

Russell Kelfer

I AM Not Among You

#1368-B

**Series: Possessing the Land:
The Process of Mentoring**

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

I AM Not Among You

If you were to categorize the sins of the Israelites, this one might be the most deadly of all. You ask: More deadly than refusing to believe God and possess the land? Perhaps. More deadly than accusing God of hating them and attempting to destroy them? Perhaps. More deadly than demanding quail at the expense of learning trust? Probably so.

It is found in Deuteronomy, chapter one, and it is there that we resume our look at these chosen people of God, this incredible called-out, hand-picked nation who have the only thing in life worth having. They have something no other people on the earth have: a unique, personal relationship with the Creator God, yet they seem to spend their lives inventing new ways to break His heart.

Again and again, they rejected His Word and scorned His absolutes. Again and again, their sins found them out, and though He destroyed them not, He lovingly disciplined them and allowed them to reap a tiny measure of what they had sown. So again and again, they cried out to Him for mercy, *and again and again He forgave them and loved them and drew them again close to His heart.*

As our story resumes, Moses, God's anointed leader, has called a congregational meeting and what might have been the world's biggest ever mega-church has come together for a word from God. Unlike today's church, *everybody came*. But then God had their attention. There had been a forty year spiritual drought in their church, and the results had been devastating. An entire generation had lived and died without experiencing what God had intended them to experience. He had given them a simple choice: "Believe Me and possess what I have given You" or "Rebel and refuse".

Those were their only two choices and they chose the latter. They chose to question God by examining the land in order to apply man's reasoning to God's promises. *They liked the promises;*

I AM Not Among You

the didn't like the procedure. The fruit of obedience was beautiful. They even brought back samples to show that God was telling the truth about the blessings of entering into His promises. But what they couldn't handle was the *warfare* that would be necessary to possess what God had given them. They wanted the *results*. They couldn't stand the *resistance*.

So they took a vote. The first vote came from the twelve “sent-ones” who went to check it out. They voted ten to two against believing God. Then came the “Gallup” poll. The people voted with the majority of the spies. They always will. God's ways are so *much different than man's* that to expect the majority to choose spiritual warfare simply because God said it is His means to victory is not realistic. The majority will always resist the path of confrontation with the enemy.

We love a good message on prayer, but the process of entering into the prayer closet for long seasons to encounter the enemy is not for most of us. We love a good seminar on sharing our faith, but to go out in the marketplace of life and become *that vulnerable* is a different matter. We want the “good life” spiritually. We want to be counted among the faithful. But the process of *being faithful*, that's a different story.

Well, back to our passage. God's people voted “no”, and God was, once again, broken-hearted. Moses is recounting this dreadful mistake forty years later now and is explaining to their children what happened, and what happened as a result of what happened. Let's tap in on the video feed that is being broadcast from the First Church of Deuteronomy and see and hear what this godly old man is saying to his congregation. He doesn't have many sermons left to give. He wants them to hear this one. I mean *really* hear. We take up where he is reminding them of their parent's response to the majority report. They had said:

Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.

Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them.

The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes;

And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the

I AM Not Among You

LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.

Yet in this thing ye did not believe the LORD your God,

Who went in the way before you, to search you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night, to shew you by what way ye should go, and in a cloud by day.

And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying,

Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers,

Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the LORD.

Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither.

But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it.

Moreover your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it.

But as for you, turn you, and take your journey into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.

(Deuteronomy 1:28-40)

First came the *sermon*, then came the *sentence*. The sermon was entitled: "Don't you Remember?" It contained graphic reminders of God's past miracles. He assumed that simply by keeping a folder on the hard disk of their minds called: "What God has Done" the very system of recall would give them the faith they needed to attach His present words to past deeds and do whatever He asked them to do. The warfare would be real, but they had experienced nothing but warfare in their lives and *always God had been there. Always.* They weren't, however, comforted because God would be there. They were simply worried that the enemy would be there. Too bad. Big mistake.

So Moses is recounting the *sentence* that followed the *sermon*. The sentence was that their parents would never see the land; never taste the fruit; never occupy the rich, green pastures; never sit beside those rushing streams; never quietly be at rest in their

I AM Not Among You

God-planned residences. They would never have a forwarding address; never have a place to plug in a phone or hang a “God Bless our Happy Home” sign. They would be transients until they day they died. All of them, that is, but Joshua and Caleb. By faith, they would enter in. Granted, they had to wait a long time because of the unbelief of their peers, but God preserved them for that moment.

