



THE POWER YOU NEED TO NEVER GIVE UP

# RELENTLESS

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## SEE OR ENTER

All who receive God's abundant grace and are freely put right with him will *rule in life* through Christ.

ROMANS 5:17 (TEV)

It's my hope that if I frequently place Romans 5:17 before your eyes, the verse will become part of your being, just as I'm sure John 3:16 is. Perhaps you'll eventually quote these words in your sleep, deeply knowing that it is God's will that you govern in the realm of life. This firm belief is a prerequisite to a strong finish, to being identified as an "overcomer" and a relentless believer.

Before proceeding, allow me to reiterate the fundamental truth we've been unpacking: *All who have freely received God's grace are empowered to be preeminent in this life.* We are to be the head and not the tail, above and not beneath life's circumstances. We are to be exemplary kingdom influencers who bring God's way of life to this earth.

### WHY DON'T MOST CHRISTIANS RULE IN LIFE?

Why aren't all Christians living in this manner? Why are the majority of believers actually *ruled by life* rather than *ruling in life*?

We've addressed the first and most obvious answer. The national survey done in 2009 reveals that 98 percent of the believers in America are unaware of God's grace being His empowerment. I believe that this statistic, unfortunately, represents the church in general throughout the entire Western world. Due to their ignorance of God's provision of supernatural power through grace, the vast

majority of believers are unable to live as God intends. They are no different from the African tribe that possesses a powerful Land Rover yet has no knowledge of its ability to transport. They are still limited to traveling by foot and carrying heavy loads great distances on their backs.

The second reason most believers are not ruling in this life will be the focus of the remainder of this book. We'll start by examining Jesus' words to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader who came secretly to inquire of the Master. Jesus' first words to him were, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot *see* the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Jesus speaks of *seeing* the kingdom. But His next statement to Nicodemus reveals something significantly different: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Why does Jesus shift his emphasis from *seeing* the kingdom (verse 3) to *entering* the kingdom (verse 5)? When we apply only our knowledge of the English language to biblical interpretation, it is often easy to miss the true meaning and significance of the text. Harkening back to the original languages helps us get a better handle on what God wants us to understand.

When Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God, He is actually referring to the "rule of God." The Greek words most frequently used for *kingdom of God* in the Gospels are *basileia tou Theos*. *Theos* refers to God, while *basileia* is defined as "royalty, rule, reign." *Basileia* is derived from the Greek word for "base" or "foundation." Some scholars believe the best translation of *basileia tou Theos* is "God's imperial rule" or "God's domain." I love the word *imperial*. One of its definitions is "supremely powerful."

For example, in the Lord's Prayer Jesus instructs us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Luke 11:2). He is literally saying, "Our Father in heaven, You are God Almighty. Your supreme, powerful rule come. Your will be done on earth just as it is in heaven." But a problem arises because most people hearing these words think futuristically, when in fact God's kingdom has already come! It has not yet come physically, as Isaiah prophesied, for that is when Jesus will rule forever and ever and Satan's influence will be gone for good. Rather, the kingdom of God has already come spiritually. It is *within us*, God's covenant people, for Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to

be seen. No one will say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!'; because the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21, TEV).

Due to Jesus' work at Calvary, the kingdom is now within every Christ follower. We are to spread its domain, its rule, where we are and wherever we go. We are to rule in life by the powerful free gift of God's grace bestowed on us through Jesus Christ.

Let's examine other scriptures where Jesus uses the phrase "kingdom of God" and substitute in its place "*God's supreme powerful rule*." It's amazing how with this change these statements have a more significant meaning for today's believer.

For example, Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12:28 would read, "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely *God's supreme, powerful rule* has come upon you." The Spirit of God Jesus refers to is the Holy Spirit, the member of the godhead who enforces the grace (power) of God that we possess. He is called the "Spirit of grace" in the New Testament (see Hebrews 10:29).

Again the words of Jesus: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into *God's supreme, powerful rule*" (Matthew 19:24).

A rich man is one who says, "I have the full adequacy and capability within myself to succeed." Because of his intellect, finances, physical strength, wit, connections, and resources, he believes he's totally self-sufficient. But Jesus sees through the smokescreen. "Blessed are you poor," He says, "for yours is *God's supreme, powerful rule*" (Luke 6:20).

