

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR THRIVING LIFE

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ROYAL INVITATION

What are true life examples of the difference between acts of the powerful and acts of Royalty?

How are you gifted to welcome others and create an attractive atmosphere within our church community?

What specific qualities of Jesus would God have to provide you to succeed in building His Kingdom through the acts of service that would flow from those gifts?

Mark 9:33-37 – ³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

I) Close to Power...

Proximity to power is intoxicating. We are magnetized by it. The attraction is elemental. Proximity is exclusive. Gaining it implies recognition, acceptance, worthiness, and a sense of personal power. However close we get, we are discontent until closer than any other. It motivates us to do what it takes. We aren't motivated to have our work approved, but our being. We want to be chosen by power. Yet most of us are ashamed of our need to be chosen. We want to believe we are worthy of power's attention whether granted or not. We want to believe we are powerful enough to survive, thrive, live the life we of which we dream. We want to believe these, but we don't.

◆ **Power of observation**: Often, we feel too far removed from power to act. When it is close enough, though, we make our move. The risk of rejection is real, so we approach subtly, indirectly, hoping to be

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noticed. Wanting to be noticed without seeming to want to be noticed. Yet we expect more of power. Power is intelligent, observant, and must know our intent. If power accepts us, if it wants to grant us access, it will ignore this. The worst would be it exposing us while rejecting us. Jesus is not the power we are used to. He finds a private moment with His disciples “in the house” to ask them “What were you arguing about on the way (Mark 9:33)?” Still, being exposed unsteadies us.

◆**Power of shame:** We are unsteadied not knowing whether this leads to acceptance or rejection. We do know what we would do. We know we are unworthy of being close to power. We would reject us. Anyone needing to peacock to gain favor doesn’t deserve it. Deeper, we realize we seek proximity to power to be made worthy. Our desire is not virtuous, it’s desperate. Flooded with these dark thoughts, “they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest (v34).” Confronted with the very opportunity to ask for our heart’s desire, shame’s power silences us.

II) Close to Anonymity...

Anonymity is disillusioning. Far from intoxicating, nearness to anonymity drains our emotional energy. What’s the point of doing anything? Anyone can approach anonymity. It’s a condition one backs into through blandness, mediocrity, failure. Only being infamous is worse, and we aren’t sure that’s true. Being redirected to anonymity by power is certain rejection. Affirmation of our fears—that knowledge we repressed for so long—we are unworthy. It’s time to fade into the background where we belong.

◆**Anonymous work:** Worldly power advantages itself of the human drive to be close. It doles out its labor to workers eager for a chance it will reward them with favor. It manipulates us by describing the work as special. Something only one rising toward power could do. It strings us out by using fancy titles and teaching us how to get others to follow along. Many of us accept this, because at least we can persist our delusions of grandeur. That’s not Jesus’ way. He’s a Truth teller. He offers His followers tedious, anonymous work. “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all (v35).” Last...servant...of *all!* Being last of all means being furthest from power. Rejected again.

◆**Anonymous beneficiary:** Words are often exaggerated to make a point. We can solace ourselves believing power doesn’t mean what it says. No, we will not be permitted closer but we aren’t really being rejected. We were close enough to be drawn in, believing we could

be within the circle. Surely, we were not so badly deceived. Then Jesus “took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms... (v36).” This ancient story requires translation into modernity. Kids were a nuisance, inconvenient, and in the way. Yes, sons were seen as a blessing—once they are grown. In the meantime, please keep them out of here. Power is embracing the anonymous over us.

III) Close to Royalty...

True royalty is more than power. Royalty is beneficent, just, wise, and powerful. Intimacy with royalty extends beyond implications of worthiness—it suggests goodness. Righteousness. Holiness. Royalty can do anything, always choosing to do what’s best for all. Royalty is quick to dissociate from rote power, focusing on its meaningful mission to build and preserve a healthy community. Royalty’s glory is not unrestrained power. Royalty’s glory is the beauty of its kingdom.

◆**Royal emissary:** Just when being pushed into anonymity feels like the end, our eyes are opened, and we realize we had mistaken royalty for mere power. Royalty is sharing His mission with us, not dismissing us. Being last, serving all, these are jobs of royal dignity because they fulfill the justice and goodness of the King. Jesus is granting us the privilege of being His emissary when He makes the open invitation, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (v37).” This is not metaphorical. Jesus enters our heart when we invite Him in, which happens when we invoke His name in service, filling us with His power. His patience, kindness, miraculousness. Every good thing that dignifies royalty. Everything we want to be, that marks us worthy.

◆**Royal host:** Jesus understood this perfectly. He invested His ministry in the desperate, the vulnerable, the wounded. He showed us the honor of True royalty by using supreme power to serve and build His kingdom by invitation, not conquest. Civilization’s history proves conquest is temporary while attraction is permanent. He invites all who are willing to be beacons of His attractiveness with a message of invitation. Invitation to enter, be healed, and thrive. His graciousness is greater even than this. In His open invitation, He suggests that He is honored to be welcomed into our presence. *We host Royalty!* He brings the kingdom to the willing because “whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me (v37).” Our heart’s fullness with God’s Spirit is proportional to how much of our life we devote to welcoming others in His name. The proximity we crave is not wrong. We are made to pursue greatness. Greatness as royal heirs, not powerful idolators. Are you ready to host the King?