

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Our Foreman

What were the characteristics of the inspiring atmosphere that opened you to receive divine revelation of the Truth of Jesus Christ?

How does it change your perspective on daily life to know that you possess the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the power to loose or bind people?

For what role in constructing the church do you believe God created you?

Matthew 16:16-19 – Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

I) Inspired Vision...

The beginning of the year is a natural occasion to reflect, set a vision and plan the course. *What are we going to build this year?* This is needed in the church like any other institution, though the process is different. We are wise to recognize that as we contemplate what we will construct this year, we must first talk with our Foreman.

♦ **Divine revelation:** “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16).” The purpose of the church is to inspire everyone God sends our way to joyously proclaim this from their heart. The key word being *inspire*. It is tempting to interpret the command that we “Go therefore and make disciples (Mt 28:19),” as an outcome we must produce. That conclusion exaggerates our ability in the transformative process. Jesus tells us “Blessed are you...For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven (Mt 16:17).” Jesus Himself acknowledged transformation was a gift offered only by the Father when He prayed “I have made your name

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known to those *whom you gave me* (John 17:6).” Jesus “will build [His] church (Mt 16:18)” on those “blessed” with divine revelation from His “Father in heaven (v17).” To do so, our Foreman wants us to construct an inspiring atmosphere in which His Father can reveal Truth.

◆ **Inspirational model:** We can look to Jesus’s own earthly ministry as a model of an inspiring atmosphere. He established Himself as a spiritual authority as He “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor (Luke 2:52).” He taught in relatable ways good news of hope, mercy and generosity to all who would listen “in their synagogues and was praised by everyone (Luke 4:15).” He was indiscriminate in healing as “he laid his hands on each of them and cured them (Luke 4:40).” He personally invited outcasts to join Him, saying “Follow me (Luke 5:27).” Likewise, He graciously accepted invitations into the lives of sinners (Luke 5:29). He defended the dignity of the undeserving when acts of mercy toward them were opposed (Luke 6:1-5, 7:36-50). He constructed an inspiring atmosphere such that He told His disciples, “If you know me, you will know my Father also (John 14:7).” Our Foreman shows us how: by sharing the love of God.

II) Great Power...

The church our Foreman is constructing in and with us has enormous power. Power many are seeking, without which they remain lost forever. It is first the might to withstand the power of death. It is second access to, or restriction from, entering the kingdom of heaven. We must first grasp this power before we know our Foreman’s vision for what we will build this year.

◆ **Death benefit:** Death may be the most persuasive condition of life. It is the reason for urgency and care. It brings the end of pain and suffering. Humanity is deceived into believing it also ends joy, so many fear death. Truth is that “the gates of Hades will not prevail (Mt 16:18)” against the church. The inspiring atmosphere is attractive because it sheds light on this Truth, that Jesus has “authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom (John 17:2),” the Father has given to Him. The church is urgent in “making the most of the time (Eph 5:16)” out of hope, not fear. This hope comes from knowing we possess the keys to usher others into the security of the kingdom.

◆ **Great responsibility:** “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:19).” By this action, Jesus entrusts His followers, the church, with the power to carry out His mission, “that everyone who

believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (John 3:16).” The consequences of our obedience to perform this work are massive. In using the keys, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt 16:19).” Our Foreman needs us to know the costs of construction delays and failings are lives lost to the “gates of Hades.”

III) Architectural Rendering...

Jesus’s model for constructing an inspiring atmosphere can be grouped into three categories of activity: community incarnation, kingdom initiation, and raising followers. This is the architectural process we will use in building this year. Each of us has a role in one of these. Over the coming weeks, we will learn the biblical methods to build each of these as Our Foreman constructs His church.

◆ **Community incarnation:** “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness (Gen 1:26).’” When we perverted His image through sin, the world lost the ability to see its loving God. Jesus restored this ability, first through Himself (John 14:7), then through His church (John 14:17, 20). Peter was able to receive revelation from the Father because He had seen Jesus. Jesus now sends us into the world for this purpose as He was sent (John 17:18). *Incarnational ministries reach into the community and point to Jesus.*

◆ **Kingdom initiation:** Sharing the love of Jesus and His message brings people to the gate of His kingdom (John 13:35). We do not want to just bring people up to the kingdom of heaven, we want to usher them inside and be amazed as Jesus heals and breathes new life (Mt 28:19, Acts 8:36). We catalyze divine revelation by helping others open themselves to God. *Kingdom initiation ministries are those that share the offer to become a child of God and teach how to get started.*

◆ **Raising followers:** We are a hopeful people. Jesus wants more than to bring us into His Kingdom - He invites us to the very throne room of the King of Kings. He commanded the Church to go and make disciples. We believe this is more than teaching His Word, it is training people how “to obey everything that I have commanded you (Mt 28:20).” We invite all to join in Christian life and support each other on the quest. *Discipleship ministries are those that get people exercising spiritual disciplines and trying to live holy lives.*