Moses himself, however, would see the land from afar, but he could not occupy it. The reason he gave in this passage seems a bit out of character for our aging hero, but then we can probably identify with his weariness at this point. He blamed them for his failure to occupy the land. He said:

Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying,
Thou also shalt not go in thither. (Deuteronomy 1:37)

That was not the reason Moses could not enter. He, too, had experienced a moment of rebellion and unbelief and it had seriously affected his testimony to the whole of the nation. Moses was a man. A godly man. One of the godliest men who ever lived. He was meek and he was strong. But at one moment in time, when he was asked to trust God to give one more sign to this unbelieving crowd of rebellious followers, he exercised his own authority rather than exalting God’s, and he broke God’s heart in the process. (Numbers 20:8-11) Consider that moment carefully, for it was indeed representative of what is about to follow. The children of Israel basically did the same thing Moses did. Listen:

Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill.

And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies.

So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill.

And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah.

And ye returned and wept before the LORD; but the LORD would not hearken to your voice, nor give ear unto you.

I AM Not Among You

So ye abode in Kadesh many days, according unto the days
that ye abode there. (Deuteronomy 1:41-46)

The scenario is not uncommon to us if we are willing to make the “spiritual switch”. Don’t spend too much time laughing at the Israelites. God wasn’t laughing. And He isn’t laughing at us, either. He is grieved. His heart is broken. He weeps at the thought of His children missing out on the rich blessings He has given them as a gift. All He has asked them to do is *believe*. He will do the rest. *He will fight for them*.

So Moses is recounting this sad incident for the second generation. He tells them that their parents could have enjoyed a quality of life reserved only for those who trust the giants in the land to God. They *chose* not to. *Believing is a choice*. And choosing not to choose is the most cowardly choice of all. It’s like pretending to be hard of hearing so you don’t have to answer a questionable question.

“LET’S GIVE GOD A HAND!”

The very first reaction of the Israelites to the realization that they had missed God’s will was, to the casual observer, commendable. To God, however, it was anything but commendable. It was the response of the flesh to try to do what only God can do: fight the enemy. They were to go up and let God give them the land. It was an act of faith, and God was to engage the enemy on their behalf and the outcome would be predetermined. They *would* possess the land. Having failed that act of faith, however, they decided to do battle with the enemy on their own and *show God what they could do*. The trouble was, (and is) God is all too aware of what His children can do. . . and it isn’t defeat the enemy. What God’s children can do is make a feeble attempt to engage Satan in their own energy and fail.

Beloved, *God is the only one who can defeat the enemy*. Mark it down. Engrave it on your heart. Memorize II Chronicles 20:15b:

Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed
by reason of this great multitude; for the battle *is* not yours,
but God’s.

What a hard lesson to learn. In their generation and in ours. We live in a society that teaches from kindergarten up that *we are the ones who can*. We live in a world filled with performance-based acceptance; where who you are may well be defined by

what you accomplish.

They were out of the will of God. What a terrible time to make a life-changing decision. God had told them what to do and they had refused. Having done that, and having seen the consequences begin to emerge, they decided to *show God what they could do*. They thought it was *the act of not going that made God angry*. It wasn't. The act of not going was the result of the *attitude of not believing*. That was what made God angry.

“THUS ALMOST SAITH THE LORD”

he worst offense of all, however, may have come in verse 41. They did acknowledge that they had sinned, but that isn't enough to qualify as repentance. They were upset because God was upset and because of the consequences; not because of their unbelief. They still didn't see their unbelief as the sin. So they gave God their reason for the second act of disobedience. Their response?

Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill. (Deuteronomy 1:41)

Uh-oh. They committed the sin of sins. They did their own thing and used Scripture as their scapegoat. They said, “We will go up and fight just the way God told us to.” But God hadn't told them to. He had told them to believe Him and by faith let Him defeat the giants. Their interpretation, having studied it in the Israeli Evangelical Seminary and having read the dissertations of the leading rabbis of the day was that while it was a generalization to some degree, in principle God was saying it was their job to go, so it must be their job to defeat the enemy. So they printed out the RHT, (The Revised Hebrew Translation), which changed the meaning of the words ever so slightly and *they actually had the nerve to tell God that it was His word that got them into all this trouble*.

