

RISE OF THE SERVANT KINGS

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS
ABOUT BEING A MAN

KEN HARRISON

Chairman of the Board, Promise Keepers

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*To Elliette—my best friend,
my fellow prayer warrior, my servant queen*

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Foreword

Some tell me there are only three things in this world that last forever—people, principles, and stories. And most of the stories are about people learning principles. *Rise of the Servant Kings* draws on events from a man’s story and shares the principles he’s learned along the way. Some the hard way.

I first met Ken Harrison when he was just a kid. He’s the firstborn of three large, strong, and very competitive brothers. All athletic, all strong-willed—like their father. Sometimes out of control. Bulls in a china shop. And everyone around pretty much knew it.

Perhaps they’re not that different from many men before them, maybe even from you—there’s much to be liked, but oh so much needing to change. Abraham, the liar, comes to mind. As does Moses, the murderer. And Jacob, the wheeler-dealer; Samson, the womanizing bully; and David, the giant-killing adulterer. Even John, the “son of thunder,” who became the beloved apostle. And, of course, Paul, the type A persecutor of Christians. We call their stories ones of redemption and hope.

How about yours? When Jesus conquers a man and that man surrenders fully to Him, everyone within range benefits and rejoices. His wife, kids, friends, neighbors, church, even his whole community—everyone wins! God loves to use converted, humbled Christ-following men. He has a way of growing them up.

This book reveals pieces of Ken’s story, so you’ll encounter plenty of rough edges in these pages. Some of your feathers may get ruffled. Ken writes like the tough LAPD street cop he once was—direct, forceful, staccato, no nonsense. Just rapid-fire bursts of truth intended to hit your center of mass with intensity and energy. But don’t miss the point. There is hope here. The “holy terror” from Boring, Oregon, is on another mission that’s not so boring. This mission is from heaven.

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Ken is a man who's growing. His mission matters like no other has in his life. Though he is a successful businessman, this mission is not about money or competition. Not about personal achievement. No more earthly pettiness. This mission is about a singular cause that transcends all else—the kingdom of Christ ruling in every masculine soul to the end that men actually become mature in Christ, marriages reflect heaven, families become healthy, communities are revolutionized, and, above all else, our God is glorified.

Come along and profit from principles Ken has learned in his life. Hang on for the ride; ponder the white spaces. And read this book with the burden from which it was written: This earth is not the real world. One day, at the end of the race, you and every believer will stand before the King for His evaluation.

Join the rise of the servant kings!

—Stu Weber, pastor, speaker, and author of *Tender Warrior*

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1

SERVANT KINGS

I looked for pleasure, beauty, and truth not in Him but in myself and His other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion, and error.

—AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*

Don't you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way to win the prize. Now everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything. However, they do it to receive a crown that will fade away, but we a crown that will never fade away. Therefore I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air. Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

—I CORINTHIANS 9:24–27

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The athlete stood and stretched, the sound of the warning trumpet still filling his ears. The sun wasn't yet up, and the cold of the January morning filled his bones. He watched his breath trail into the air and shivered as his trainer rubbed him with oil, getting his blood flowing. A slave fed him cheese, figs, and dried meats, the only food he'd have for months. He stomped his feet impatiently, knowing that if he missed the next trumpet, he'd be disqualified from the greatest moment of his life. Despite the cold, there was no need to dress. He'd train today naked, the same way he'd compete.

The athlete had been selected to represent his city in the Isthmian Games, and he'd met every qualification. He was a freeborn Greek, he'd won the qualifying matches, and he'd met the standards set by the city elders. Now came the real challenge. He would train every day for ten months, his every move monitored by the marshals. If any of them thought he was giving less than maximum effort, for even an instant, he would be cast out. If he ever left the training grounds, he would be disqualified. If wine or any food beyond the approved diet touched his lips, he would be sent home with deep shame, with "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The training was grueling and there were no breaks. And no mercy. He

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represented the people of his city and served at their discretion. The effort was worth it. If he won, he'd be a ceremonial king, given the crown of Poseidon and the glory that went with it. The city would shower him with rewards. The people would honor him with a parade and write songs about him. A ceremonial hole would be cut in the city wall to symbolize that with such a great athlete, the people didn't need walls to protect them from their enemies—they had him. His family would be fed and would be forgiven from taxes for his lifetime, and his children would go to the best academy. Even better, he would be given a lifetime appointment to the city council.¹ If only he could stay focused during his time at the training grounds and not be disqualified from the race. He thought, *I must “discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that . . . I myself will not be disqualified.”*

This is the athlete Paul had in mind as he wrote the verses at the beginning of this chapter. This is the only type of athlete the Corinthians would recognize—a man who had mastered self-control and was focused so completely on victory that if he ran the race well, the city officials would lavish awards on him.