He is not identifying the financially poor; He is blessing those who depend on God's grace. Jesus declared that the Spirit of God was upon Him to preach the gospel to the *poor*, yet many times He would intentionally meet with and minister to some of the financially richest men or women in the communities He visited. When He spoke about a camel going through the eye of a needle, it was right after His encounter with the rich young ruler, who chose to trust in his riches instead of in God.

Consider another statement by Jesus about the kingdom of God: "To you it has been given to know the mystery of *God's supreme, powerful rule*; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables" (Mark 4:11). The authority and power available to us through God's grace is indeed a mystery—a hidden truth that only the Holy Spirit can reveal. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have

entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God *has revealed them to us through His Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 2:9–10). The fact that you and I can rule in life through the grace of God was hidden until the Holy Spirit revealed it to us through the apostles who wrote the New Testament. All we have to do now is believe.

Here’s another assertion from Jesus concerning the kingdom of God: “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see *God’s supreme, powerful rule* present with power” (Mark 9:1). This statement from the Messiah himself should secure our belief that the coming of God’s kingdom is *in the here and now* as well as in the future. The supreme, powerful rule of God would be within those who followed Jesus once the Spirit of grace came on the Day of Pentecost. In this same light, Jesus said to a scribe who answered Him wisely, “You are not far from *God’s supreme, powerful rule*” (Mark 12:34).

As you can see from the few examples I’ve shared, the kingdom of God takes on a much more powerful and relevant meaning when we read it as it is stated in the Greek. You may find it both enriching and encouraging to continue substituting *God’s supreme, powerful rule* whenever you come across the term *the kingdom of God* in the New Testament.

But we must remember a very important aspect of God’s supreme, powerful rule. He has delegated His rule to us! “The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’S; but the earth He has given to the children of men” (Psalm 115:16). Jesus, as the Son of Man, took back what Adam had forfeited. Jesus then declared, “All authority (all power of rule) in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” (Matthew 28:18, AMP). But Christ our Lord and King is no longer here on the earth, so you and I—the body of Christ—are to carry out *God’s supreme, powerful rule*. If we don’t exercise rule, then it stays within the realm of the forces of this world and life rules us. That’s not God’s plan! We are empowered by His grace to rule in life through Christ!

## SEE VS. ENTER

Now let’s examine further Jesus’ words to Nicodemus. You’ll recall that the Master first said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he

cannot *see* the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). And just a few moments later, He put it this way: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

With the insight we’ve gained from the Greek about the kingdom of God, we’re now better positioned to discover why Jesus differentiates between *seeing* the kingdom as opposed to *entering* the kingdom. If we were to view the kingdom of God as a physical place such as heaven, then verse 3 would indicate that being born again is not enough to enter heaven—only enough to *see* it. This, of course, is not true. When you understand that Jesus is talking about God’s supreme, powerful rule—or kingdom rulership—then these verses take on a totally different meaning and are much easier to comprehend.

The Greek word for *see* in verse 3 is *eido*. Its primary definition is “to see, perceive, be aware of, or be acquainted with.” Jesus is telling us that all who are born again can *see*, *perceive*, be made *aware of*, and are *acquainted with* God’s supreme, powerful rule, the kingdom of God.

In His next statement He no longer uses the word *see* (*eido*); He uses the word *enter* in regard to the rule of God. The Greek word for *enter* is *eiserchomai*. Its primary definition is “to arise and come into or to arise and enter.” So in these two statements Jesus moves from *being aware of* to *arising and coming into* God’s supreme, powerful rule. See the difference?

To illustrate, when I enter an aircraft to fly somewhere I’m quite aware of its ability to defy gravity, lift me high above the earth, and bring me to a set destination. As a passenger, I can see as well as experience the benefits of riding in that plane.

