

عرب حول المسيح ح **Arabs Gathered Around Isa al- Masīh**

By

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Foreward

If you are reading this, you are almost certainly a Muslim and a follower of Isa al-Masīh. You may be living in an Arab culture, and you may think of your self as a Muslim (submitted to God) follower of Isa al-Masīh. Or, you may think of yourself as a follower of *al-Masīh*, but prefer to not self-identify with the word “Muslim.”

Either way, you have begun to discover that Isa al-Masīh is more than just another prophet. He is the One sent by Allah to reconcile us to Himself, and to bring us into an actual spiritual relationship with Him. **"This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Isa al-Masīh (Jesus Christ) whom you have sent."**¹

You are learning to discover and to develop that relationship as Isa al-Masīh described it, **"abiding in me."**² Isa al-Masīh was also sent to proclaim the availability of the Kingdom of God, the spiritual rule of God in the hearts and minds of men on earth.

Whatever way you choose to identify yourself, if you are what the Injeel describes as **"in the Christ,"**³ you have begun a new pilgrimage in life, the journey of a follower of Isa al-Masīh, a journey to find the most true and honest way to worship Allah ﷻ. You will find it to be a way of wonderfully wholesome freedom. Isa al-Masīh said,

"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."⁴

You have probably begun to experience this freedom already. Freedom from shame⁵, from slavery to sin⁶, and from fear of judgment⁷ will be yours in continually increasing measure. Many other forms of bondage begin to disappear as we follow and trust in Him. People are slaves to many things. In promising us freedom, Isa al-Masīh applied the following prophetic words to Himself. He was quoting the Prophet Isaiah, who had prophesied many years earlier, about the Masih who was to come. Masih means **"anointed one."**⁸ Specifically, it means the One anointed to be

¹ John 15;1-5

2. 1 John 2:17

³ John 17:20,21

4 John 8:31

5 Romans 10:11

6 John 8:34-36

7 Romans 5:1,2 & Romans 8:1-4

⁸ Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4;24:14,22 The early followers of Isa al-Masīh were sometimes called Christians, meaning “little Christs.” Christ was the Greek word for al-Masīh, or “The anointed One.” The people who followed Him began to live and to relate to others as He did. They became such examples of His sacrificial love that people thought of them as small versions of al-Masīh Himself. They were simply

King.⁹ Isa al-Masīh came as a king who would set us free.¹⁰

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (acceptance)."

"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."¹¹

We live in the day when Isa al-Masīh has come as the Lamb of God¹² to give us **life**, to take away the sin of the world¹³, and to deal with the spiritual inner heart condition which is the cause of sin.¹⁴ In His Kingdom, the prisoners and the oppressed have been set free from Satan, who is the **thief** who had sought to ruin our lives, to destroy our relationships, and to prevent us from worshipping Allah in truth and in spirit.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."¹⁵

"The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."¹⁶

That Spirit-given **Life** is His **Life**, and it has now become the light of men.¹⁷ We are to live by the power of that **Life**, for *"the flesh counts for nothing."* In the Injeel, *the flesh* refers to the limited strength or capacity of humans, as opposed to the dynamic work of the Spirit through us.

those who trusted in and were committed to follow the promised al-Masīh, the one anointed Way! For obvious reasons, it will usually be better for us not to be identified as "Christians", but simple as followers of Isa al-Masīh. It is the Arabic version of the Hebrew word "Mashiach" (מָשִׁיחַ) which is derived from the Hebrew verb "mashah" (in Arabic masah), and it means anoint. **Lissan al-Arab**, the most authoritative dictionary in Arabic refers also to this meaning in the root "masaha". Anointing was widely practised in the ancient East as a means to consecrate someone for a holy office, either as high priest, prophet, or king. One of the early passages in the Bible refers to the anointing of high priests: "He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God" (Leviticus 21: 11-12). Another passage refers to the anointing of David as king: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. (1 Samuel 16:13). Lissan al-Arab again says that Isa is called al-Masih because God anointed him in his mother's womb. In this respect there are 11 references to Isa as al-Masih in the Qur'an.

9 2 Samuel 5:1-4; 1 Kings 1:39

10 Philippians 2:5-11

11 Luke 4:18, 19, 21

¹² John 1:19-34

13 John 1:29

14 Luke 6:43-45

15 John 10:10

16 John 6:63

17 John 1:4

How then are we to live our lives with one another, putting no confidence in the things we can produce in our own strength? The Kingdom is more than individuals; it is communities of people who have been set free. What will our life of freedom together look like? With confidence, I can tell you this: **it will not be religious (or made up of religious rules.)**.

We know very well that religion can produce a slavery of its own. **It is important, then, to realize that Isa al-Masīh did not come to start a new religion**; He came to remove the oppression of sin, and to give us a new and wonderfully free **Life** in the Kingdom of God, **Life** that is for now! This IS Good News!

Isa al-Masīh did not come to start a new religion! – Chapter 1

It may come as a surprise to hear that **Isa al-Masīh did not come to start a new religion**. You may be thinking, “Well what about all these Christian churches in the world?” Let me ask you, Did He build any of them? In the Injeel, Isa al-Masīh mentioned the word “church” only three times, and in not one of those three was he referring to religious meetings or buildings.¹⁸

In comparison, **He spoke of the Kingdom of God more than one-hundred seventy-five times**. From the very beginning of His public life, Isa al-Masīh proclaimed that this Kingdom is now available to men and women here on earth.¹⁹ Allah is now willing to rule our lives through His Spirit in our renewed hearts and minds. al-Masīh came to bring us into the Kingdom of God through a spiritual relationship with Himself and the Father. He also talked much about the Kingdom because that relationship with the Father is the heart of the Kingdom of God. **Relationship with the Father in His Kingdom is the means by which we now serve, worship and please Allah ﷻ.**

In His teaching on the Kingdom, our Lord Isa al-Masīh explained that the Kingdom is primarily expressed through attitudes and relationships. When He was asked **which of all the commandments was most important, He named the two which have to do with relationship, and contrasted them with religion.**

“One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the discussion. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

Jesus replied, “The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.”

The teacher of religious law replied, “Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth by saying that there is only one God and no other. And I know it is important to love him with all my heart and all my understanding and all my strength, and to love my neighbors as myself. This is more important than to offer all of the burnt offerings and sacrifices required in the law.”

