrow. They kill today because of what happened yesterday, and they are too scared today because of what may happen tomorrow. Do you know that today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday? In other words, as long as you are on earth you will never run out of tomorrows. There will always be a tomorrow. So until you learn to make today what today is supposed to be—to embrace today, seize it—you will perpetually live your life either bound by yesterday

or tomorrow or even chained between both.

Friend, I would like to challenge you to change one thing and watch that one thing change everything else. When you put God first, all else will fall in place. Make Him first in your thoughts, hopes, and decisions. Put Him first in how you spend your time. Place Him first in how you view the world around you. Please Him first, honor Him first, give to Him first . . . and all else will get in line.

God doesn't say that to put Him first is a request. This is a demand from a deserving King. But when you choose to obey this principle you will reap the benefits of the abundant life Christ came for you to have. In other words, God's got your back when you put Him first.

A lot of people never get to see what it looks like when God has their back because they are out there trying to fix it, solve it, tweak it, and obtain it all by themselves. We are tangling with the Gentiles in a Gentile-run world, and we never truly experience God overruling our issues—simply because we don't put Him first. This is His kingdom and He is the rightful King; putting Him anyplace other than first is foolishness.

Keep in mind we are to seek His “kingdom” and His “righteousness.” *Kingdom* means His authoritative rule along with the visible demonstration of it comprehensively in every area of life. *Righteousness* is the standard God requires for people to be rightly related to Him. It includes abiding by the governing guidelines He has set as the King.

In other words, if you are a kingdom Christian and you want to know the right way to go, think, act, perceive, react, or relate—that is called righteousness. Righteousness simply defined is God’s standard for living life. His kingdom and His righteousness are to be what each of us seeks first. Without them we are wandering aimlessly around without the support and the backing of our King.

In baseball, if you miss first base when you are rounding the bases it doesn’t matter whatever else you do. If you have run past first base without touching it, it doesn’t mean anything that you touch second, third, or home plate. It doesn’t matter that everyone in the stands is cheering you or congratulating you when you cross home. Because if you miss first base, then nothing after that even counts.

In kingdom living, if you fail to seek God’s kingdom and His righteousness first, all else is for naught simply because He has established His rightful place as first and without it you are on your own.

COMMITMENT AND PRIORITY

When you look around at the Christian community today, you frequently see chaos. Marriages are falling apart, singles are struggling to be content. Debt rules. Addictions run amuck. And yet so many people are faithfully in church leaving many to conclude, “My Christianity is just not working.”

They are worn out, lonely, miserable, and frustrated, to say the least.

Many have come to conclude either this thing called Christianity is not real or it is simply not real for them. However, there is a reason why so many well-intentioned believers are falling short of God's best in their lives. This is because without the password called priority, they cannot access all God has in store for them.

If you have a smartphone, it is likely you have a password restriction so if you inadvertently left it somewhere a stranger—or a friend—couldn't pick it up and take advantage of the personal information. Passwords are often critical to the whole process called access, and the password for victorious kingdom living is this word: *First*.

I've talked a lot about the concept of first in this chapter, but perhaps you are wondering, "Tony, what does that look like? How do I do this?" In one of my favorite chapters in Scripture, Paul gives us the visual illustration of what it means to put God first. We read,

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what

God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(Romans 12:1, 2 NIV)

The problem with many Christians is, while they have made a decision to become a Christian by trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation, they have not yet made a decision to become a disciple. They have not surrendered their lives to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ. The difference between a decision-maker and a follower is simply *surrender*.

What Paul is telling us in this passage is God wants us to present ourselves to Him. He wants you to put yourself on the altar. You are to present your life—that means all of you—to Him on His altar. Keep in mind in the Old Testament times, when a sacrifice was placed on an altar, the priest did not just put the head or the arm or a portion of the lamb on the altar. He put the entirety of the being on the altar. What too many believers have done is put a portion of their time, talents, and treasures on God's altar and assumed it is enough. It is not. God wants all of you to be given to Him.