Then a friend buys me some flying lessons. After some initial training, I get into a single-engine plane and the instructor tells me what to do. Before long I’m pulling back on the yoke and flying the plane. It’s almost a surreal experience. One of my prevailing thoughts on my first flight is the fact I can fly that plane wherever and however I desire. There is no road, no path. Instead, I create the path and the route. I’ve gone from *being aware of* what a plane can do and experiencing the benefits of riding along as a passenger to now being the pilot and flying the plane wherever I want to. I’ve *entered into* the freedom of flying.

Jesus’ words indicate that there are two types of believers. We could compare the first group to passengers in an airplane who see, perceive, and

experience the benefits of flying. Then there are those who arise and enter into the cockpit as pilots who actually do the flying and determine where to go and at what speed and altitude. The passengers, even though they can benefit from the airplane, are at the mercy of those who know how to fly.

To further illustrate the significant difference between seeing and entering the kingdom of God, imagine a small group of people stranded on an island. It's a dangerous island filled with ferocious man-eating wild animals, poisonous snakes, spiders, and scorpions. If that isn't bad enough, there's also a cannibalistic, primitive tribe on this island. Our small group is in great danger. However, there is some good news: located on the island are an airstrip and a fully functional jet. The aircraft is loaded with fuel and sitting on the airstrip. It can easily carry our group of people to safety. But there's a huge problem: no one in the group knows how to fly a plane! All of us are experienced passengers, but none has risen to the status of pilot with the ability to fly a plane. Even though the aircraft gives us the power to fly to safety and freedom, we cannot do it because we don't even know how to start the engines, let alone fly the jet off the island.

This scenario illustrates the difference between the believer who has only *seen or experienced* God's supreme, powerful rule and the believer who has *arisen and entered* God's supreme, powerful rule.

Quite a difference, isn't it? Which type of believer do you want to be?

## ENTERING RULERSHIP

The logical question that surfaces now is, How does a child of God move from *seeing* to actually *entering* rulership? In other words, how do we go from being spiritual passengers to spiritual pilots? The apostle Paul addresses this question for us.

Under the direct orders of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas left their home church and embarked on their first apostolic journey (Acts 13:1–4). After traveling great distances to many cities in Asia, they began their long journey home, revisiting a few of the cities in which they had launched new churches. In those days, of course, travel was more challenging than it is today. I can get on a plane and easily travel to cities anywhere in the world, usually within a

twenty-four-hour time span. I'm not prone to think when I leave some location abroad, *Due to the complexity of travel, I wonder if I'll see these people again this side of heaven.* But in Paul's day this was often a nagging thought. When leaving these churches, Paul knew there was a good chance he wouldn't see these dear ones he had birthed into the kingdom again until he reunited with them in heaven. Consequently, we can imagine Paul choosing his words to these new believers carefully. And what he leaves them with directly addresses how we go from *seeing* to *entering* rulership:

They returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations *enter* the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:21–22)

Paul didn't leave these three cities with the content of a financial seminar, a church growth conference, a leadership training symposium, or even an uplifting message of hope—though all these topics have their place. No, he left them with words that would empower the young believers to live relentlessly and finish well. His aim was to prepare them to enter rulership.

Paul's words remain true for us today. They should be embedded in our hearts and souls: *We must pass through many tribulations to enter God's supreme, powerful rule.* Stay with me now; this is a message of hope and faith, not gloom. Think of it this way: Tribulation happens! It's inevitable. Jesus clearly communicates that tribulation is a fact of life for His followers. "In the world you will have *tribulation*," He assures us, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). He has overcome, which means that you and I have been given authority and power over whatever this world can throw against us. We are His body; we are Christ on earth. We have overcome the world in Christ!

The word *tribulation* is defined as "hardship or a state of great trouble." The Greek word is *thlipsis*. *The Encyclopedia of Bible Words* defines *thlipsis* this way: "The idea of the great emotional and spiritual stress that can be caused by external or internal pressures. Of the fifty-five uses of this root in the New Testament, fifty-three are figurative." The pressure may come from enemies, adverse circumstances, wrong decisions, or passion run awry.

James Strong defines *thlipsis* as “pressure (literally or figuratively): affliction, anguish, burdened, persecution, tribulation, trouble.” W. E. Vine defines it simply as “anything that burdens the soul or spirit.”