Realizing this man's understanding, Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”²⁰

This religious teacher had recognized that relational responsibilities to God and neighbor were far more important than religious systems, rules and rituals. It was at this point that Jesus told him that he was coming close to the

18 Matthew 18:15-27; 16:18 The word “church” is translated from the Greek word, “ekklesia” which means “people called out”. “Church never means a building or meeting place; it means people called out of the ways of the world to serve Allah.

19 Matthew 4:17, 23; Luke 17:20,21

20 Mark 12:28-34

Kingdom of God. The man had begun to realize what God wants from us.

What is Christianity then? Is it not a religion? Certainly it is accurate to say that, for religious, financial and political purposes, men have attempted to construct a formal, institutional religion around the name and person of al-Masīh. However, ask yourself this question; does any of that religion process and structure seem to be the direct result of the life and teachings of Isa al-Masīh? Actually, most of it has been conceived by man, and was later added on to His life and teachings over the centuries. We will discuss much more of this later, also.

For now, let me explain by first giving you a new definition of religion.

Religion is dependence upon systems or institutions in which men are expected to keep rules or rituals for their connection with or access to God.

This is certainly not a definition of freedom!

A closer examination may help us to see that a primary mission of Isa al-Masīh was to eliminate religion as the foundation for people's connection with God, and to replace it with Himself!

In the last meeting of Isa al-Masīh with his disciples, Isa spoke of the fact that he would soon leave them. However, the disciples did not yet understand when he said,

"You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me."*²¹

Notice that he did not give Thomas a religious answer. He did not say that the Christian religion would be the "way." **His answer to Thomas was a relationship.** He was saying, "You have me. **I am the way** to Allah, our Father. There is NO other way. Follow me." In fact, the early followers of Isa al-Masīh were first known as those who belonged to "the Way." They were those who had found "the Way" to God, and "the Way" was a person, Isa al-Masīh.²²

Previously, for these Jews, the Hebrew religion had been regarded as "the way" to God. It was a complex system, developed over several centuries, of priests, rules, and temples. The Jews thought, as direct descendants of Abraham, that they were citizens of the kingdom of God by birth. However, Isa al-Masīh knew that the real Kingdom of God called for the fruit of true righteousness in the hearts of people who had been spiritually born again²³ through genuine repentance, and He said to the Jewish religious leaders,

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."²⁴

The intent of everything Isa al-Masīh said and did was to reveal a vision of Allah ﷻ and his people living together in true relationship as He originally intended. Think about this: The Bible **begins** with Adam and Eve in the garden walking, talking and fellowshiping with God.²⁵ The Bible **ends** with Allah dwelling with His people in a new city in which He is personally present, dwelling with them! Read this, and notice the absence of religion in that new

²¹ John 14:5,6

²² John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 24:14

²³ John 3:3-8

²⁴ Matthew 14:23

²⁵ Genesis 2:15-25 & 3:8,9

Jerusalem!

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, **for the old order of things has passed away.**"*²⁶

*"The Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God shone with the glory of God . . . **I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple . . . And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.**"*²⁷

No temple! No holy buildings! Not at the beginning of man in the Bible, nor at the end! Can you imagine Jerusalem without holy buildings? **No Holy places**; only God and His people dwelling together in peace, ". . . **for the old order of things has passed away.**" My fellow followers of Isa al-Masīh, WE are the people of the new order! One of His followers wrote this:

*"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**"*²⁸

al-Masīh came to reveal something about Allah never fully understood before; **Allah is our Father, and we are His family! Family is the true nature of the people of Allah.** Not an institution, not even a society; but a family – a family of people walking together in glorious freedom! If you will learn to think of God's people together as **family**, and of their times together simply as family gatherings, you will avoid a lot of religious thinking, as well as a process which may be unnecessary and even a distraction from the **Life** he came to give.

We could go on for pages and pages showing this amazing truth about God dwelling among His people, and we will have much more to say about it later. However, this is the central truth; **the public years of the life of Isa al-Masīh were largely spent confronting the religion of the day, and drawing people to Himself in true relationship.** Later I will give you some additional examples of that from His life. But first, in this next chapter, I want to ask a critical question.

Why is this so important for Arab followers of Isa al-Masīh now? -- Chapter 2

It is important for a number of reasons, but especially important at this time for one major reason:

Groups of followers of Isa al-Masīh are new in most of our Arab world, so it is important that we do it His way. We must understand who we are, and what our King expects us to do. We are laying a foundation among our Arab people, setting a new precedent in Arabic lands. It is important that this new entity look and act like His family, and not like a Western institution. It is also important that these new groups be able to attract and include other people from our culture to a life with Christ, and not to make imitation Westerners of them.

Most of us live in places where there are no Western-style churches -- not as buildings, congregations, or institutions. Many of us have few ideas about them, or how they function. We may wonder how we are to proceed, what plan we

26 Revelation 21:1-4

27 Revelation 21:10, 11, 22, 23

28 2 Corinthians 5:16,17

are to follow as we and other Arab people become followers of Isa al-Masīh. We may even wonder if we should seek out Westerners, Western missionaries, or Western books about “church” in order to learn what we should be and do.

I have good news for you. It is possible to become a follower of Isa al-Masīh while remaining in our Arab culture. Isa al-Masīh does not want you to become a Westerner!

To the contrary, seeking to imitate Western church practices could be quite detrimental to us, and would not be helpful in our walk with Isa al-Masīh who, by the way, grew to adulthood and gathered His followers in a Middle Eastern culture quite similar to our own, and without any “churches” as Westerners know them today. The second part of the Bible, the part written after Jesus lived and died in Palestine, is known as “The New Covenant.” It clearly shows another model for fellowship among His people; It gives a model much more suitable for our culture, one based on the relational nature of the family and Kingdom of God, one in which our Lord Isa al-Masīh IS THE WAY!

Allow me to give some reasons for this statement, to be followed by some suggestions for models of fellowship which fits our culture. First, **some of the reasons NOT to imitate Western churches:**

1. It can easily be shown and proven that the Western model of “church” is not the relational model of our Lord Isa al-Masīh, nor can it be found in the Scriptures in most of the forms we see in the West today. Isa al-Masīh is our pattern, not the religious institutions of men.
2. Western churches, or groups modeled on them, do not fit well in our culture, and in most cases, would not be permitted.
3. Attempting to imitate the Western model is likely to increase persecution, and worse, would tend to separate us from our Muslim friends and families as well as from our Arab culture. Part of our purpose in Christ is to be among our Muslim friends and families, and to help them also find freedom as followers of Isa al-Masīh.
4. The weaknesses of the Western church are well known in our culture, as are many of the undesirable elements of the society it has produced.
5. The past injustices of the Western church, most notably the Crusades, and other cooperation with the colonial actions of the West, tends to make any group which is attempting to imitate the Western model highly suspect in our culture.