Here Paul gave us the template for our Christian walk. We are to run the race of life to win the crown and the rewards and recognition that come with it. Paul put the message of Christ—that all who have believed in Him have been selected to represent Him in the game of life—into terms the Greeks could relate to, ideas like these:

- We are the freeborn (we were born in bondage to sin; when we became born again, we were freed from our bondage to sin). We were selected from the very beginning of time (Ephesians 1:4).
- Some of us will receive the crown of victory at the judgment of the Christians (1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:8), and some of us will hang our heads in shame (1 Corinthians 3:13–15; 1 John 2:28) because we have not run the race to win.
- If we don't stay focused on victory, there will be consequences for our actions on earth and consequences in heaven. All our experiences in life have taught us that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

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An Obedient Life

When I was nineteen, I got a job at an underage nightclub working as a doorman. I had walked with the Lord my whole life, so this job was getting me an education in a world with which I was completely unfamiliar. The club was in a rough area of town, and homeless people often milled around the front door. There was one homeless man who was like a black mirror image of me. He was the same age, height, and build and always seemed to be around. Even on warm summer days, he was never without his denim jacket with brown corduroy sleeves.

I'd often go to a sandwich place that was open late to get something to eat. Sometimes I ate only half the sandwich and gave the other half to him. I didn't think much about it; he was hungry and I had half a sandwich. On a few cold nights I bought him coffee. Each time I handed him something, he'd just nod. I never heard him say a word.

I really didn't fit in with the scene at that club, and my Christian lifestyle and values were apparent to the owners. They never saw me take part in the club's activities, so, regarding me as a trustworthy employee, they promoted me to manager within a few months.

One night three guys in their late teens forced their way through the front door without paying admission, and I was called on to confront them. Somehow I got them outside the door, but as we exited, one of the teens threw a punch that caught me square on my jaw. He hit me again and then again. He hit me about ten times over the next thirty seconds. He was a trained fighter and moved and punched far more quickly than I could defend myself. I was finally able to get ahold of him and got him to the ground, which ended the fight. I looked around, wondering what had happened to the other two teens and saw them stretched out on the ground, unconscious. Standing over them was the homeless man, fists clenched. He was barely breathing hard.

"Thanks, man," was all I could say between gasps for breath. He just nodded.

Twenty years later, after becoming the CEO of a large company, I was

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walking down the sidewalk in the same city when I saw that homeless man. I could hardly believe it—he was wearing the same denim jacket with the corduroy sleeves. It was tattered and dirty but the same jacket. I emptied my wallet and walked up to him, handing him the cash. “You helped me out once,” I said. He just nodded and walked away.

This was similar to an event that happened to an officer I knew while I was a police officer with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). We were working in the notoriously high-crime area called 77th Division. The gang war was in full swing, and we were struggling with a vicious gang called the Eight Trey Crips. Though they were part of the Crips street gang, they killed other Crips, as well as those from their rival gang, the Bloods.

Around two o’clock in the morning on a hot summer night, I was writing an arrest report in the break room of 77th station. An officer walked in with a dazed look in his eyes and a bandage on his head. He shuffled over to the coffee dispenser and put a quarter in, waiting for the weak, lukewarm coffee to drip into a tiny cup. Then he threw down a sheet of paper and stared at it, trying to figure out how to start a report. “Man, what happened to you?” I asked.

He blinked and focused slowly on my face. Looking back on it, I realize now that he probably had a concussion, but in those days we were told to “just shake it off.”

“I was in a foot pursuit of a couple of Eight Treys, man,” the officer said. “I got separated from my partner during the pursuit and jumped over a fence. The kid I was chasing ducked under a clothesline, and when I went to tackle him, the line got me under the chin. I never saw it. It flipped me backward, and I bounced my head off the concrete. Knocked me out cold, man.”

He blinked a few times. “I woke up indoors on some guy’s couch. He’d seen the whole thing, come outside, and carried me into his house and hid me from the Crips.” The officer held his head in his hands, trying to quell the pain.