My own simplistic definition for *tribulation* or *thlipsis* is “the desert.”

Today’s English Version of the Bible translates Acts 14:22 like this: “We must pass through *many troubles* to enter the Kingdom of God.” To illustrate, let’s imagine that you serve a great king who has conquered an entire country. He has entered into the capital city and overthrown the beastly lord who ruled the land with an iron fist. The deposed leader had been cruel to the people, poisoned their thinking with false propaganda, set them at odds against all that was good and noble, and incited hatred and disdain for the right ways of the just and noble king you serve.

The good king commissions his servants to go into the land and enforce his victory by taking all the enemy’s occupied territories and strongholds that remain intact. Throughout the land there are under lords who still hold fortresses and castles. They continue to propagate the ways of the former evil king. Consequently, there are still many under the sway of the evil lord’s system. Even though the overall war has been won, there is still much work to do to enforce the victory.

You are en route to conquer a castle in enemy territory. There are many dangers along the way, for you must confront, overthrow, and pass through enemy-occupied lands. Your foes have set many traps to prevent you from taking this

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 —

ground. You’ll have to battle through these tribulations one by one. And once you arrive at the castle you face the most difficult test of all: overthrowing the enemy stronghold. The good news is, the more you defeat enemy traps, engagements, and encampments along the way, the more experienced and battle-savvy you become. If you take

this castle you’ll rule this territory. Not only that, but you’ll be such a skilled and trustworthy warrior that you’ll be in good stead to maintain your rulership over the territory you’ve taken for your king.

The good king in our story represents our Lord Jesus. He has commissioned us, His loyal soldiers, to go and enforce His victory over the forces of darkness

that are still swaying this world. As we proceed we will encounter battles of hardship but will ultimately liberate those men and women who are still held prisoner by the enemy's tactics, ways, and propaganda.

You and I must pass through many tribulations to enter into rulership. But, as Jesus says, we can be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. Through His grace, we are given power and authority to take on whatever challenges the world hurls our way.

And not only do we have the *empowerment* of God's grace. We who believe in Christ as Savior and Lord also have a very special *position* in God's grace. Read joyfully Paul's words to the Christians in Rome:

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then *heirs*—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, *if* indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:16–18)

As believers, you and I are God's heirs! We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. The word *heir* is from the Greek word *kleronomos*, defined as "one who takes possession of or inherits. The emphasis is on the heir's right to possess." My dictionary defines an heir as "a person inheriting and continuing the legacy of a predecessor." There's also a secondary definition: "a person legally entitled to the rank of another." Wow, are you grasping this? God has made us heirs to everything He's accomplished and owns! We own what He owns. We are to rule as He rules.

It all belongs to God, and therefore it all belongs to us. "No one, then, should boast about what human beings can do," Paul writes to fellow believers. "Actually everything belongs to you" (1 Corinthians 3:21, TEV). Everything! You and I are truly heirs of God! The Contemporary English Version phrases it, "Everything is yours, including the world, life, death, the present, and the future. Everything belongs to you." Stop and ponder this for a day or two. In Christ, you and I are far richer than the world's richest man!

But there is one caveat. A very important one. The Romans 8 passage above clearly says *if*. There is a condition on our inheritance; in other words, it's not

automatic to every Christian. What is the condition? We must suffer with Him. Read the passage again. In order to enter into the reality of joint rulership with Christ Jesus, we have to encounter, confront, and overcome any opposition that would stand in the way of what belongs to Him, just as He did. Notice the words *suffer with Him*. Overcoming opposition is not a walk in the park or a tiptoe through the tulips. It's warfare, and suffering goes with warfare.

But in our case, it's not a defeated suffering. In Romans 8:18 Paul asserts that facing up to tribulation can be positive and full of hope: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be* compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Here's the key principle I want you to comprehend and hold firmly:

No matter the pressure of the *thlipsis* (tribulation) you encounter, the difficulty is nothing compared to the level of rulership you'll walk in after the tribulation has passed.

If we're doing Christianity right, there will be suffering. But with each triumphant battle, a greater glory of strength and wisdom prevails in us. Paul is not just pointing to the glory that will be bestowed on us at the judgment seat in heaven; he is also speaking of the benefit we gain for the present day. When we prevail through tribulation, we move to a greater level of manifest rulership.

