

Sowing Seeds of Faith Newsletter

Straight Arrow Ministries

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www.straitarrow.net

In This Issue

- Beginning of a New Year
- Message: Cultivating Newness
- Website Features
- About Straight Arrow Ministries
- Featured Product
- Devotional Thought

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The Beginning of a New Year

With the advent of a new year, let's choose to forget the past and move forward into the present and future with faith and hope that God is with us as we prepare our hearts for new things!

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let's give our new year the KICKSTART it needs!

Website Features

Seminars by Kenneth L. Birks

Discover the enriching seminars Ken has available for your church or ministry.

Click here: www.straitarrow.net/seminars

Cultivating a Spirit of Newness

Let's face it. We all desire new things. They inspire us until the newness begins to wear off. God's desire for our lives is to give us a new heart that is constantly springing forth with a sense of newness that thrusts us forward in His purpose for our lives.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them.

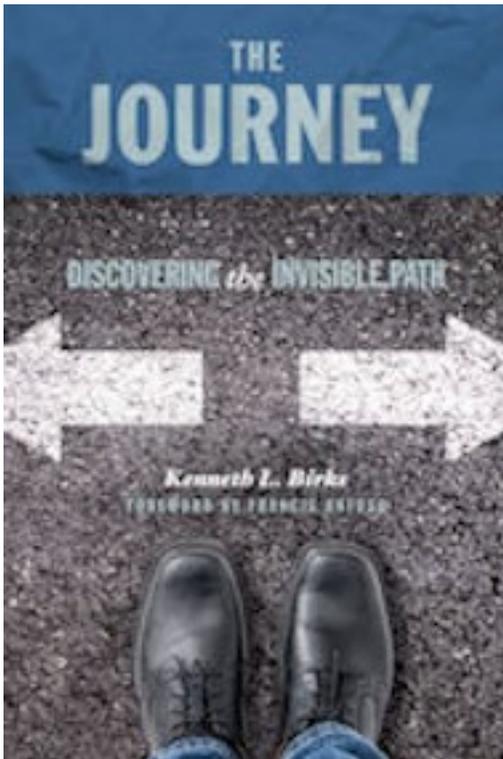
The problem is, our hearts are constantly being trampled on by the world and worldly desires as well as the circumstances of life. Our hearts become hard as a result.

If we are to remain fresh with a constant sense of newness, our hearts need to be cultivated on a daily basis.

Hosea 10:12 Sow to yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

Continued on Page 3

Featured Product



To Purchase this book in bulk for small group studies or Bible Study Classes, see the following website where companion workbooks are also available in teacher and student formats.

www.straitarrow.net/resources/journey-tools.htm

Ken's new book: **The Journey Discovering the Invisible Path**

The goal of this book is to give you, as a Christian, a glimpse into the path God has purposed for your life and to help you seize your destiny and purpose. In doing so, you will be able to live the role created for you. Whether you are just starting out on your journey, anywhere in the middle, or have become detoured and lost your way, this practical guidebook will help shine the light on the invisible path that not only leads to God's goodness and experiencing His kingdom within, but also to the greatest adventure of your life.

Comments: "*The Journey*" is your GPS for the Bible. The problem is solved. The riddle is deciphered. Like a trusted guide, Ken makes complex concepts simple and masterfully unpacks the Bible's greatest mysteries. He provides a sure foundation upon which to build a lifetime of insight.—*Francis Anfuso, Sr. Pastor*

I recommend this book to individuals, to small group leaders, to pastors, to churches, to Bible schools, and to seminaries. "*The Journey*" will help make disciples out of believers. —*Richard C. Benjamin Sr., Pastor, Retired*

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See www.booksbyken.com for details

About Straight Arrow Ministries

Straight Arrow Ministries believes in the integrity of God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

I believe in the divine harmony of Scriptures with Scripture interpreting Scripture rather than relying on a particular school of thought. No doctrine is an island unto itself. It must harmonize with the entire Bible. We should be loyal to the Scriptures rather than a particular school of thought. Whether it's through Seminars, Bible Studies, Sermon Outlines or Podcasts, I strive to maintain an integrity to the purity of God's Word so that those who hear are instructed in righteousness, given good sound doctrine and thoroughly equipped for every good work. Building a solid foundation in God's Word is of the utmost importance with precept upon precept and line upon line being established so that the deeper truths have a foundation from which they have been built upon.

Cultivating a Spirit of Newness Continued

In other words, we must cultivate our hearts. The word *cultivate* means “to prepare for the raising of crops, to loosen or break up the soil, to foster growth, to improve by labor, care or study.”