“They’ll kill him for that,” I said.

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“Yeah . . . no,” he said, frowning his brow. “We called the fire department, and they snuck me out of his house on a stretcher. The gangsters didn’t see he had a cop in his house.” He shook his head slowly. “When I came to, the guy said, ‘I seen you around before. You were always fair to everyone. You’re one of the good cops. I wasn’t gonna let them kill you.’ You know, Harrison, if those Eight Treys would’ve seen me laying there unconscious, they’d have put a bullet in my head.”

“Yeah,” I said, “you got lucky.”

“No,” he said, “I treat everyone with respect. I never figured people were watching though. I never thought it would save my life.”

His actions had consequences, and they saved his life. My actions as a teenager had consequences, and they saved me a trip to the emergency room. In his case and mine, black men risked their safety and even their lives to save white men because of some small acts of kindness that neither of us realized would come to matter so much.

Giving a cup of coffee to a cold man, treating poor people with respect, these are small actions that should typify every Christian (Matthew 10:42). But they don’t typify every Christian, do they? These are not actions that can simply be summoned up when you want them. They are consequences of living a life of obedience to God.

A man who is in love with God is a man who is in love with other people. Neither that fellow officer nor I thought about what we were doing. Our actions were the outward expression of our nature. We were men in love with Jesus. We acted like servant kings.

Let’s Talk

Let’s have a truly honest discussion about what the Bible says about God’s plan for men.

God wants us to be His servant kings.

What does that look like? A real man is proactive, courageous, and

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humble, but our sinful nature pulls us toward passivity, cowardice, and arrogance. Our sinful nature says to us, “As soon as you get your act together, then you can try to be and do something meaningful.”

That’s a lie. God seeks men of action and faith who will “go before they know.”

In this book we don’t want to gain more facts about God. We want to come to know God Himself. We’ve been invited into relationship with Him, so let’s get to know Him and what He wants from us. Let’s also take an honest look at why it’s so hard to draw close to Him despite His invitation. We want to learn how to have true life as we step out in bold obedience and trust in His Word.

Well Done!

How would you complete the following sentence? The goal of my life is _____.

The goal of football is to score touchdowns. The goal of running a company is to increase profits or stock value. What’s the goal of your life? Let’s take a look at a crucial Bible passage and see if we can come up with an answer:

It is just like a man going on a journey. He called his own slaves and turned over his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; and to another, one—to each according to his own ability. Then he went on a journey. Immediately the man who had received five talents went, put them to work, and earned five more. In the same way the man with two earned two more. But the man who had received one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master’s money.

After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. The man who had received five talents approached, presented five more talents, and said, “Master, you gave me five talents. Look, I’ve earned five more talents.”

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His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!”

Then the man with two talents also approached. He said, “Master, you gave me two talents. Look, I’ve earned two more talents.”

His master said to him, “Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master’s joy!”

Then the man who had received one talent also approached and said, “Master, I know you. You’re a difficult man, reaping where you haven’t sown and gathering where you haven’t scattered seed. So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what is yours.”

But his master replied to him, “You evil, lazy slave! If you knew that I reap where I haven’t sown and gather where I haven’t scattered, then you should have deposited my money with the bankers. And when I returned I would have received my money back with interest.

“So take the talent from him and give it to the one who has 10 talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have more than enough. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And throw this good-for-nothing slave into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:14–30)

A man with a goal in life is active because he knows what he’s pursuing. Let’s live lives that the Savior deems “Well done!”

God delights in communicating Himself and His ways to every man who is prepared to receive Him. God can work in you only to the extent that you are submitted to Him. We all have some “self” left in us. Every believer is granted the Holy Spirit the moment he receives Christ (Ephesians 1:13–14). The amount of influence the Spirit has on you depends on the extent of your surrender: *the more self, the less God; the less self, the more God.*

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When I was with the LAPD and arrested someone, sometimes I was present when the jailer fingerprinted the prisoner. He would roll each finger in ink and then roll it onto the page. The jailer needed the finger absolutely yielded to him to get a good print. If there were any smudges, he would have to throw the card out and start over.

Often the prisoner would try to help and would smudge the print. The jailer would get angry and order him to relax every muscle and trust the jailer to do all the work. Some prisoners were unable to simply yield, and the process took a long time compared with those who yielded and completed the process easily.

