

THE NARROW ROAD

Contending for the Holiness of God

As we travel the narrow road, seeking our Hidden Treasure, we find our excitement fades. We discover to become a pure and spotless Bride is messy, painful and humiliating as He exposes our hearts to ourselves, and to others. It requires: patience, endurance and humility.

DIGGING FOR HIDDEN TREASURES

LUKE 11:9-10, MATTHEW 13:44

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Recovering of Gems

Many years ago, in 2008, a dear sister, brother and myself decided to go digging for hidden treasures – we went ‘rock hounding’ for a day. Rock hounding is a term that is used for the excavating and recovering of precious gems that are hidden in the earth. None of us had ever ‘rock hounded’ before. As we set off that cool day in January, we were full of joy, hope and great expectation! We all had the same desire—hoping we would find something of value—something spectacular. So we made our preparations for this day—or at least we thought we had. We made our travel arrangements—airfare and car rental, as the mine was in the hills north of San Diego. We made our reservation at the mine, for they only had so many openings each day.

When we arrived, we could hardly wait to start mining for the precious gem that the mine was known for—pink tourmalines, an incredibly rare stone. We had no idea what to expect, but quickly found out. They give everyone a 5-gallon bucket. And we each have a station, which consists of two screens that sit on top of each other to sift the dirt through with a tray of water to clean anything of suspect. There is this huge mound

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of dirt that has been excavated from the mine. All stations are positioned around this mound of dirt, so we all have equal access to it.

You fill your bucket with dirt from the mound and carry it back to your station. You pour the dirt onto the top screen and shake it over the bottom screen, shifting and shaking, until the dirt has sifted through the screen. If you find anything, you use the water to wash it to determine if it is of any value. The water quickly becomes filthy, for the dirt is dirty!

If you find anything, they have ‘experts’ to help identify anything of value, who come to your station and confirm what you found: if it is real or not. Once your bottom screen fills up, you have to empty it. And you continue this process through-out the day.

Hope and Expectation

At first, we were so excited, full of hope and expectation. We did not get disappointed when the first bucket, or even many after, did not have this ‘precious gem’ that we had set out to find. After many buckets, still nothing. But we are not the least bit discouraged nor expecting not to find our treasure. Instead, we are determined to find it. Every few buckets, we find something sparkling or unusual that motivates us to continue with renewed passion. After 20 plus buckets later, the sun has now shifted to early afternoon, there is a chill in the air. We have a flight to catch and only have a couple more hours to keep digging. Still nothing. At this point we are tired and fading fast. We are somewhat discouraged, actually really discouraged. We were just sure we would have found our ‘treasure’ by now!

By now, we realize that digging for our hidden treasure is a lot of work, at times painful—we did not bring gloves, and a messy process. That there is nothing easy about it. And actually, it is not fun anymore. We have lost our excitement. When we first began, we told ourselves, this is not too bad, we can manage the ‘weight’ of our 5-gallon buckets.

But after hours of carrying it back and forth, it feels like dead weight. We find ourselves covered in dirt and mud—our clothes, faces and hands. The sifting and shaking of dirt, the water, it all gets on you. It is impossible to stay clean. We have become a filthy mess while trying to find our hidden treasure. Our muscles are sore. And we are feeling weak, as we lean

on our own abilities, but we are not even willing to admit it to each other yet, for our pride stops us.

Faith and Strength

Yet, at this late hour, we still have a flicker of hope, telling ourselves, it just has to be in the next bucket. We muster up our faith and strength, again. Instead of running to the mound of dirt, we are now slowly limping to get to it. What is amazing, though, is that we still have a determination inside of us that will not let us give up—despite what our eyes are not seeing and what our weak flesh is feeling. So we fill our buckets a few more times—nothing, and we finally give up feeling so discouraged. We cannot believe we just spent all this money, time and energy, all to no avail, with no treasure to take back with us.

At this late hour, we realise that we did not come prepared on another level. Our clothes are covered in dirt and dry mud. It never occurred to us to bring a change of clothes. So we arrived back at the airport: covered in our filth, our bubbles burst, with reality setting deep within our hearts. And that reality being there is a lot more to digging for hidden treasures than meets the human eye or expectation. Even so, none of us was regretting that we had this experience. For we learned much about the process and each other. It was worth every penny and every effort!

While waiting for our flight, we can feel the other passengers’ alarm by our appearance. They do not know why we are covered in dirt and dried mud. And, to be honest, by this time, we just do not care. We just want to get back home, bathe and be clean again!

A Desire

Beloved, as we walk the narrow road, we can see this ‘experience’ parallels our walk on many levels. First, to become the Bride—one without spot or wrinkle, and to find the Prize, we must have a desire: to want to find this ‘Hidden Treasure’ that is more precious than diamonds. We have to desire to want to know the Lord and to want to become like Him, if we are to find Him.