Now, here are some suggestions for a better way:

1. **A Family Model.** The model taught and lived out by our Lord Isa al-Masīh in the Injeel, as well as that taught by the other Scriptures in The New Covenant, is based on **relationship**. It is, in fact, a spiritual family, not an institution. Our Arab culture is built around family structures. Extended family is our general model for groups larger than a household. Family, extended family, and community are all traditional components of our culture. Followers of Isa al-Masī, who gather in similar ways, will be less resisted or suspected. Bring the Light of Isa al-Masīh into our Eastern model of family and community, and that Light will prove to be irresistible.
2. **A Relational Model.** As followers of Isa al-Masīh who have trusted fully in Him and have made Him Lord and Master of our lives, it will be essential that we learn to truly follow His ways, doing what he told us to do, in the way He told us to do it. His final words to His disciples before His death tell a lot about what He expected of them and us. Here is a portion: of it:

*“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: **Love***

*each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my **friends** if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you **friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.*²⁹

This kind of relationship, remaining in His love and loving one another as He has loved us, is the nature of His Kingdom. Consequently, it must be central in our lives as followers (disciples or learners) of Isa al-Masīh. Nothing else is as important, and nothing else can be allowed to distract us from it. Love cannot be practiced by individuals alone, so the early believers formed small communities or spiritual families in which sacrificial love, practiced by all for the benefit of all, was the only rule of Life. *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."*³⁰

In the earliest days after the resurrection of our Lord Isa al-Masīh, his followers often gathered in the outer courts of the Jewish temple. However, this was NOT their "church.". They gathered there, apparently because the location was known to all, and because the open public court was large enough for all of them to mingle freely. The public court included two large unroofed areas of about 500 feet (150 m.) by 1,000 feet (300 m.). Each of them were twice the size of a football or soccer field. These two open courts formed a community gathering place. They were not the part of the temple used for sacrifice. The sacrificial rituals of the temple, however, were no longer important to the new followers of Isa al-Masīh. These new God-lovers no longer came there to participate in the Jewish sacrifices.

Isa al-Masīh had become the sacrifice, offered once for all.³¹ His people had found, in Him, a new **Way**.

Soon, the focal point for fellowship became the homes of the followers, and this remained the general practice for most of the first three hundred years. The principle identifying factor, however, was sacrificial love and fellowship around meals with praise to Allah. This verse shows the early beginnings of the transition from the temple to the meetings in homes.

*All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*³²

3. **Leadership.** With regard to leadership, the priests of the old Jewish religion were no longer needed either. Allah's family is a "royal priesthood of believers"³³ – In His kingdom we are all priests, all are bearers of spiritual life and gifts, and we all serve one another spiritually and naturally in an atmosphere of love matching our Lord's supreme example and His only command.³⁴ As in a family, there are older brothers in God's family, and they will provide some leadership, but it is leadership of a kind you may never have seen –

29 John 15:8-17

30 Galatians 5:6

31 Hebrews 7:27; 10:14

32 Acts 2:45-47

33 I Peter 3:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10

34 John 13:34; 15:9-17; 17:20-23

servant leadership modeled by our Lord Isa al-Masīh.³⁵ We will talk much more about the nature of that leadership later.

In summary of what we have said thus far, the Western model of “church” was not the model taught and lived by Isa al-Masīh. It is also a Western model which does not fit well in our culture. Why try to bring something into our Arab culture which would be as foreign as the clothing of an Eskimo? We have each paid a price to become the followers of al-Masīh; let us learn to live our lives together in His way as a loving spiritual family.

Also, I must say that if we understand “church” as a meeting, we are mistaken. A family is not a meeting. If His people are defined as a meeting which must be held in some special place³⁶ and on some special holy day³⁷, we are seeing something other than that intended by Isa al-Masīh. Obviously, families do come together for various special reasons, but that meeting is not what identifies them; they are known as members of that family, and **not** by the nature of that meeting.

Instead, the family of Isa al-Masīh will fit easily into our culture; it is about people, not about meetings, and the result will be transformed lives rather than uncomfortable, ill-fitting religious bondage. That transformation is the work of His Spirit within us renewing our minds,³⁸ not the result of a new set of religious rules. It is **Life**, not religion.

Isa al-Masīh said to the religious leaders of His day,

*You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”*³⁹

One of his disciples said later,

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father.”*⁴⁰

No one who has been freed from being a fear-driven slave to religion wishes to be a slave to anything again. In the world now, God is present among His people in Spirit.⁴¹ Because he is a Father, His Spirit is the Spirit of adoption to sonship, to make us His children. We are His children, not His slaves. We serve Him out of a heart of gratitude and love, not out of fear of judgment. As in any truly loving family, our hearts cry “Abba, Father – we want to be together with You.” **His love has made us a family, and not just another religion.**

*In love, He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -- to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*⁴²

35 Matthew 23:8-12; John 13:15-17; \

36 John 4:21-24

37 Matthew 12:1-14; Luke 13:10-16

38 Romans 12:1,2

39 John 5:39,40

40 Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6

41 John 4:23,24

42 Ephesians 1:5,6

Isa al-Masīh as Our Example for Living -- Chapter 3

As I said earlier, the intent of everything al-Masīh said and did was to reveal a vision of Allah ﷻ and his people living together in the way He originally intended. Our Lord Isa al-Masīh is our example. He came to reveal the Father to us. Take time to read the Injeel once again for the specific purpose of observing how Jesus related to His disciples (whom he later made a specific point of calling “friends.”)⁴⁴ The terms “Father”, “Son”, “Friends” and “Brothers” all show us the way Isa al-Masīh was introducing the people (including us) to God’s family.⁴³

During the three years He was revealing the Father to those men, they spent much of their time walking the dusty roads of the countryside, eating informally from the wheat stalks in the field, catching fish for one another, and often sleeping together in their jalabas in homes where they were invited, or in the fields as they traveled. Much of Isa al-Masīh’s teaching was done with these men as they walked along the way, quite apart from crowds of people, much of it even on a one-to-one basis. **His training was to show them how to live** by discipling them as they lived together. They lived as brothers and friends, leaving a rich example of family and friends for us to follow. He seems to have lived life quite naturally and spontaneously with them.