That’s a picture of how God wants to work with us—life goes better when we relax and let Him work through us. He’s patient, willing to work on us throughout our entire lives, teaching us to yield to Him. But we have to let Him do it. Self wants to help; self wants to get credit. It chafes at the idea that God will do all and self can do nothing—except *yield*.

In our efforts to “help,” we have smudged the edges, putting the ugly print of human pride and self-effort where only our Lord should have received the glory. Jesus said that for us to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must be like little children (Matthew 18:3). He meant that our surrender must be one of simple, childlike trust in our Father. He will accept our surrender and fill us with His great power and fellowship.

Preseason Football

Too many men today are doing life as if it’s a preseason football game. We think that because we’ve received Christ and can’t lose our salvation, there is nothing left but to seek our own pleasures and obey some set of rules that someone somewhere told us. We do the best we can, but it really doesn’t count, does it?

No one likes preseason football. God has told us to snatch people from the hands of Satan and bring them into His loving arms. He’s told us to pro-

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rect and provide for His children and to care for the less fortunate. Life is the playoffs, not the preseason.

And when the game's over, we get only one shot to hear Jesus say, "Well done, my son!" So let us do the work that God gave us and, with it, experience the joy and reward of serving our Lord.



God knows that it is hard for us to obey and to have a nature that treats others respectfully and kindly. He knows that we yearn like little children to please our Father but fail over and over. That is why He urges us through the apostle Paul's writing to stay intensely focused, just like a Corinthian athlete. He will always meet us where we are if our hearts are pure. He will lift us to victory, but it will often be difficult.

In the next few chapters we will dig into why it is so hard to become the men we so desperately want to be. We will learn how to become servant kings.

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2

THE FALL

Our problem is not that we're human; it's that we're fallen.

—JOHN STONESTREET, COHOST OF
BREAKPOINT RADIO

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man,
and death through sin, in this way death spread to all
men, because all sinned.

—ROMANS 5:12

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Have you ever held a young person in your arms and watched her die? There is something about it that stays with a man until he takes his last breath.

When I was a Los Angeles police officer, my partner and I would often sneak out of our division into neighboring divisions where we could get something decent to eat for Code 7 (lunch). There wasn't much to eat in the ghetto at two o'clock in the morning, so we often drove north to the USC campus or the Hollywood area. Code 7 was forty-five minutes of peace amid the chaos.

My partner and I were eating late-night pancakes when a hysterical woman ran into the restaurant, screaming that there had been a car crash just outside and people were dying. It sounds harsh, but at the time we resented being bothered. This was supposed to be our moment of peace, and we saw dying people all the time. We radioed for an RA unit (paramedics) and some officers from Traffic Division to handle the accident and walked outside.

You just never know what is around the corner or just outside Denny's. A motorcycle was down, crushed under a car. A boy about eighteen was

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unconscious, bleeding severely from his head. He wasn't wearing a helmet. Behind him on the bike was a beautiful girl, also about eighteen. She had a helmet and I didn't see any blood on her. But her eyes had the glassy stare of the dying.

She looked up at me and put her arms out like a child wanting a hug. I stood there, thinking about what had been drilled into me through training—*never touch a wounded person unless there's a life-saving need.*

"Hold me," she whispered. It was a plea. So I sat down and wrapped my arms around her, putting her head in my lap.

The boy woke up and looked at us, unmoving.

"I was taking her to the hospital," he said. "Her brother was just in a motorcycle accident. I wanted to get her there as fast as possible. Man, what did I do? Is she going to live?"

Then she convulsed. Her body shuddered with the seizure of the dying. I held her closer and tried to calm her body. It seemed disgraceful to let her spasm like that. I think I was trying to hold her soul in, to keep her from dying there on the street.

Her convulsions slowed, and as I was watching her face, she looked up, but not at my face. Her eyes were on my badge. She kept moving her lips, trying to speak, but no sounds came out. She reached up and grasped my badge, and then the life left her eyes. One moment I was holding life in my arms. The next I was holding a corpse. She was gone.

The two traffic cops we'd requested showed up on their motorcycles. It was the same two older officers who seemed to show up every time I needed a traffic unit. There was a strange sort of camaraderie between us, even though we had barely spoken to one another, maybe because we'd handled so many horrific accidents together.

I was hesitant to speak because I was afraid I'd cry. "He was taking her to the hospital to see her brother," I blurted out. "The brother was just in a motorcycle accident."

The traffic cops looked at each other and then back at me. "Hollywood Presbyterian?" one of them asked.

