

INSTRUCTIONS IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Photo

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Entry 8 - 11

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Securing God's Favor

If you have God's favor, you have everything. He protects you, provides for you, partners with you and promotes you. Yet, without God's favor, you are fighting an up-hill battle. While the Lord extends this opportunity to all, His favor is secured by those who pay the price to have a deep relationship with Him. The release of favor is found throughout the Bible; we see that according to a person's response, they are held at a distance or drawn into a deep friendship with Jesus. It does not matter where they come from, but whether they are courageous, humble, discerning and faith-filled to the point of partnering with Him. Pride is the greatest deterrent to securing God's favor, but all can gain God's favor by humbly putting their unrestrained trust in Him.

Nicodemus was an influential leader with amazing courage and faith, but his quality is largely overlooked by Bible scholars. Against the tide of popular opinion, He answered the call of the Holy Spirit and he also responded correctly when he was tested by Jesus. That is why he gained God's favor. He was a special man, a Pharisee, promoted to the Sanhedrin, which at that time, was Israel's Supreme Court. He was an academic and a theologian. He was incredibly intelligent and deeply spiritual, yet most of the disciples did not know him; only John mentions him. John, who was just a fisherman, somehow had a personal connection with Nicodemus. God arranges unusual connections like that. Read about Nicodemus in John 3, 7:50 and 19:38.

Although Nicodemus belonged to an elite fellowship of orthodox academics, he met with Jesus, who was from the other side of the tracks. Jesus, was the lowly carpenter's son from Nazareth who was now preaching and performing miracles. Nicodemus discussed Jesus with his colleagues, but none of them dared visit the

home-spun, controversial villager from Galilee. Maybe Jesus was the Messiah, but they would wait until believing in Him was safer. Not Nicodemus, he was quick to obey the inner voice. He was courageous and that is the 1st requirement to becoming God's friend. When he came to Jesus, he purposely let down his guard. He called Jesus 'Rabbi', elevating Him above himself. He also said that Jesus was a miracle worker who came from God. Nicodemus let go of his entitlements and become vulnerable. He had great courage; the visit could cost him his reputation and his place among the elite. Jesus loved him for it.

Before long, the next test came; Jesus rebuked Nicodemus. In essence He said, 'How can you, a spiritual teacher of Israel, fail to know about the Holy Spirit?'

Courage was the correct response to the Holy Spirit's call; humbling oneself to receive Christ's rebuke was the next response that God looked for. Nicodemus did not react defensively, but received the Lord's rebuke.

His response determined whether Jesus would hold him at a distance or become his close friend. Jesus did not rebuke Nicodemus to fix his problems at their 1st meeting; He was looking for his response.

At the extreme other end of society we discover the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at Jacob's well. (In John 3, He met Nicodemus, in John 4, He met the Samaritan woman.) She is of questionable character for she has cohabited with 6 different men, but Jesus was not concerned with her disposition. As with Nicodemus, He looked for her response. By mentioning the Samaritan's lifestyle, He actually exposed and rebuked her. Like Nicodemus, the courageous Samaritan pressed in for more and Jesus loved her for it.

The pattern is also seen in the life of Martha. She was not one of the elite, like Nicodemus, nor was she a woman of questionable character, like the Samaritan. She was just a common Jewess, but she was courageous to welcome Jesus to stay in her home. Soon after, we read that the Lord rebuked her for judging Mary. When rebuked, Martha did not pull away, but continued to open her life before the Lord and He loved her for it. She gained the friendship and favor of God.

The 3rd response the Lord looks for before extending favor is our attitude toward His truths. What will we do with a costly pearl if He

suddenly casts one before us? Do we love the deeper teachings of Christ?

The greatest teaching about salvation was given to Nicodemus. (unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven). The greatest teaching about worship was given to the Samaritan (The Father seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and in truth). The best teaching on the resurrection was given to Martha (I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live). When God throws a nugget of revelation before us, our response determines our future friendship with Him. Some are so self-focused that they miss the pearl that passes before their eyes; it goes right over their heads. They are talking so much in an attempt to gain approval from others that they fail to hear what is being said. They do not discern and value what is valuable to the Lord, so their fellowship with Him remains shallow. Often, God's rebuke or treasure of revelation comes through one of His ministers, and receiving it requires more humility than if it came directly from Him.

The 4th response the Lord looks for is partnership in the work. We see that Nicodemus defended and promoted Jesus before the Sanhedrin (John 7:50). Later, he and Joseph of Arimathea took the body of Christ down from the cross, dressed it for burial and placed it in the tomb. Nicodemus was a fearless, yet humble leader who unashamedly spoke out for Christ. I am confident that he preached to his academic

friends and helped birth the revival that broke out among the priests. ***"The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."*** Acts 6:7

The Samaritan woman was also enthralled by Jesus' words. Her response was to answer the call to be a missionary. She left her water jar by the well and ran into the city to tell her friends about Jesus. She endeared herself to the Lord and won His favor. The Bible says that He stayed with the Samaritan woman and her friends for 2 days.

Martha's story is the same; she became an radical disciple who served Christ in the community. Jesus always stayed at her home with Lazarus and Mary. She won His friendship and in so doing she secured God's favor over her life.

These examples call us to examine our lives. 1. Are we courageous enough to obey? Obedience requires us to make decisions that are not popular. 2. Are we ready to receive His correction? It may come through a trusted leader. Our response determines the depth of our friendship with Christ. 3. Are we hungry for deeper teaching and will we allow it change our lives? 4. Will we serve as missionaries who promote and share God's love. If we respond correctly, we become God's dear friends and we secure His favor over our lives. AΩ



Christians for Messiah Ministries

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