Isa al-Masīh certainly also spoke to crowds who often gathered to hear his teaching and/or to see the amazing miracles. However, there is no record of him ever suggesting they try to draw a crowd of people together for that purpose. In fact, it often seemed far more important to him to draw apart from the people so He could fellowship with the Father or with his disciples, than to seek out “meetings” for His teachings.

He never seems to have set an example for us of regularly assembling the same group of people so he could more thoroughly teach them. He had a more effective way to make sure His teaching and His way of life was given to every person who wanted to follow Him. That way was to deposit His life, His ways, and His teaching in the lives of a small number of men who would use that same method to teach others in the years to come.⁴⁵ That method was to disciple them, training them personally or in small groups, showing them, as well as telling them, how to do the will of God.

This is a method very different and much more effective when **the goal is to teach people how to live a new way**. If the goal is simply to teach them theology, it can be done in large groups. But learning how to **live in an entirely new way** requires someone who is always available as an example, someone who can personally demonstrate that new way to live, and who can observe the disciples to see if they are truly learning and changing. Making disciples, or training people how to live, requires relationship, the fabric of the Kingdom. Later in this book, we will discuss the process of making disciples in greater detail. This is crucial in order to both fulfill our Lord’s command about reaching others, and also to form them into the kind of relational communities in which the ways of the Kingdom help us to demonstrate sacrificial love.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."⁴⁶

"God authorized and commanded me to commission you. Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 20 Then

43 John 17:6, 26

44 John 15:15

45 Mark 4:33,34; 9:28-31; 10:17-27; Luke 8:4-10; John 2:18-22; 13:2-17; 16:12-15; 17:6-23; 20:19-31; 2 Timothy 2:2

46 John 13:34,35

*instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."*⁴⁷

Later, one of his followers said this to one who had become a disciple and a spiritual son to him:

*You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs-- he wants to please his commanding officer.*⁴⁸

Our Lord Isa al-Masīh is our example, as well as our king and our commanding officer. If it is in our hearts to **do** all he has taught us to **do**, He will help us to train others "*in this way of life.*" This charge to "entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" was the primary way of helping new followers of Isa to DO the things He had taught us to DO. Jesus taught the Twelve this way, and we are here today because each of them discipled others - man to man, one to one, and in small groups. In this way, each could be shown what to do and how to do it by someone who was proven and had really become part of this new way of life. A disciple is a learner, an apprentice - one who wants to learn to BE like Him. This kind of training, with the Spirit, brings the inward transformation of thought, feeling and character that "cleans the inside of the cup"⁴⁹, as Isa said, and "makes the tree good" so it will produce the right kind of fruit.⁵⁰ This is the way a good father teaches his family how to live, and it is the way he trains his offspring. We will talk more about Isa's model of training in section 6, when we discuss what a spiritual, kingdom family actually looks like from day to day.

A Way of Life -- Chapter 4

Before His death, Isa al-Masīh enjoyed one last evening with his disciples. As you would expect, they ate a meal together. During and after the meal, Isa al-Masīh gave them some very important teaching about who and what they were to become. He also gave them a new commandment:

*So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."*⁵¹

He also prayed for **you and me** that evening.

*"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one;"*⁵²

In this way, with a new commandment, with a New Covenant sealed with his death, and with a new prayer to the Father, a new community was created by our Lord Isa al-Masīh. Although the new community did not become fully functional until after His death and resurrection, the foundations had already been laid. Here they are:

47 Matthew 28:18-20 from The Message translation

48 2 Timothy 2:1-4

49 Mathew 23:25

50 Luke 6:43-45

51 John 13:34,35

52 John 17:20,21

1. The members were chosen by our Lord Isa al-Masīḥ to be His disciples who would learn His ways.⁵³
2. They were a community of friends,⁵⁴ brothers,⁵⁵ and family⁵⁶
3. Each was forgiven and set free by His sacrifice, not by their own religion or good deeds.⁵⁷
4. They had received His eternal Life, and had become citizens of His Kingdom.⁵⁸
5. Among the citizens of the His Kingdom, there were no distinctions by race, gender, or nationality, nor were there distinctions between slaves and free. They were one and they were equals.⁵⁹
6. Every one of them received the promised Holy Spirit as an indwelling guide and help.⁶⁰
7. Every one was equipped by the Holy Spirit with abilities (gifts) for service (ministry) to one another.⁶¹
8. The leaders would be servants of all, following the example of our Lord Isa al-Masīḥ.⁶²

This is the foundation Isa al-Masīḥ has laid down for the new community. As He supremely demonstrated through His own life and death, only with love, humility and mercy can the purposes of God be achieved. By his example, He calls us to live with each other in love, humility and mercy.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

53 John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4; I Peter 2:9

54 John 15:15

55 Hebrews 2:10-13

56 Matthew 12:46-49

57 John 5:24; Ephesians 2:4-10

58 Matthew 19:29; John 6:27-51; 10:27,28; 17:2,3 Luke 12:32; Colossians 1:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; Rev. 5:9,10

59 John 17:20-23; John 7:37-39; Romans 10:11-13; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Galatians 3:26-29

60 Luke 11:3; John 3:5-8; 4:23,24; 6:63; 7:37-39; 14:25,26; 16:12-15; Acts 4:31; 8:5,9,14,15; 3:17,18; Ephesians 4:4

61 I Corinthians 12:4, 7-10

62 Mark 10:42-45; John 13:12-17; Philippians 2:3-7; 1 Peter 5:1-6

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed--not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence--continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe . . .”⁶³

The contrast in that last sentence is graphic:

“complaining or arguing . . . in a crooked and depraved generation”

versus

“blameless and pure, children of God without fault , , , you shine like stars in the universe.”

Which community would you want to live in? God’s choice seems obvious!

What is the cost? Humility, mercy and love!