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I nodded.

“Oh no!” the other said. “We just came from handling that accident. Her brother died.”

We all just stood there for a moment, looking at her. “You know the thing about it, man?” one of them said. “Their parents are on vacation. These were their only two kids.”

The Problem

When I watched this girl die in my arms, it hit me particularly hard because it was one of the few times I’d watched an innocent person die. I’d seen criminals die many times, and that hurt less. Watching someone die is always the same—there is a distinctly visual sense of the soul leaving the body.

When we see the tragedy of death right in front of us, it seems unnatural. But everyone must die, so if we are just a collection of cells, death should seem just a mundane part of human existence, right? Instead, death is a horrifyingly terrible moment, and it genuinely feels wrong when it happens.

It’s strange that we all have such a deep conviction that death isn’t the end, unless, of course, it isn’t the end at all. The Bible teaches us that our souls are eternal and death is our separation from the bodies in which they are housed. But what happens to our souls when our bodies die, and why is that separation so terrifying?

I’ll answer that question, but let’s first look at what evil is and why it exists. Knowing that helps us understand death and its hold on us.

What Is Evil?

When God created human beings, He gave them freedom of choice. The choice was between life and knowledge. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve could have eaten from the tree of life but chose instead the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1–2). Life would have consisted of an

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eternity living in God's presence and learning more and more of His nature. But when human beings chose knowledge over life, they entered the realm of death. The desire to know became their greatest temptation; it became more valuable than obedience or even life. This is why faith is so integral to knowing God. Faith is the first step away from the need to know and toward true life.

Death, like evil or darkness, is not a thing; rather, it is the lack of a thing. It is a parasite, deriving its essence from something else. Darkness wasn't created; it is simply a lack of light. In the same way, cold is the absence of heat. If you grasp a cold door handle, you aren't feeling cold; you're feeling the door handle robbing you of the heat from your hand.

In this way, death and evil are really the same thing; they are both not God. People who do not understand God claim that if He created everything, He must have created evil. No. When God created a person with a choice, the potential for evil was born. Once that someone chose something other than God, evil became reality, and with it came death—because God is life (John 11:25; John 14:6; 1 John 5:20).

The terror of death is on us all because as long as we're trapped in our shells—our bodies—we most often seek to operate in the known. We operate in the place in which our sinful nature is most comfortable—the place of knowledge. Separation from our bodies brings us outside the realm of our control. And that reality will be a place devoid of the light and life of God for those who die in their sins: “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God!” (Hebrews 10:31). On the other hand, for those who have received the redemption of Jesus Christ, “entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied” (2 Peter 1:11).

At the moment of death, those who have had their sins forgiven by Jesus Christ will find that having their souls separated from their bodies will be a moment of peace, not terror. One of C. S. Lewis's friends, upon seeing him the day before he died in 1963, said that he had never seen a person so prepared to die.²

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What Are We?

“God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26). Most Christians seem to start to build their understanding of theology in Genesis 3, which documents the curse, instead of starting in Genesis 1. We were created in God’s image and therefore yearn to do good, but we behave badly anyway due to our fallen nature. We all are evil and need the salvation of Christ (Romans 3:23). What makes us so bad is that because we were created in God’s image, we know better. We inherently know what is right and desire it, but we do the opposite anyway. When God created human beings, He said, “Very good!” (Genesis 1:31). God created us to rule the earth and fill it. He rested on the seventh day, not because the work was done, but because He was giving us the responsibility to shepherd every living thing as life spread, each according to its kind, throughout the earth (Genesis 1:28). So what went wrong?

George MacDonald is quoted as saying, “Never tell a child, you *have* a soul. Teach him, you *are* a soul; you have a body.”³ I believe this is why the young woman I held on the street that night felt so different after she had died. She had left.

A proper view of our bodies is necessary for us to understand the Fall and God’s warnings about living “according to the flesh” (Romans 8:4–5, 12–13). Andrew Murray wrote,

When God created man a living soul, that soul, as the seat and organ of his personality and consciousness, was linked on the one side, through the body, with the outer visible world, and on the other side, through the spirit, with the unseen and the divine. The soul had to decide whether it would yield itself to the spirit and by it to be linked with God and His will, or to the body and the solicitations of the visible. In the fall, the soul refused the rule of the spirit and became the slave of the body with its earthly appetites.⁴

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Humans were created to worship. When we chose something other than God in the garden, evil became not only our reality but also our nature, and our fellowship with Him was broken. Just as Adam and Eve hid from God in the garden because of their shame, we naturally hide from Him too. But still we seek to worship, so we worship self.