Throughout Scripture we read anytime God wanted to do something big for His people He always required a sacrifice first. There had to be something present that demonstrated sincerity and commitment. Worship is not simply singing songs on a Sunday. True worship, as outlined in Romans 12, is giving yourself to God in your entirety. True worship includes surrender.

I like the story of the chicken and the pig. Both are walking down the street one day when they come to a grocery store with a sign in the window that reads, “Bacon and Eggs Desperately Needed.” The chicken looked at the pig and said, “I’ll give them the eggs if you’ll give them the bacon.”

The pig stared back at the chicken and replied, “No way.”

The chicken asked, “Why not?”

The pig stated, “Because for you it’s a contribution, but for me it’s my life.”

Unfortunately today we have too many Christians who are only willing to give God an egg here or there, and after they do so they think they’ve given enough. Or another thing believers will do is climb up on the altar and then climb back off. They wonder why God isn’t showing up miraculously in their lives. The reason why He is not is God has asked us as kingdom followers to climb up on His altar and give Him our all.

Our King has asked each of us to live our lives as a “living sacrifice.” Quite literally a sacrifice is a dead-thing. So the truest interpretation of this term is we are to be a “living, dead-thing.” We are to be alive to God and His desires while simultaneously being dead to our sinful nature and our own will.

RELATIONSHIP OR RELIGION?

What we need to carefully distinguish, as we look at putting God first and offering our lives in total surrender to His kingdom and His righteousness, is that what we do is rooted in relationship rather than rules. Too frequently people will confuse structure for surrender. They cross off a list and think they have put God first. In all actuality, if God is first you don't need a list because you will naturally seek Him, His heart, and His way in your own personal surrender out of love.

Whenever religious activity, however sincere, trumps relationship, the victory of Christ is no longer experienced in the believer's life. One of the greatest dangers in our churches today is for religion to replace an intimate relationship with the Savior. By religion I am referencing the external adherence to exercises, codes, or practices in the name of God yet apart from God. For example, if you go to church because it is the religious or spiritual thing to do rather than because you are motivated to spend time worshiping God, learning about Him, and experiencing Him, then that is religion. Religion is anything you do for God that does not stem out of a heart connected to God.

One of the assignments I had to do at seminary involved writing a research paper. I remember this particular paper because, when I turned it in, I was very proud of the work I

had put into it. I had done my due diligence. I had controlled the material, analyzed all of the possible idiosyncratic elements of the vicissitudes in the arguments. I felt great about my paper.

However, when I got my paper back from my professor there was a big, fat, red zero at the top, along with a smaller note at the bottom. In a hurried hand my professor had scrawled, “Tony, great work. Great preparation. Wrong assignment.”

It wasn't that I hadn't done great work; it was I had done my great work on the wrong assignment. I had researched the wrong topic. As a result I didn't get credit for what I had done. Kingdom living is no different. It's not that there aren't a lot of people doing a lot of excellent things. It's not that a lot of these same people attend church, help the hurting, or say all the correct spiritual platitudes. It's that they've missed the priority of the kingdom. They've missed the relational connection that comes through voluntary surrender. They have not made God first in their hearts. And then they wonder why they aren't experiencing any victory, power, hope, and authority in their lives.

External observances—the rules of religion—can get in the way of a relationship. When you are motivated by relationship, surrender comes naturally. There is a story about a woman who was married to an ungrateful, controlling, and dominating man. She had been married to him for over twenty years. It didn't take her long when she first got mar-

ried to realize unless she did everything on his list, her life would be miserable. She would be yelled at, shoved, and then neglected.

This forlorn woman kept a list in the top drawer of her bureau of everything she knew her husband wanted from her. Every day she would seek to cross off each item on the list. After twenty or so years of marriage, and what seemed like a lifetime of trying to please someone who could not be pleased, her husband died suddenly of a heart attack.