## SUFFER WITH HIM

As we look at the words *suffer with Him*, we must ask, How did Jesus suffer? This is where many get confused, for there are two types of suffering. One is for righteousness' sake and the other is for the world's sake. Let me explain.

One type of suffering happens because the entire world's system is under the sway of the evil one (see 1 John 5:19). As a result, cruel and evil things happen to people every day. Babies are aborted or abused, girls are forced into sex slavery, diseases take lives far too early, poverty and hunger abound, strife and turmoil rip families apart, addictions drive and destroy—and that's the short list. There is nothing good or profitable in this suffering. It is sad and tragic, but it's consequential to Adam's sin of turning his authority over to a very cruel lord.

The second suffering, for righteousness, is the one on which we will focus, for it is the kind of suffering Jesus and Paul refer to. All suffering for righteousness, when endured with God's strength, is profitable. Its results are always glorious. It strengthens us in our call to rule.

Jesus demonstrates this for us throughout His ministry. Remember, we are destined to suffer with Him if we will rule with Him. So how did He suffer? Jesus had prepared thirty years for ministry and then is baptized in the river Jordan by a well-known prophet named John.

Once Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descends on Him in bodily form, appearing as a dove. God the Father speaks from heaven for all to hear, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Imagine being among the throng of people witnessing this amazing, heavenly confirmation of Jesus. Many leaders of the nation, both political and ministerial, also witness it.

Now if we were Jesus, most of us would think, *This is the perfect time to launch my ministry! I should give my first message now, with all these people around. After all, I've been preparing for this moment for thirty years. Maybe I should hire a marketing and promotional team that can capture the momentum of this event. Everyone here now knows I'm the man of God for this hour.*

That would be a logical, promotion-wise response, right? But here's what Jesus did instead: "Then Jesus, being *filled* with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil" (Luke 4:1–2). I've found that many believers think Jesus was tested only at the end of His forty days in the desert. But that's not the case. While the Gospels report three specific tests endured by Jesus, it clearly implies that He was tested (i.e., endured tribulation) the entire forty days.

Notice who led Him into the desert. The devil didn't lead him there. No, His Father, through the Holy Spirit, did. Someone may think, *Why would God lead His Son into the desert where He knows Jesus will face suffering and opposition?* One fact we can be sure of is that God will never lead us into a storm that He doesn't give us the power to overcome. (I'll support and elaborate on this principle in our next chapter.) The immediate takeaway for us here is that God does not author *thlipsis* or tribulation. He knows we live in a broken world and that if we are going to conquer and rule the world, we are going to encounter resistance

from its evil forces. Therefore, God trains us in areas He knows we can handle in order to strengthen us for greater conquests.

Jesus went into the wilderness filled with the Holy Spirit immediately after baptism and encountered *thlipsis* over the next forty days. Remember that He had stripped himself of His divine privileges to walk among us as a man filled with grace (see Philippians 2:7 and Luke 2:40). He battled through and overcame all the adversity, never once giving in to the temptations of the devil. Then after the forty days, “Jesus returned in the *power* of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region” (Luke 4:14).

He went into the wilderness *filled* with the Spirit of God, but after overcoming the adversity of heavy temptation, He returned in the *power* of the Spirit of grace. Recall Paul’s words in Romans 8:18: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be* compared with the *glory* which shall be revealed in us.” This passage could just as easily read, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the *authority and power* which shall be revealed in us.” Jesus entered into a greater level of rulership after He successfully passed through *thlipsis*.

The apostle James underscores it this way: “Blessed is the man who perseveres [relentlessly abides in truth] under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the *crown of life* that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, NIV).

Notice that when you overcome a trial as Jesus did during His forty days in the desert, you receive the “crown of life.” I know you can make the case that this crown is awarded in heaven at the judgment seat. And this is true. But I believe James is referring not only to the physical crown awarded in heaven, but to entering *now* into a higher level of rule in this life. A crown speaks of authority. What comes with authority? Power. Jesus went into the wilderness *filled*, but He returned in *power*. Remember, we enter into rulership *if* we suffer with Him. So when we suffer *thlipsis* and pass the test by not giving up—relentlessly obeying God’s Word when all hell is breaking loose—there is an immediate benefit: greater authority in the area of life in which we’ve stood fast.