With this perspective we begin to understand 1 Corinthians 2:14: “The unbeliever does not welcome what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.” We naturally evaluate things from the perspective of our flesh, which is not of God.

The corrupted soul sometimes looks to its own thoughts and feelings and tries to find goodness and peace. This is the ego and is encouraged by the ways of the world, which say, “Look inside and you will find the answer.” Our Creator has a different perspective: “The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable—who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). There is nothing inside but self, demanding to be worshipped.

You may be thinking that people don’t often worship themselves—more often they hate themselves. However, self-loathing always derives from self-obsession. Have you ever known a person who lives completely to serve others? Have you noticed how that person is always filled with joy? The opposite is true as well. A person who focuses on self is always miserable. A depressed or suicidal person obsesses over self to the point of utter misery. Let’s look at why.

The Curse

The creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God’s sons to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God’s children. For we know that the

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whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. And not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. Now in this hope we were saved, yet hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:19–25)

All of nature fell under a curse because of the sin of human beings. When God announced the curses on mankind and nature in Genesis 3, He was not doling out punishment. He was declaring the consequences of sin. If my son drives drunk and crashes his car, breaking his leg, and I say, “Now you’re going to miss the wrestling season,” I’m not punishing him. Rather, I’m simply explaining the consequences of his actions.

It is interesting to note that God gave three aspects of life to people *before* the Fall: food, work, and sex. Mankind was to eat of the garden, work the garden, and be fruitful and multiply (1:28–29; 2:15). Notice that these are also the three aspects of life that received the curse (3:16–19). One of the most beautiful outcomes of sex is children, which now come through a mother’s hard labor. The harvest of our food comes through labor (in fact, the same Hebrew word for *labor* is used to refer to childbirth and farming), and toil will no longer be a constant reward but a daily fight.

When God told Adam and Eve not to eat from the forbidden tree, He warned them that they would “certainly die” (2:17). After God declared the consequences of their sin, He gave Adam and Eve skins to wear, covering their shame. God was no longer creating, which means He had to kill an animal to get the skin to cover their shame. Can you imagine the horrific moment for Adam and Eve, who had never known death, to see an animal in their care killed because of their actions? This also foreshadowed what must eventually take place: someday an ultimate death would be required to cover the sin of all men.

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Consequences

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do. . . . For in my inner self I joyfully agree with God's law. But I see a different law in the parts of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dying body? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh, to the law of sin. (Romans 7:18–19, 22–25)

As humans, we deeply want to do good, but we do evil instead. We want to be kind and generous, but something else lurks inside—something that drives us to take and destroy. We fight our own sin nature.

In the Scripture passage above, the apostle Paul wrote of our state of desperation when we make unhealthy choices and also of the relief we feel when we turn to the Savior. Jesus died to free us from this state and sent His Spirit to keep us free. As believers, we no longer are slaves to sin; the victory has been won—our sin nature is dead! We still commit sins, but we no longer are compelled to sin by a sin nature. Sin loses its appeal as we grow in Christ and begin to see the world through His eyes, and fellowship with Him becomes easier and easier.

As we grow as Christians, the Holy Spirit continues to conquer any inclination in us to sin, reminds us of our new nature in Christ, and helps us increasingly become a true reflection of God's image. As we learn to turn from our inclination to sin, the Holy Spirit begins to have greater influence in us. We begin to learn how to become servant kings.

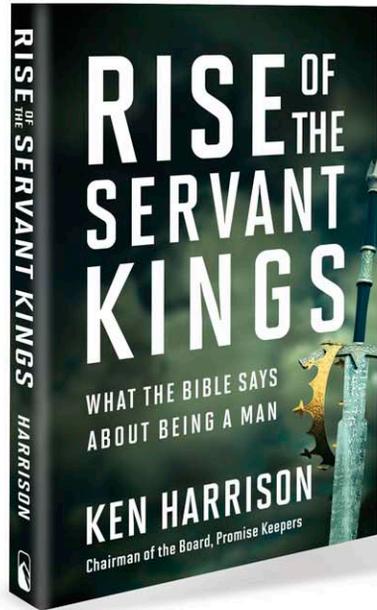
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