A few years later, this woman met and fell in love with a kingdom man. This man treated her with respect, honor, and dignity. She loved his personality, his heart, and everything about him. She always considered herself to be a lazy woman, because it would take so much effort every day to try and cross off her previous husband's list. She lacked the motivation to do it—and although she did do it, she assumed she must be lazy since she ultimately didn't want to be doing what she was doing.

But life with her new husband shed light on who she was. She had energy, focus, and diligence. In fact, in any given day she would do far more than what was ever on the list for her previous husband, and what's more she would do it both willingly and gladly.

One day, while cleaning out her bureau, the woman found the old list. Noticing that everything on it used to be a chore and had now turned into a pleasure, she wondered what had

changed. Then she realized the simple truth that relationship was a far greater motivation than rules could ever be.

The first man dominated through rules without relationship. The second man offered her a relationship that then motivated her response. The activity was the same—in fact, it was identical. But the motivation changed both the results and rewards of the activity.

God wants to be first in your life as your King, but He wants His relationship with you to be the motivating factor for your surrender. Otherwise you are simply begrudgingly crossing off a list called religion and failing to access the strength, peace, and power that comes by way of His love.

We serve a mighty God who is all-powerful, but never forget He is closer than you think. He cares for you. His love is to be your driving passion in putting Him first. God doesn't want you serving Him only because you are supposed to. He wants you serving Him because you love Him. He wants your morality, prayer life, dedication for Him, and all else to be predicated on your relationship with Him rather than on religious duty. Instead of being defined by what you do, He wants you to be defined by who you know—Jesus Christ.

TWO CRUCIFIXIONS

When you place yourself on the altar as a living sacrifice, you are mirroring Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Essentially

there are two crucifixions that must occur in order to experience victorious kingdom living—Jesus’ and your own. Paul writes of these, “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which *the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*” (Galatians 6:14, emphasis added).

To identify with Jesus Christ is to identify with His own surrender. Being crucified with Him creates a resultant disconnect from this world’s order as well as a subsequent attachment and alignment with Him.

The word “world” in the Greek is *Kosmos*. It simply refers to an organized world system or arrangement designed to promote a specific emphasis or philosophy. For example, we will often talk about the “world of sports,” or the “world of finance,” or the “world of politics.” These phrases are not referencing a location or a place. They are referencing an organized system inclusive of certain definitions, regulations, and philosophical worldviews.

When Paul states he has been crucified with Christ, he is saying he is no longer alive to this world’s system that wants to leave God out, or to worldliness. He is crucified to the strategies and rules that are set up to try and make humanity acceptable to God independently of God.

I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed this, but the world does not mind religion. The world not only tolerates religion, but it frequently will even embrace it. Religions dominate much

of humanity's systems all across the globe. What the world will not tolerate, however, is the person of Jesus Christ. As soon as you introduce Jesus into the equation, you have become too specific. Staying with God is okay because that is generic and vague. But once you bring Jesus to bear on a life or a kingdom worldview, that is too narrow for many people.

The more religious you become, the further from Christ you go. Putting God first equates a relationship where you willingly surrender yourself as a "living sacrifice" to the One you love. You, like Paul, die daily.

As he pointed out in his letter to the Corinthians, "I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, *I die daily*" (1 Corinthians 15:31). Surrender represents the moment-by-moment connection to and identification with Jesus Christ and the purpose of His life, death, burial, and resurrection. It is acknowledgment of complete and total dependency on Christ and His sufficiency in your life.

Jesus wants to be more important to you than your own comforts, wants, and will. Luke says a similar thing to Matthew when he writes in chapter 14 verse 27: "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Unfortunately today, we have some messed-up ideas about what it means to carry our crosses or to put God first. A physical problem, bad in-laws, or noisy neighbors—none of those

things is a cross. So what does it mean to carry your cross?