The next verse in Hosea explains why our hearts get hard from being trampled on. It says, we partake of the fruit of lies and trust in our own ways. The worldly system of thought is full of lies because it is controlled by Satan, who is the father of all lies. Yet we find ourselves attracted to his lies and ways of thinking by trusting in our own ways rather than God’s ways.

If we are to bear fruit, we must be constantly cultivating our hearts by breaking up the fallow ground so that the seed of God’s word can grow and bear fruit that remains.

As seen in the opening Scripture, God’s desire is to remove the heart of stone from us so that the newness will come.

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene, he came with the message, “Prepare the Way for the Presence of Jesus.” He essentially came to plow the ground or to cultivate it so that those who heard him would be prepared for the newness that was about to come for the Nation of Israel. — *Luke 3:4-6*

The message of John the Baptist is just as relevant today as it was over 2,000 years ago. Before Christ can come and fill our lives with newness and His fullness, there must first be a preparation in our hearts. Our hearts must be cultivated or prepared for the newness that is to come forth.

John the Baptist came out of the desert boldly announcing God’s word and challenging his hearers to a complete change of heart. Their hearts needed to be cultivated before they could receive what God had to offer them.

As Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah, much of Israel was in a state in which their hearts had become like stone, to the extent they couldn’t see or perceive what God was desiring to do in their midst. — *Matthew 13:14-15*

These are the people John was dealing with as he came preaching, “Prepare the Way.” He had to have a message that immediately got their attention.

What was the message John used to get their attention? How did he go about cultivating their hearts so that they could hear the message?

He begins his message by using shock treatment to get their attention by calling them a brood of vipers. This helped them to see the condition of their hearts and their need for repentance. — *Luke 3:7*

Without Christ and what He can do for us, we are all a brood of vipers walking in the wickedness of our sins.

Secondly, he began to strip away their protective shields by not depending upon Abraham as their father. — *Luke 3:8*

He first attacked their sense of righteousness and then attacked their sense of belonging. He stripped away their protective shields so they could identify with their need for a savior. This allowed them to see the true condition of their hearts.

We should ask ourselves, “What kind of protective shield do I have around my heart that needs to be torn away to reveal my true condition before the Lord?” This is the ground He desires to cultivate in our hearts.

In the next part of John’s message, he evokes the fear of God into their lives.

Luke 3:9 “And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown

*Cultivating a Spirit of Newness Continued
into the fire."*

All of this together reveals the conditions of their hearts and produces a conviction of their genuine need before God. Notice, in all of this, John does not use the feel good approach that is so rampant in many of today's churches. He didn't mince his words. He wanted them to see their wretchedness so that they could understand their need for repentance.

Luke 3:9 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

He then sums up his message by hitting hard on the theme of repentance that had already been introduced when he said, *"Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance."*

His answer to those who have been blessed with abundance was to give. — *Luke 3:11*

To the tax collectors, his message was to be honest. — *Luke 3:12-13*

To soldiers, policemen and those in places of authority, his message was don't intimidate, accuse falsely and to be content — *Luke 12-13*.

John's message was simple. 1) There must be a change in your hearts. 2) God is about to act. 3) Judgement is coming, and 4) You must have a new life.

God is calling all of us to repent and turn to Him so that the times of refreshing will come. God's desire is for each one of us to experience the wonderful newness that enables us to walk with a sense of fervency and zeal that brings us into the fulfillment of all of our hopes and dreams.

Now is the time to prepare the way for the presence of the Lord by asking Him, "What areas of my heart have been hardened by the pressures of the world, the deceitfulness of sin, and the circumstances of life?"

Now is the time to break up the fallow ground of our hearts by applying the Word to those areas that have become hardened, beaten down and trampled on.

To download this message in its entirety, please click here: www.straitarrow.net/Newsletters/cultivating-newness.pdf

Devotional Thought

Are you desiring a sense of newness as you enter another year? If so, you must understand that Newness comes by allowing God to renew our spirits. Think about all the times in your walk with God when you have made great strides in faith. It was most likely a sense of newness that catapulted you forward. It may have been when you first came to Christ, a new insight or revelation, answered prayer, a new experience or whatever. The point is: Newness brings freshness into our lives and motivates us to continue on in our journey with joy and enthusiasm.

Get in touch with what God wants to do in your life, rather than what you want. David prayed for God to create a new heart and renew a right or steadfast spirit within him. This should also be our heart attitude.

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