For Arab followers of our Lord Isa al-Masiḥ, linked together as friends and brothers through a common relationship with our Isa al-Masiḥ, this relieves us from any need to follow the Western pattern of “church buildings” or of other institutional ways. We are friends, family and spiritual brothers who have found a new Way of life together. As such, it is easy for us to get together in various configurations without the need for special “meeting” places. History records that for the first three hundred years followers of our Lord Isa al-Masiḥ met primarily in private homes as spiritual families.

Worship and “Ministry” -- Chapter 5

As we said in chapter 1,

“If you will learn to think of God’s people together as **family**, and of their times together as family gatherings, you will avoid a lot of religious thinking and process which is unnecessary and also a distraction from the **Life** he came to give.”

The activity of most Western churches revolves around what they call **worship** and **ministry**.

Usually, the Western model of **worship** consists of singing together with some prayer. We will look at the true nature of worship later in this chapter. For now, it is enough to say that worship is not primarily singing, though music and singing may be an expression of it.

The Western model of **ministry** usually involves leaders who are religious officials, and who make their living from preaching or officiating like priests or immams. When you read the Injeel, you quickly discover that these were sometimes the kind of people who most often conflicted with our Lord Isa al-Masiḥ. They were professional religious people whose professional incomes were threatened by Isa al-Masiḥ when he taught about the Kingdom as attitudes and relationships, and when he explained that Allah's desire was for a family, not an institution run by men whom He

63 Philippians 2:1-15

called "hirelings."⁶⁴

A professional leader of an institution is tempted to become a proprietor rather than a steward. A steward knows he is caring for something which belongs to someone else, in this case the family of God which He has redeemed at a great price.⁶⁵ A proprietor believes he is caring for something which is his own, and from which he can gain income, status and security. Proprietors tend to focus on growing the size of the institution for their own benefit. A steward thinks only of caring for something entrusted to him by his King, and of making it something that will truly glorify God. Peter wrote:

Here's my concern: that you care for God's flock with all the diligence of a shepherd. Not because you have to, but because you want to please God. Not calculating what you can get out of it, but acting spontaneously. Not bossily telling others what to do, but tenderly showing them the way.⁶⁶

The truth is that leadership is only one of many "ministries" or ways of serving God's people. **In fact, "serving" is the real meaning of the word often translated in English as "ministry." The plain teaching of Scriptures is that "serving" is to be done by each and all of God's people. Every one of us is "in the ministry", if you want to call it that. The normal form of ministry among God's people is each and all serving (ministering to) the others.** As each of us learns to serve one another, we also grow in the virtue of humility which is so necessary for salvation and for demonstrating the spirit of our Lord Isa al-Masiḥ

Worship and "ministry" (serving) are directly related in the following teaching from the Apostle Paul. He shows us that, when we put worship and serving together in the Spirit, as seen in the sacrificial example of our Lord Isa al-Masiḥ, they become one and the same thing. Giving our lives to Allah and to one another can take various forms according to the abilities (gifts) given by God's grace. It works when we don't think too much of our selves, and when we give our lives as "living sacrifices" to Him through our service to one another.

Brothers and sisters, in view of all we have just shared about God's compassion, I encourage you to offer your bodies as **living sacrifices**, dedicated to God and pleasing to him. This kind of **worship** is appropriate for you.

Don't become like the people of this world. Instead, change the way you think. Then you will always be able to determine what God really wants—what is good, pleasing, and perfect. Because of the kindness that God has shown me, I ask you not to think of yourselves more highly than you should. Instead, your thoughts should lead you to use good judgment based on what God has given each of you as believers.

Our bodies have many parts, but these parts don't all do the same thing. In the same way, even though we are many individuals, Christ makes us one body and individuals who are connected to each other. God in his kindness gave each of us different gifts. If your gift is speaking God's word, use it in proportion to your faith. If your gift is serving, then devote yourself to serving. If it is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If it is encouraging others, devote yourself to giving encouragement. If it is sharing, be generous. If it is leadership, lead enthusiastically. If it is helping people in need, help them cheerfully.

Love sincerely. Hate evil. Hold on to what is good. Be devoted to each other like a loving family. Excel in showing respect for each other. Don't be lazy in showing your devotion. Use your energy to serve the Lord. Be happy in your confidence, be patient in trouble, and pray continually. Share what you have with God's

64 John 10:11-13

65 1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 2:9-15

66 I Peter 5:2,3 The Message Translation

people who are in need. Be hospitable.⁶⁷

I recommend that you also read chapters 12, 13, and 14 of 1 Corinthians, in which Paul says essentially the same thing, but in greater detail.

The desire of our Lord Isa al-Masīh, that we should be a family of friends who lay down our lives for one another, is also clearly expressed by another of His disciples, Peter, who wrote:

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever.⁶⁸

Here is one further word about “worship.” Singing songs together about God is mentioned in only a very few Scriptures,⁶⁹ and the intent in some of them seems to be singing to encourage one another as well as to worship God. Such encouragement can be quite helpful. However, **the clearest and most straightforward teaching on worship was given by our Lord Isa al-Masīh** to a Samaritan woman. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people, part Jewish and part Assyrian. They believed that a mountain north of Jerusalem was the proper place to worship, which the Jews fiercely disputed. This woman was also of questionable reputation in her own community. But Jesus, who said, “**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**” chose to give her the clearest statement on worship ever uttered.

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."⁷⁰

The corresponding definition of worship “in spirit and in truth” was given by Paul:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--**this is your spiritual act of worship**. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.⁷¹

Truthful worship, a “**spiritual act of worship**” offered up “**in spirit and in truth**” is based on the sacrifice of our lives to the pleasure and glory of God. It brings about the transformation from all we have previously been, by turning us from a selfish, ego-centric way of living to a life lived, to a life of giving, as was that of our Lord, for the benefit and salvation of others. **Our spiritual act of worship, in spirit and in truth, is primarily the way we live, not the songs we sing.** Singing songs **without** lives of sacrifice to others in truth and spirit, simply repeats the hypocritical worship of the Jews denounced by both Isaiah and our Isa al-Masīh:

You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

67 Romans 12:1-13

68 1 Peter 4:8-11

69 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16 Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13

70 John 4:21-24

71 Romans 12:1,2

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
They worship me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men.' "⁷²

So, is it wrong for followers of our **Lord Isa al-Masīh** to sing praises to God? Not at all – unless we sing with lips that are far from him because they are not attached to lives sacrificially offered to God for the purpose of learning His will about relationships, and humility, and pleasing Him by the way we live. Singing is one of several joyous ways to release our praises to God, and confessing truth together in music strengthens our faith and glorifies God. However, it is **not** indicated as the primary reason for Followers of Isa to gather together. Worship “**in spirit and truth**” is primarily an attitude of surrender, and the Kingdom is principally attitudes and relationships. Scripture tells us to come together to encourage one another in the hope and promises of Allah, and to strongly spur one another to lives of love and good deeds.⁷³ Don’t ever let the traditions of men lead you to think that you have worshipped simply because you sing songs in a meeting. Sing if you can, but if it is a problem to do so in your culture, remember that the key to worship is a surrendered heart, with or without music.