When the Romans wanted to put a condemned criminal on public display to humiliate him, they paraded him down the street carrying the crossbeam of his cross. Carrying your cross to the place of execution was a public display that you were guilty of the crime for which you were condemned.

To carry your cross means to bear the reproach of Jesus Christ. It is to be so identified with Him that when they accuse you of being a Christian, you are found guilty. When someone accuses you of being His disciple, you say, "You got me."

To carry your own cross is to admit publicly you are guilty of the crime of being committed to Christ, guilty of placing Him first.

Carrying your cross is when a girl tells her boyfriend, "I can't sleep with you because I am a Christian." It's when a businessman says, "I can't do that unethical thing, because I am Christ's disciple. I am living by a different agenda." Carrying your cross is dying to yourself and what you want and putting Jesus first. It's not comfortable to carry a cross.

Religion and religious titles mean nothing. External paraphernalia and religious duties, when placed against the backdrop of the preeminence of Christ, count for nothing. What matters is your identification with God's kingdom and His righteousness and the newness of the life He now lives within you.

Paul tells us more in his letter to the Galatians, “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Galatians 6:15). He writes elsewhere similarly in his letter to the Corinthians, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Your victory in your daily life, decisions, emotions, finances, and in all things completely hinges on your attachment to Jesus Christ and your relational surrender to Him. It rests on His work, not on your own. It is tied to the new creation within you, not to the flesh.

THE BENEFIT OF PUTTING GOD FIRST

Paul concluded his letter to the believers in Galatia with this final thought reflecting on the fruit of living a kingdom life of surrender. He writes, “And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Why does God often feel so far away? Because we are not operating by this rule. Paul says if you walk according to the rule of surrender—to align your framework of thinking, moving, and operating with the “firstness” of Him and His kingdom, you will experience the benefits of God, which include both peace and mercy. However, when you are merely satisfied with religion or religious activity—or even when you

have placed your trust in your religious activity to earn favor with God—you have been severed from Christ and fallen from grace (Galatians 5:1–4).

Fallen from grace is a fairly drastic occurrence. Grace is the provision of all that you need in order to live a life of abundance and peace. To best understand what it means to be “severed from Christ” or to be “fallen from grace,” I need to compare it to electricity. Electricity is the flow of power that makes everything work in your home. Virtually everything in your house operates because of electricity. Your appliances, lights, heat, air conditioning, computers, television, and many things work because they are receiving electricity.

If you are severed from electricity, the flow of the power stops even though you still own the appliances, lights, heater, air conditioning unit, computers, television, and all else. It’s not that you no longer possess these items nor is it that you didn’t pay for and purchase them. But you can have something you have paid for and not enjoy it because the flow of electricity is no longer there.

To be severed from Christ or to fall from grace means what God wants to do in you and through you is no longer flowing. You have essentially been unplugged, or disconnected, from the power of Jesus even though you still have all of the paraphernalia of religion. Therefore your hope is gone, your peace is gone, your courage is gone, your faith is gone, and your authority is gone.

Yet those who function by the rule of surrender in kingdom living will experience a peace that passes understanding. The Spirit of God will permeate all you do so you begin to think differently, act differently, live differently, love differently, and even recognize yourself in a different light. This is because the flow of the Spirit, the electricity that comes to each of us by way of the accomplishment of the cross, will empower you. God will be at work in you, with you, through you, to you, and for you.

Without electricity, a lot of what you own in your home would be unusable, even though it may have been expensive. Electricity is essential to empowering what was made to run on it. A relationship with Jesus Christ and His sacrifice, my friend, is essential to both empowering and enabling you to live an abundant, victorious life defined by both peace and mercy.

Never let religion get in the way of your relationship with Jesus Christ. Instead, out of your relationship with the One who loves you most, put first things first and watch that solitary decision change everything else for the good of your own life, the betterment of others, and the advancement of God's kingdom agenda on earth.