But it is not enough to have a desire, it requires our intentional actions. So we have to find out what is required on our part. And then, we have to obey the instructions that we are given. To dig for our precious gem that day, required that we make the travel arrangements and reserve a set apart time at the

mine. We had to know when to arrive and where the mine was located. We had to know what the protocol was and to follow that protocol. That required a response on our end—to ask.

LUKE 11:9

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you...

It is the same in our relationship with the Lord. If we have a desire to know Him, it will cause us to start asking to want to know Him more. Moses cried out, in Exodus 33:13, show me Your ways that I may know You. Moses asked to know God's ways, for he understood the nature of God was to teach mankind His ways, that we would know His character. But knowing His ways—His character, was not something that was automatic. Therefore, Moses asked to know His ways so that his life—how he lived and worshiped God, could be pleasing to Him.

EXODUS 33:13

Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight...

To dig for our Hidden Treasure is costly. It takes time, energy, resources, finances and our undivided devotion to seek Him. If we are to know Him, there is a price attached. It will cost us everything that is dear to us—ultimately our self-will, that we may know His ways. In the rock hounding experience, we willingly paid a 'fee' to be able to dig for this precious gem. I could not but help think to myself, how much more so should we be willing, as His Remnant, to pay any 'cost' to know our Beautiful Savior and Reigning King!

The Lord requires nothing less than all of our heart: a surrender of our will, one step—one decision at a time, so that we can obey and please Him. The surrender of our will is a process. It does not happen over-night, but one 'bucket' of our will at a time, as we dig for our Hidden Treasure.

LUKE 11:9

So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find...

He Sifts and Shakes

As we seek Him, He sifts and shakes everything that can be shaken in our lives. We feel the weight of His

discipline—His holy love, come upon our weak flesh as He deals with our pride. Our sin and character flaws are exposed, as the Holy Spirit convicts us and 'highlights' and brings them to the surface through our life's circumstances. But we are not without hope! As we confess our sin—freely He forgives us. He gives us the washing of water with His Word and the Holy Spirit not only to convict us, but to cleanse us from wrong behaviors and thought patterns.

EPHESIANS 5:25-27

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

And while He sifts and shakes us, there is a transformation taking place within our soul. Remember, in digging for that precious gem, we ended up covered in dirt. We just wanted to be clean again. So, too, is it for us. As we dig, looking for our Hidden Treasure, we realise that our sin can no longer stay hidden in the inside recesses of our dark hearts anymore. We will find ourselves, by Divine Design, covered in our filth—exposed in a way that we can see it. We will not want it to be hidden anymore. Instead, we will want to be cleansed of it no matter how costly or how painful it may seem to us at the time, as we feel the heat of the Refiner's fire upon our souls.

And when we are in the fire, He proves our hearts to see if we really want Him—especially when we cannot see or feel Him, and our expectations of self and others have been shattered. In our brokenness, when our fragile hearts are sore and our emotions are raw, He wants to know are we still willing to pay any price to know Him? Are we still willing to take up our cross and follow the Lamb, until every spot, blemish and trace of self-will has been transformed by the renewal of our minds, so that we can know the perfect will of God for our lives? Are we still willing to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to the Lord?

ROMANS 12:1-2

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

As we travel the narrow road, seeking our Hidden Treasure, we find our excitement fades. We discover to become a pure and spotless Bride is messy, painful and humiliating as He exposes our hearts to ourselves, and to others. It requires: patience, endurance and humility, as we pursue the treasures of truth, purity and holiness, to keep bringing to the 'Expert' everything that we thought had any value and let Him confirm its worth—do we keep it or throw it out?

1 THESSALONIANS 4:7 AMP.

For God did not call us to impurity but to consecration [to dedicate ourselves to the most thorough purity].

In seeking our hidden treasure that day, we found it was costly physically, financially and emotionally. It took determination, where we had to be intentional if we were to continue to keep seeking. We had to overcome discouragement and keep hoping that the next bucket would have the precious gem that we were seeking to find.

So, too, is it for us. We must keep knocking, until the door of our hearts are opened. When we do, we discover that the siftings and shakings are all working for our good. They are all moving us into His eternal purpose for our lives: to be conformed into His likeness. And, at the same time, we find that our Hidden Treasure has been with us the whole time, rooting us onward and upward, providing the grace we need to finish our race, His way!

LUKE 11:9

*So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you, seek, and you will find, **knock**, and it will be opened to you.*

It is Not Automatic

To become a pure and spotless Bride, who will be found in the right wedding garments, is not automatic for us. We see that with the five wise and five foolish virgins. Five were prepared, and the five that were not prepared did not make it to the Wedding Banquet. It is a process to become pure and holy. It takes discipline, commitment and sacrifice on every level in our lives: spiritually, emotionally, physically and financially. Yet, it is not a to-do list. But about keeping our lamps filled with oil, which represents our relationship with Him. And it is in that place of relationship, where we work together with Him to bring us to the end result of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

And as we do, it means not giving up when everything in us screams that we cannot do this one more second longer. It means praying when we do not feel like it. Fasting when we are hungry. It means loving the unlovable people whom the Lord puts in our paths, loving them His way with sacrificial love, which can only manifest if we die daily.