## MY MOTHER-IN LAW'S TESTIMONY

Lisa's mom is a classic example of this promise. In 1979 Shirley's local doctor in Indiana diagnosed her to have breast cancer. It wasn't caught early, so the cancer also spread into her lymph nodes. Her breast was removed along with 30 percent of her lymph nodes, and the doctor told her she was terminal.

Shirley wanted a second opinion, so she went to MD Anderson hospital in Houston, Texas, considered to be one of the top hospitals in the United States for treating cancer. Her doctor there served as head of the oncology department. His report wasn't optimistic. After giving her the same prognosis she'd received from her first doctor, he said, "You got a stiff indictment, didn't you?" He thought that if she did exactly as he and his staff prescribed, she might live two, possibly three years at the most. Medical science could foresee no cure.

The protocol would be intense radiation, then home to Indiana for two or three weeks of rest, then back to Houston for chemotherapy.

While in Houston, Shirley called a nationally known TV ministry for prayer. It "just so happened" that the man who took her call knew the couple in charge of the outpatient facility at MD Anderson. He proceeded to call and encourage them to look her up and continue to minister to her. The couple connected with Shirley. They took her to their church, to ball games, and out to dinner, the whole time sharing faith-building promises from the Word of God.

Shirley was a new Christian. Prior to discovering the cancer, she had been taught basic principles of the faith by the wife of a couple in ministry. Upon her return to Indiana she had lunch with her mentor, who advised Shirley that God doesn't heal everyone. Her friend gave several examples of other Christians who had not been healed of serious conditions. As Shirley shared the scriptures of hope that the Houston couple had revealed to her, the woman became upset that Shirley was resisting her counsel.

Now Shirley was confused. When she returned to Houston for chemotherapy, the couple continued to meet with her every day, encouraging her from God's Word. Eventually, Shirley came to believe deep within her heart that what the Word of God says about healing is true. There would be no more doubting what God says in His Word. She would be healed!

When Shirley decided to discontinue chemotherapy, her doctor thought she had lost her mind. As she left the hospital, he actually followed her all the way to the elevator, warning her that she was making a life-threatening mistake. But Shirley was resolute. She left and never returned to MD Anderson. She returned home, and there she poured the Word of God into her life each day through books, audio messages, and Bible study.

As of today, thirty-one years later, she is healthy and lives down the street from us. In fact, at age seventy-five she serves in our ministry's church relations department, a team of seven who resource more than twenty thousand churches in the United States with our books and curricula. In her role she has helped countless pastors and church workers find the resources they need.

In all my years of ministry, I've found few people like Shirley who are as easy to pray with for healing. One time not long after Lisa and I married, I came home from work, and Shirley—who was visiting us—had come down with severe flu. When I walked in, Shirley was crawling up the stairs to go to bed. She had no strength to walk. When she saw me she said, "John, I need you to pray for me so I can get rid of this flu."

As I prayed for her, the power of God was so strong, so tangible, that my mother-in-law literally collapsed to the floor. Then she jumped up, started bouncing around our apartment, and said, "I want to make you guys dinner!" She proceeded to cook us a wonderful meal. I laughed within and thought, *Wow, the same thing happened with Peter.* His mother-in-law was sick, Jesus healed her, and she got up and made them all something to eat (see Matthew 8:14–15).

Not only does Shirley receive prayer easily, she's also a power woman when it comes to praying for others to be healed. If she's around anyone who is battling illness or injury, you'd better know that they are going to get a fire-hose dose of God's Word and prayer for healing!

Shirley has remained cancer free and in good health for thirty-one years and counting! By relentlessly fighting her intense *thlipsis* with the Word of God, she has received the crown of life in the arena of healing. She has endured and overcome this adversity and now rules in the area of life in which she persevered.