They took it out of context and used it to suit the occasion and justify their second act of disobedience, which was, in effect, as deadly as the first.

It was at this point that Jehovah gave them the *reason* defeat was imminent. He said this:

And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up,

I AM Not Among You

neither fight; for I am not among you; lest ye be smitten
before your enemies. (Deuteronomy 1:42)

Now, I don't know about you, but that sounds clear enough. Don't go. Don't fight. If you do, you'll become barbecue. You will be ground into the dust. You will not only lose, you will be "smitten". It literally means "You will be crushed". You've seen the difference in the sports arena. Two teams battle in a basketball classic, and with seconds to go and the score tied, one team gets a miraculous basket and wins at the buzzer. The other team is defeated. They lost.

But on other occasions, the same two teams might meet and one team might so dominate that the other is literally humiliated. They go home from the game too embarrassed to be interviewed. They have been more than defeated; they have been "smitten" or "crushed". The Jews were guaranteed victory were God to fight for them. They were guaranteed to be smitten were they to fight for God. Mark it. That pattern is woven through the whole of Scripture.

"I AM NOT AMONG YOU"

God is so gracious. He not only told them in advance of the *results* of their disobedience, He gave them the *reason*. The reason was clear: He said:

Go not up, neither fight; for I am not among you...

Not only would God not fight for them, *He wouldn't even make the trip*. He said, "If you go, you go alone". If you choose to fight the enemy, then you fight the enemy. God is not a co-laborer in spiritual warfare. God is not merely the Commander-in-Chief, either. He is the Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end. He is the Rock; His work is perfect. He is our Shield and our Defender. He is the I AM, and the mere sound of His voice is enough to still the din of the battle. It is enough to cause the mountains to shake and the trees to bow down in submission.

The nations are like putty in His hands. The most ruthless of dictators have no power when God decides to enter the fray. He is enough. Yea, He is ten-trillion times more than enough. He is. And that is everything.

But the other side of the coin is this: If God is everything, and you go out to battle without Him, *what chance do you have?* God said it clearly here. Don't go. Don't fight. You will be crushed.

I AM Not Among You

Why? *For I am not among you.* And if God is not among you, you are among the vanquished. You will be smitten. You will go home too embarrassed to be interviewed.

Was He refusing to go because they were not His children? Not at all. They were *His chosen ones*. He was refusing because they had, in the confusion of their disobedience, slipped out from under the umbrella of His sovereignty and decided to *show Him what they could do for Him*, thus keeping Him from showing them *what He could do for them*. That, beloved, is the sin that ever so subtly makes the Christian into a god and makes God both angry and grieved.

It wasn't that the giants in the land were anything special. They were big by man's standards, but they were nothing when compared to God. The key was that God had taken care of those giants even before the foundation of the world. They were nothing to Him. All He had to do was utter a word and they would dissolve into nothing at the sound of His voice. The giants weren't the problem. The flesh was the problem. The flesh wanted to show God it could compensate for unbelief. It can't. It can only make matters worse.

Making the "spiritual switch" is critical in this instance, but it is, for many, incredibly difficult. It is where God's "higher ways" (as much higher as heaven is above earth) have to be accepted for what they are and appropriated in spite of the conflicts they raise with the natural mind.

The natural mind does not want to give up control.

The surrendered life is all about giving up control.

The natural mind does not want to be dependent.

The surrendered life is a life totally dependent on God.

The natural mind does not accept blind faith.

But without faith it is impossible to please God.

The natural mind does not respond well to absolutes.

Yet the Christian life is based on absolutes.

The natural mind does not respond well to authority.

The Christian life is a life under authority.

The natural mind desires acceptance and success.

The surrendered life often includes rejection and failure.

The natural mind wants to at least share in the glory.

I AM Not Among You

Ours is a jealous God. He will not share His glory with another.

The natural mind wants pleasant circumstances.

The surrendered life will be subject to pain and tribulation.

The natural mind puts confidence in numbers and strength.

God uses the weak and the few to confound the mighty, that “no flesh should glory in His presence”.