As we keep knocking, we must keep asking for grace—His strength and abilities, to let the low life go, that we can obtain the high life—our death to self-will. When we keep knocking, He will be faithful to not let us give up, give in or give over to the discouragement and what feels like defeat along the way. He will give us the grace that we need to come through the purifying process, all the while, reminding us of His perfect love.

And in the process, we will learn to lose our pride, enabling Him to clothe us in humility and meekness and reveal Himself to us. We will learn to lean on His strength, and not ours. We will no longer walk in the shame of our nakedness, when sin and our character flaws are revealed. Instead, we will walk in the security of His perfect love, knowing He did not come to shame and condemn us, but came to set us free from them with His precious Blood.

And though others may not understand our pursuit of the One we love—what seems like a radical lifestyle to them, we will no longer care what man thinks. Instead, we will run to the only One Who is able to prevent us from stumbling and present us blameless before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy.

Counting the Cost

At first, when seeking our Hidden Treasure, it seems so easy. I believe so, because we really do not understand what we have asked for—we did not know how to count the cost. Often, we start our race with a zeal—a passion, in our asking, seeking and knocking to know Him—to find Him. But then the storms and fiery trials of afflictions come. Some are easier to weather than others, but all take their toll on us, either for good or for bad, and that choice will be ours.

If we weather them according to His Word and perfect love, they will purify, mature and cause us to be like Him in character: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control.

They will qualify to be His Bride, who has dove's eyes for Him alone.

LUKE 21:19 AMP.

By your steadfastness and patient endurance you shall win the true life of your souls.

Yet, we must be realistic; this search for our Hidden Treasure is hard at times, often painful, many disappointments, with much rejection, persecution and opportunities for discouragement to set in. At times, we feel so worn out, feeling like we cannot go on for one more second, or the pain feels too great to bear.

But then a spark—His flame of living love—life, in our hearts will not let us quit! There is a determination within us that must know Him. It nudges us to keep moving deeper into His love and higher into His ways, as we go lower by dying to self. And if we do not grow weary and faint not, in due season we shall reap a great reward and be His Bride. And while we are in that place of contending for the holiness of God to permeate every area of our lives, we can be of good cheer knowing He is fighting for us, providing all that we need to be victorious in Him.

If this is our desire: to be made worthy of Him to be His Bride, then anything that we hold dear: our reputations, ministries, family, friends, material possessions, we must hold loosely and be willing to surrender if the Master would ask. Because at some point, He will ask to prove our faithfulness. The Lord is not against our having those things, but He will test our hearts to see if we put anyone or anything above Him. He must test our hearts on every level to see if we will be faithful to Him alone, and be found worthy of Him. For He will not marry a harlot bride.

EPHESIANS 4:1-2

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...

Infinite Worth

Our hearts are these precious treasures that are priceless to our King. We have infinite worth to Him and to His Kingdom when we walk on this earth, His way. We are all called to be His Bride, but few will be chosen. In the rock hounding experience, at the end of it, we could not wait to bathe and be in clean clothes again! This speaks of the desire of His Bride's heart—to be pure before the One whom her soul loves and adores.

As Yeshua cleanses us from our filth—our sin nature, as we confess and forsake it, we learn how to dress ourselves in the right wedding garments. We learn what it means to contend for the holiness of God to permeate our lives. We learn to endure the sanctification—purification process, wanting our souls beautified by the spirit of holiness, and refined by fire. We learn not to settle for one spot, blemish or wrinkle, trusting in His abilities to cleanse us and not our own. We learn to bring every thought into captivity, to the obedience of Messiah, and are ready to punish all disobedience when our obedience has been fulfilled. We learn what it means to be a Bride making ourselves ready, for our Wedding Day.

We get to decide if we will be chosen or not, by the choices we are willing to make, whether to do His will or to do our will. He gives us all the same opportunity, the same Holy Spirit and all the grace that we need to succeed. He is not looking to disqualify anyone.

In this late hour, He wants us to be found in the right wedding garments. He wants us to be holy, as He is holy. But it takes our free-will offerings to surrender our will for His, over and over again. It is not about finding a shortcut or to manipulate our situations that He allows into our lives to purify, correct and teach us His ways, that we may know Him.

ROMANS 9:21-23

Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

It is about embracing them, and letting them transform us, by one degree of glory at a time. Until we have become emptied of self, that we can become those vessels of mercy that He has prepared beforehand, in this final hour, that will display His glory. AMEN!

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