## OVERCOMERS

Others have the same testimony. Consider Oral Roberts, who is in heaven now but whose life and legacy continue. At age seventeen, Oral was about to die from tuberculosis. He relentlessly stood against the disease with the Word of God and prayer, and later was confirmed healed by his doctor. As with Shirley, Oral received the crown of life in the arena of healing, and millions of people were subsequently strengthened and healed through his life and ministry.

I have a friend named Jimmy who has been a pastor for years and influenced many through his ministry. At a young age, he was given up to die by doctors but was taken to an Oral Roberts meeting. After Oral prayed for him, Jimmy miraculously recovered.

What if Oral hadn't persevered as a young man? Where would my pastor friend be today—along with the millions of others who received healing through Oral Roberts's ministry? What about all the people Pastor Jimmy has impacted for eternity—where would they be today? Oral entered rulership. The full result of his relentless belief will be known only at the judgment seat.

Or consider Kenneth E. Hagin. Born in McKinney, Texas, in 1917 with a deformed heart, Kenneth was later diagnosed with a rare, incurable blood disease. He became bedfast at age sixteen and was not expected to live beyond his teens. In April 1933 he died three times and saw hell, and each time Kenneth was brought back due to his mother's and grandmother's steadfast prayers. Kenneth gave his life to Jesus as Lord. He relentlessly believed and fought the disease with the Word of God. A pastor who came to visit and comfort him said, "Hang in there, son, it will all be over in a few days." A year later Kenneth rose from his "death bed" and, shortly after, began to preach.

Kenneth Hagin's ministry became world renowned, with more than sixty-five million books in print and a Bible training center that has graduated more than thirty thousand men and women, many of whom are in full-time ministry. After sixty-five years of ministry, Kenneth is now home with the Lord, but his legacy continues. He received the crown of life in the arena of healing, and, as a result, untold multitudes have been healed and lives changed due to his faithful ministry.

What if Kenneth Hagin had not persevered? How would the millions he ministered to have been affected?

These three people whose stories I've shared—my mother-in-law, Oral Roberts, and Kenneth Hagin—have something in common. They've all been attacked, lied about, and spoken of as evil. The husband of Shirley's hometown friend ceased speaking to her once she decided to believe God for healing. During their lives, both Oral Roberts and Kenneth Hagin were accused of being in error, extreme, heretical, even demon inspired. But what did Jesus say about such things? "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

Interestingly, there are ministers and other believers who have lightened and broadened the message of the kingdom to make everyone feel comfortable. For fear of offending someone or of being labeled "intolerant" or "extremist," they've withdrawn from fighting the good fight of faith. To them, anything that happens is the will of God and should be passively accepted. They've removed "offensive" portions from the Gospels, yet He's referred to as "a rock of offense." The Scriptures also call Jesus a "stumbling stone," but they have reduced Him to a pebble that couldn't cause anyone to stumble.

These pastors, ministers, and believers seem to want to be spoken well of by all; they'd never be accused of being extreme, heretical, or demon inspired. Yet Jesus was considered all of these things. He was relentless in truth. He exposed the deception of those who desired to be well spoken of. He announced, "Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name" (Luke 6:22, MSG). Quite the opposite of being well spoken of, wouldn't you agree? Then He gives the reason: "What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable."

The reality is this: if you choose to be a relentless believer, one who rules in life, it is highly likely you will be slandered, lied about, misunderstood, and even marginalized by those who profess to follow Jesus but are satisfied with a comfortable life. They will seek to discredit you in order to justify their apathetic ways. They did this with the true prophets of the Old Testament, with John the Baptist, with Jesus, and with the leaders of the New Testament. They do so today. Your greatest resistance will most often be from those who claim to know

God. It will range from lies and slander to exclusion. And it may even go as far as what Jesus foretold: “The time will come when those who kill you will think that by doing this they are serving God” (John 16:2, TEV).

Do you want to rule in life for the glory of God? Do you want to impact lives for His kingdom, forever? Do you want to hear the Master say, “Well done, My good and faithful servant” on that great day? If so, settle it now: You will face *thlipsis*, sometimes quite intensely, and you’ll need to endure and overcome.

If you still truly desire to enter rulership and you’re willing to endure, then keep reading. The best is yet to come.