The truth, then, is that every measuring stick the world uses to measure success and to make decisions will be at odds with the Word of God. Not slightly different. Totally different. Not some of it. All of it. The Word of God is not an addendum to the mind of man designed to augment the plans and ways we would operate were it not for God’s intervention. The Word of God is a revolutionary departure from everything the mind of man would contrive on his own. Everything about it is a total departure from how and why man would live on planet earth if left to his own devices.

And there are no exceptions. (All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.) There are no “good” guys apart from God. (The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.) There are none whose works would even please God, for there “are none that doeth good, no not one.” Either you believe that or you don’t.

God cannot, therefore, leave it to fallen man to make any decisions apart from His Word or fight any battles in his own strength. Therefore, the degree to which we surrender our authority and our reputations and our rights to God will be the degree to which we experience victory. The degree to which we acknowledge that we can’t and He can, and only to that degree will we see the giants begin to fall. So long as we are insistent in co-laboring with God to enter the land, He will quietly, lovingly step back and say to us, “Go ahead. Fight the battles. But I must warn you: *I am not among you.*”

In other words, “Go if you must, but you go it alone.” And as we endeavor to live in this world without becoming of this world, the battles rage and He allows situations to develop in our lives that the mind of man and the might of man cannot overcome. To us, at least, they are indeed giants. There are the giants of terminal illness, the giants of physical pain and suffering, the giants of deformity and handicap, the giants of rejection and persecution, the giants of failure and financial ruin.

I AM Not Among You

Some come from sowing and reaping. Some come with no apparent human cause at all, but all come as a result of fallen man, now redeemed, living in a world where Satan is given freedoms to harass the believer while God waits to see how that believer will choose to respond to the giants who stand ready to devour him or her.

God's plan is both simple and profound. It is so simple that man cannot accept its simplicity yet it is so profound that when man sees it work he is amazed. Here it is in one sentence:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.
(Philippians 2:13)

It is God who enables you and God who works through you. You don't *do* things for God, God does things for you. That is what His indwelling Holy Spirit is all about. You allow Him to live His incredible transformed life in your body, and as you do, you possess the land an inch at a time, a foot at a time, a day at a time. So long as you understand that, and you continually release into His hands the freedom to live through you, there is a multiplication of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness and faith. His life flows through you into other lives and those lives are touched by the miracle of His power.

Giants fall. Habits disappear. Relationships heal. Grace abounds. When, however, *even through simple neglect*, you begin to enter in and *without consulting Him and waiting on Him and searching His every word*, you begin to feel confidence in your own abilities to accomplish spiritual things, *you are fighting giants without Him*. At that moment, He steps back and says: "I am not among you."

No, you haven't lost your salvation. No, you haven't lost all your rewards in heaven. But at that moment, you are walking through a field filled with land mines and you left your protection back at the barracks. You know when it happens. Or you should. Spiritual things become dry and difficult. The Word becomes doctrinal but not personal. The unsaved become unfinished business on your agenda, not a deep burden on your heart.

But more than that, you rush into each day and each decision as though it were up to you to pull it off. You don't take the time to humble yourself before God and plead for wisdom, even though the Scripture says:

—If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth

I AM Not Among You

to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1:5)

You become agitated that no one is recognizing you or applauding you or supporting you in your work. You begin to claim rights that Jesus never said you had: the right to a good place in line, the right to a parking place near the door, the right to be accepted and loved and appreciated. The power seems to be gone. The wisdom seems to have waned. *So you try harder.* Wrong move. You add more things to your “to do” list. No one seems to be working but you. You get frustrated at their inactivity compared to your zeal.

And all the while there is no peace. And all the while there is no joy. What’s wrong? You are fighting giants, beloved. And God didn’t call you to fight giants; He called you to let Him living through you take you into the land of promise *any way He chooses.* And when the giants appear (and they will), you are to do the praying, He will do the slaying.

We don’t see many giants slain in our day. We don’t see many new converts, hear many dramatic life-changing stories, learn of many supernatural inner transformations that are so profound that the unbelieving world sees that “these are they who have turned the world upside down,” taking note that “they have been with Jesus.”