Likewise, ‘ministry’ – which actually means serving -- can take the form of leading, but it takes many other forms also, many of them equally important to leadership. Isa al-Masīh cautioned us about leadership because it simply presents more temptation than most other forms of serving. It is too easy to become a proprietor, “the boss”, and to leave the “serving” out of leadership.

Jesus called them together and said,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. It must not be so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁷⁴

God’s people are a Kingdom family. In chapter 2, you learned that our Lord Isa al-Masīh taught that “the Kingdom is primarily expressed through attitudes and relationships.” In chapter 4, we saw that those attitudes can be summed up as love, humility and mercy in a spiritual family. **Local communities of God’s people are Kingdom families in which the attitudes of love, humility and mercy create lasting, dependable relationships.**

Those relationships are maintained by people whose minds are renewed with those Kingdom attitudes. If a person does not humble himself, he will not be able to show mercy -- which is necessary for love. To see the community, which is His Body, be united, our Lord Isa al-Masīh calls us to cover one another’s failures with mercy as we live with one another, and as we serve Him and one another with true humility and sacrificial service. Is there anything the Arab world needs more than people who practice unselfish love, mercy and forgiveness, together with serving and honoring one another with a true humility?

The “church” is not where the Pope is, nor where the pastor is, nor where the meeting is, nor where the singing is – the “church” is where love is and where mercy is – both binding together transformed lives in lasting relationships⁷⁵ “**Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you**

72 Matthew 15:7-9 & Isaiah 29:13

73 Hebrews 10:23-25

74 Matthew 20:25-28

75 Ephesians 4:1-3 & vs 16

are my disciples."⁷⁶

This is the only “church” needed by Arab followers of our Lord Isa al-Masīh; a spiritual family living in the freedom of love. We don’t need religion; we have tried that, and it was neither **life** nor **freedom**.

What Does This Spiritual Kingdom Family Look Like? -- Chapter 6

The beauty and genius of Isa’s plan for His people is that it can look like a vast variety of things. It can be as simple as a man sitting and praying with his wife and children, and reading the Injeel, or a group of three or four men doing the same thing over coffee. It can be two families having tea together, praying and encouraging one another from the Injeel, or three women meeting at the well to talk about our Lord Isa al-Masīh and discussing how to better serve their neighbors. It can look like nearly any other gathering of people, and it can fit in our culture easily.

Recently, I was with a small group of Arab followers of Isa. They had come together primarily to eat together and to visit with one another. While everyone was visiting in small clusters of 3-6 people, one of the teenagers began to strum a guitar. Soon someone heard the melody and began to sing with the instrument. Others joined in, and enthusiastic singing followed for about 20 minutes. Then the teenager’s father told the story of how he had come to faith in our Lord Isa al-Masīh. He had been in the military and became disgusted with the corruption among the officers. One of them stole money from the local military office, and then immediately asked our friend if he wanted to go to Mosque prayers with him. He began to ask himself, Is this the reality of Islam? Could there be another way to God? Through an amazing set of circumstances, he was given an Injeel by a stranded tourist. This led to many in his family coming to faith in our Lord Isa al-Masīh. The others, who were present, new to the faith themselves, were greatly encouraged. They then prayed for one another. It was simple, but deeply spiritual.

One of the keys to understanding the Spiritual Kingdom Family of our Lord Isa al-Masīh, is that it DOES NOT require a professional imam or priest to function. Actually, He has already given the ability to everyone of His people to help the others. When one comes to faith in our Lord Isa al -Masīh, there is a spiritual birth in which one is given not only new and eternal Life, but also abilities or “gifts” with which to serve one another.

One of the disciples of Isa, a fisherman named Peter, later wrote about this:

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.”⁷⁷

Once again, unselfish love is the real key to the life of His followers together. Loving one another in this way, each one does what he has been enabled or “gifted” to do for the sake of the others, and not for his own good. The “gifts” will begin to appear in each believer as he or she matures in the faith; it will happen almost automatically. The key however, as Peter wrote, is to “love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

Peter also mentioned hospitality and serving one another. Followers of Isa al-Masīh were a tiny, fiercely persecuted minority in the Roman Empire during the first century after the resurrection of our Lord Isa al-Masīh. However, they quickly grew in number because people around them saw the amazing love they showed for one another and for those in their community. This love was without respect to race, gender or position in life. Free men served slaves, and rich people served the poor in a demonstration of love never before seen in the harsh and often cruel Roman

76 John 13:34,35

77 1 Peter 4:8-11

Empire. It was a new kind of behavior born in the sacrificial example of their new Lord Isa al-Masīh, and it was carried out with an intense unselfish love that could only have come from heaven itself.

Let me say again, however, that this unusual and attractive way of life did not require any special religious officials or “holy” places in which to meet. For the most part, they met in homes, and used the spiritual gifts given them. They did this in the manner of unselfish love patterned by the life and death of our Lord Isa al-Masīh. **Any group or family of Arab people who have come to full faith in our Lord Isa al-Masīh can do the same thing any place in the Arab world including the places where “Christianity” is most rejected.** This is not some new religion; it is a transforming faith in Allah through Isa al-Masīh which makes loving people out of those who had lived as selfish sinners.

As these early fellowship groups grew in this process, most of these groups began to recognize some of the men among them as “elders.” These were not priests or “officials; they were simply those who were more mature and experienced in living to please our Lord Isa al-Masīh. These “elder brothers” guided the small communities. They were like shepherds of flocks of sheep; “overseers who made sure the sheep were nourished and protected from danger. One of those “elders” was Peter who cautioned the other elders to be unselfishly motivated.

And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches: I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share his glory and his honor when he returns. As a fellow elder, this is my appeal to you: Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example. And, when the head Shepherd comes, your reward will be a never-ending share in his glory and honor.

You younger men, accept the authority of the elders. And all of you serve each other in humility, for "God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble."⁷⁸

As “elders” begin to emerge as elder brothers in a local fellowship group, it will be beneficial for them to seek out other “elder brothers” in other groups, and to spend time with them in much the same kind of activity as practiced in each home fellowship group. By that, I mean they need to learn to help one another learn from the Injeel and from God’s Spirit. They need the help of others also. They will discover that among two or three “elder brothers” each will have different gifts from God from which each of them needs to receive. They should also consult with one another about the meaning of portions of the Injeel which seem difficult. Just as in any group of two or more followers of Isa, they need to practice unselfish love, mercy and forgiveness, together with serving and honoring one another with a true humility. This will help them become more teachable, and able to serve one another in the example of our Lord Isa al-Masīh.

That kind of simple household faith spread quickly in the Roman Empire, even though His followers were hated and persecuted by both Romans and Jews alike. The reason is that in each one dwelt the LIFE he had come to give those who trusted in Him. It was new, spiritual, and eternal LIFE that reproduced itself again and again.

Think for a moment about the life God puts in an apple seed! Inside one seed is an entire orchard. Each seed will grow a tree. Each tree will produce thousands of apples, each with an average of 8 seeds. The reproducing result can be more than 8000 new trees from one original seed. This is the way the new Life given to us by Allah through our faith in Isa al-Masīh works in each one of us. It is probably the reason YOU came to faith yourself. Someone with that Life spoke to you, loved you unselfishly, gave you an Injeel or in some other way helped you come to faith in Him. Through you, through your family, and through those you influence, it will happen again and again.

There are lists and descriptions of the gifts Isa gives to His followers for serving both in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 14. You can read them later. However, more important than the gifts is the way we view them. Our Lord Isa al-Masīh views us as His body on earth for the purpose of serving others. It is essential; that we do so in humility, honoring one another.

⁷⁸ I Peter 5: 1-5

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

“Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are not presentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”⁷⁹

Always remember that Isa al-Masīh explained the Kingdom of God in terms of attitudes and relationships. The vast world-wide network of those relationships form a body, “the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” When He left the earth, He said to His disciples,

"God authorized me and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²⁰ Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I'll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age."⁸⁰

Notice that the operative words are: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you.”

The primary reason for the followers of Isa al-Masīh to get together, in any configuration, is to help one another learn to LIVE as he taught us to LIVE! Learning to live in a new way takes time, and it is best learned from those who are DOing it, not just talking about it. Above all, we need to be faithful to serve one another in this way.

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”⁸¹

Teaching one another how to DO the will of God as He defined it -- Chapter 7

As we mentioned above, the will of Isa al-Masīh for His followers was “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you.” This should also be the most common practice among us as we gather together in any configuration. We need to help and encourage one

⁷⁹ I Corinthians 12:12-27

⁸⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

⁸¹ Hebrews 10:23-25

another to DO His will, and to LIVE in a new way. This is a process, and we will need one another's help. "Let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."⁸²

For instance, He taught us that his Followers would actually love and pray for their enemies. You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁸⁴ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁸⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.⁸³

This will not be easy for those who are just moving from the typical Arab mentality about enemies into the Kingdom behavior of Isa al-Masīh. It requires a spiritual effort to depend upon the Spirit within us, the LIFE given us by our Lord Isa al-Masīh, to overcome the habits of a lifetime. It will be very helpful and necessary to learn to do this from someone else that has begun to successfully obey the Lord in this challenging area of life. Time spent together learning and praying about this will initiate the process of Kingdom transformation in our lives. Read the Injeel together, especially the "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew chapters 5-7. Then we will actually begin to fulfill the prophecy of our Lord Isa al-Masīh that we will be the "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."⁸⁴ This is a high calling!

Here is another example: Our Lord Isa al-Masīh also taught, in His world-acclaimed "Sermon on the Mount" that His followers do not need to swear oaths. Swearing oaths are usually just an effort to convince others that we are telling the truth. However, His Kingdom is about truth, and we have no need to convince others; simply let our words and our lives represent truth at all times.

But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.⁸⁵

However, to do this requires someone who has become confident that the Lord will back up his word to others, and he knows he does not need to swear an oath to convince. Here again, this is best learned by reading it to one another, discussing it, praying about it, and then learning from those who actually do it! Prayer, together with such mutual instruction, should be the substance of much of the time spent together by Followers of Him.

In fact, we need to see clearly that following Him is our prime objective. The initial invitation of our Lord Isa al-Masīh to His disciples was to "Follow me . . ." **To follow Him is to do as He said, and to do as He did!** This must be settled in our hearts as our objective. Remember, these are not religious rules, but a way of life that will convince others that you have indeed become a new person in Christ! Paul, an evil man who had become one of His transformed followers, wrote this:

"Whatever we do, it is because Christ's love motivates us. Since we believe that Christ died for everyone, we also believe that we have all died to the old life we used to live. He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live to please themselves. Instead, they will live to please Christ, who died and was raised for them.

"So we have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! What this means is that those who become His Followers become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!

⁸² Hebrews 10:23-25

⁸³ Matthew 5:43

⁸⁴ Matthew 5:13,14

⁸⁵ Matthew 5:34-37

“All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others.”⁸⁶

Transformation is the key word when it comes to the purpose of our gathering together whether as families or groups of friends who are following our Lord Isa al-Masīh. **Transformation** of our lives takes place as a result of three things:

1. The Holy Spirit of our Lord Isa al-Masīh living within us.
2. The encouragement and example of one another as we learn to depend upon Him
3. Teaching His words to one another from the Injeel.

Our little clusters of Isa’s followers should be thought of not as churches nor as mosques, but as **transformational communities**. They don’t need to be large, for He said, “**Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.**” Two or three men, women, friends or a family can serve as **transformational communities**. **The key is our common purpose to follow and to please Him, not out of religious fear, but out of love.**

“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.”⁸⁷

“I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! I command you to love each other in the same way that I love you. And here is how to measure it—the greatest love is shown when people lay down their lives for their friends. You are my friends if you obey me. I no longer call you servants, because a master doesn't confide in his servants. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, when you pray in my name. I command you to love each other.”⁸⁸

“So we make it our goal to please Him . . .”⁸⁹

The really good news is that our Lord Isa al-Masīh did not merely tell us to live this way, but he gave us the ability to do so, empowering us by the new **LIFE** he gave us as we were re-born into the Kingdom of God, actually given a “new self”, or new life and new nature. This next portion of Scripture describes it almost like layers of clothing we will be able to “put on”. This does not indicate merely an outward or superficial change, but it does mean that we can discard the old ways and take on new ways as we pray for the power of His **LIFE** within us to do so.

You have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in each of us.

Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and

⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14-19

⁸⁷ John 14:12-14

⁸⁸ John 15: 9-16

⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:9

forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus, all the while giving thanks through him to God the Father.

Always remember that the primary reason we live our lives together in these small gatherings or transformational communities is to encourage one another as we are transformed by the LIFE of the Spirit within us and by the continual renewing of our minds so that we may please our Lord Isa al-Masīh.

Our Friends and Neighbors -- Chapter 8

As we said in the first chapter of this little book, our Lord Isa al-Masīh said that two commandments are the most important, and are the summary of all of God's law:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."⁹⁰

As a natural part of loving your neighbor, you will find that you have a great desire to tell others about your new relationship with our Lord Isa al-Masīh. This is a desire that the Spirit of our Lord Isa al-Masīh has put in your heart. It would not be possible to truly love someone and to withhold this wonderful news from them, In fact, He said, **"Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life"**⁹¹

However, this is not always easy to do in our Arab culture. Many Muslims have been taught that what you have come to believe about Isa al-Masīh is wrong. Of course, you know that it is not wrong; it is the will of Allah, our Abbah and Creator, to put our entire faith and confidence in our Lord Isa al-Masīh. The question is, how do you tell those whom you love?

There are three primary things to keep in mind:

1. Be positive, and not confrontational. Many Western Christians have tried to talk to Muslims about Isa al-Masīh, but they have often started by criticizing Islam. This is NOT our message. We must be bridge-builders, people who can begin where others are, and build a bridge of friendship by which they can go toward Isa al-Masīh and come to faith in Him.
2. You are going to talk with your neighbors about spiritual reality, not about religion. You are not asking them to become "Christians." You are giving them the opportunity to become followers of Isa al-Masīh. It is important that you pray for your neighbor before talking with them. It is also important that they see the changes in your life which result from your relationship with our Lord Isa al-Masīh. Peter, who was one of the twelve disciples of our Lord Isa al-Masīh, said, **"Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."**⁹²

⁹⁰ Matthew 22:37-40

⁹¹ Matthew 28:19

⁹² I Peter 3:15

3. Realize that your motives may be misunderstood, and some may even persecute you. Peter also said, “Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts regard Isa al-Masih as Lord, and always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”⁹³

Our Lord Isa al-Masih knew that his followers would face persecution at times, and in His great Sermon on the Mount, He said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The greatest blessings come to those who suffer for Him, provided we do it in genuine love for Him and for others. If we suffer for doing wrong or for doing violence, he promises no reward. However, if we suffer for loving our neighbor enough to tell him or her about our Lord Isa al-Masih, we also have the joy of bringing them to the wonderful freedom we have found in Him. The reason people of all nations around the earth have come to faith in Him is because so many have done what he told us to do:

“God authorized and commanded me to commission you. Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **20** Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.”⁹⁴

In one of His parables, Jesus described the good news of the Kingdom like this:

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”⁹⁵

Friend, the “treasure” we have found is “the kingdom of heaven”, the Kingdom of our Lord Isa al-Masih, the Kingdom He came to earth to proclaim, His Kingdom which we will share for all eternity. By His grace and mercy, we have found the treasure, the pearl of great value, and what else can we do but tell those whom we love about it?

A Final Word

This book was written as a simple explanation of what life together can be as the followers of our Lord Isa al-Masih. There is much more that can be said, and perhaps another book will follow this one. However, this matter of fellowshiping together is not complicated; it is simple. In many ways, the more simple, the better.

Our Lord Isa al-Masih came from the Father Allah to live to suffer and to die for us. However, the Father raised Him from the dead, and our Lord then poured out His Spirit on all who believe and follow Him. He didn’t come to start a new religion; He came to bring us into the Kingdom of God **together!**

Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance : that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers

⁹³ I Peter 3:14, 15

⁹⁴ Matthew 28:18-20.

⁹⁵ Matthew 13:44-46

at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.⁹⁶

Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For, since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all opposing dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.⁹⁷

In one of our Lord Isa al-Masīh's last meetings with his disciples, he gave these instructions to them and to us, followed by a prayer also for them and for us:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."⁹⁸

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. "After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you *will* see Me; because I live, you will live also. "In that day you will know that I am in My Father and you in Me, and I in you. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

"All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them. Anyone who doesn't love me will not do what I say. And remember, my words are not my own. This message is from the Father who sent me. I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Counselor as my representative—and by the Counselor I mean the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I myself have told you.

"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives. So don't be troubled or afraid. Remember what I told you: I am going away, but I will come back to you again. If you really love me, you will be very happy for me, because now I can go to the Father, who is greater than I am. I have told you these things before they happen so that you will believe when they do happen."⁹⁹

"But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and none of you has asked me where I am going. Instead, you are very sad. But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world's sin is unbelief in me.

Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the prince of this world has already been judged.

"Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me.

All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ I Corinthians 15:3-7

⁹⁷ I Corinthians 15: 20-25

⁹⁸ John 14:1-3

⁹⁹ John 14:18-29

¹⁰⁰ Jn 16:5-15

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. You have given him authority over everyone in all the earth. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by doing everything you told me to do. And now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began.

"I have told these men about you. They were in the world, but then you gave them to me. Actually, they were always yours, and you gave them to me; and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the words you gave me; and they accepted them and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. And all of them, since they are mine, belong to you; and you have given them back to me, so they are my glory! Now I am departing the world; I am leaving them behind and coming to you. Holy Father, keep them and care for them—all those you have given me—so that they will be united just as we are. I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They are not part of this world any more than I am. Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself entirely to you so they also might be entirely yours.

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.

"I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are— I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you've given me to be with me, so they can see my glory. You gave me the glory because you loved me even before the world began!

"O righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. And I have revealed you to them and will keep on revealing you. I will do this so that your love for me may be in them and I in them."¹⁰¹

**"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever."¹⁰²**

¹⁰¹ John 17: 1-26

¹⁰² Revelation 11:15