We promote our churches when we ought to be projecting our Lord. We analyze our programs when we ought to be searching our hearts for sin, confessing it, forsaking it, and asking God to send down a fresh outpouring of His Spirit. Yes, that’s simple, but we still have a simple gospel and it has not changed. It is still about sin, a Savior, salvation, and security. And the Christian life has not changed, either. It is still about surrender, sovereignty, and spirituality.

Examine your heart today. Are you living in the sheer freedom of a life that is so yielded to God’s living in you and through you that you are but a spectator, watching in amazement as He gives you power, peace, and the joy of watching giants fall? Or have you slipped into the pattern of trying to live the Christian life in your own energy, and you’ve wondered why you are so tired; so disappointed; so angry?

At the end of the day, do you feel as though you have been out on the front lines of the battle by yourself, and the giants

I AM Not Among You

have had you surrounded? Are you pouting in your spirit that God gave you all these promises of spiritual victory, and yet you are limping home at the end of each day to a spiritual emergency room, wounded, bleeding, and wondering if the battles will ever end?

Could we be so blind? Could we be living out our lives and carrying out our ministries as though it depended on us? Could it be that we have quietly lost sight of the fact that *the battle is not ours; it's God's*? And could it even be that we are preaching and teaching and sharing the concept of "Christ in you the hope of glory" all the while relegating Him to some kind of second-string role, where we will call on Him if the score gets too lopsided against us? God forgive us.

What God is waiting for is not some new burst of energy from us, or some new ministry plan from us. He is waiting for us to return to that state of total humility and consciousness of sin that we experienced when first we faced that wretched Cross, and He is looking for us to cry out for cleansing and admit that only His amazing grace can enable us to ever so much as occupy a square inch of the land. Then He is waiting for us to learn to wait on Him.

God moves slowly. Let Him. Why does that so trouble us? It is His slow, awkward ways that give Him time to change our character as He takes us past those wretched giants, one step at a time. Yes, we may be hurting. Yes, we may be struggling. Yes, we may be lonely.

That's no reason to start slinging swords towards giants. That's all the more reason to fall on our faces before God and stay there until the sunlight of His presence beams across the horizons of our hearts and we know that *in His power*, there is nothing we cannot do. Then, filled with His Spirit and confident in His Word, we can quietly go forth into the battle, not wondering about the outcome, but excited about the victory.

Every day you have to make the choice again. Every day Satan will try to convince you that God wants you to show Him what you can do for Him today. That's a lie. What God wants to do is show you *what He can do for you*. To do that, you have to take your eyes off the giants and look at the Giant-slayer. Then He wants us to say quietly in our hearts, "The battle's not ours, Lord; it's Yours. I will simply go out today and watch you do the

I AM Not Among You

impossible. I don't want to hear you say, 'I am not among you.' You don't want my help. You want my heart. Here it is."

Yes, the battles will rage. And yes, there will be giants everywhere. Giants are the stepping-stones God walks on to lead us into glory. Praise Him, therefore, each time you see another giant. Praise Him and rest.

And leave the rest . . . to Him.

I AM Not Among You

For Further Study and Application

1- The children of Israel “forgot to remember” all the things God had done in Egypt and in the wilderness and His day to day leading. What happened when they forgot?

2- Read Numbers 20:8-11. Why was Moses forbidden from entering the land? What reason did he give in Deuteronomy 1:37? Do you ever justify sin in your life by shifting the blame to others?

3- The children of Israel had missed God’s best. God had offered to fight for them and slay the giants on their way to possessing the promise. They couldn’t believe Him. So they refused. What did they decide to do when they found out that they had missed the will of God? What was it that broke God’s heart? Can you identify?

4- What did the Hebrews use to justify their readiness to fight the enemy after all? They said, “We will go up and fight according to what?” How often have you done that?

5- Memorize Deuteronomy 1:41-43. It is the key to this lesson. Focus on the phrase “I am not among you”. What are the odds if He is “not among you”? Would we chance those odds in any other part of our lives?

6- Study the differences between the natural mind and the life of faith on pages 10 and 11. See if you can make personal application.

7- Meditate on Philippians 2:13. What is God saying to you?

8- How would you describe to someone the difference between living for God and having God live through you? Do you understand it? Is it real in your experience?

9- Ask God today for the grace to live a surrendered life. Let Him be the giant-slayer. That’s what He has promised to be.

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230

210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778

www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer