

## **19: RACISM, RELIGION, AND RIGHTEOUS REBELLION (Luke 6:1-11)**

I'm an enneagram four, which is defined as an individualist, so I have always enjoyed defying the status quo, and rebelling against rules. Before I was a follower of Jesus, I just liked breaking rules. I broke a lot of them and it almost broke me! After becoming a follower of Christ, I've been led on a journey of the Spirit leading me to find unrighteous, and unjust rules to break. That's a big part of who the Lord made me to be.

That's why I love movements in history where people have defied the status quo when the status quo was just plain wrong! The Greensboro Sit-In was one such example of this:



The Greensboro sit-in was a civil rights protest that started in 1960, when young African American students staged a sit-in at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, and refused to leave after being denied service. The sit-in movement soon spread to college towns throughout the South. Though many of the protesters were arrested for trespassing, disorderly conduct or disturbing the peace, their actions made an immediate and lasting impact, forcing Woolworth's and other establishments to change their segregationist policies.<sup>1</sup> As you can see also from the picture above- protesters were abused, mocked, jeered at, and had liquids and foods dumped on them by racist resistors.

I love the people at the Greensboro sit-in. It was an evil law to not allow black folks to sit at lunch counters. They should have stood up to it, even though many of the elite in the culture didn't agree. Even though it meant they'd get food dumped on them and drinks poured on them. They were bringing radical change where it was needed by standing up for righteousness very publicly in a way that was largely unwanted.

And the civil rights movement was wildly inspired by Jesus Christ. Many of the earliest Civil Rights leaders were Christ followers and deeply connected to the black Church. These leaders of the time were reading about Jesus and applying what He did to situations in their time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/the-greensboro-sit-in>

In Luke 6, we see Jesus, once again defying the religious status quo of His time, and challenging the religious elites of His day;

*1 On a Sabbath, (Jesus) passed through the grainfields. His disciples were picking heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. 2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" (Luke 6:1-2)*

On this particular Sabbath the disciples were moving through a grain field. As they went, they plucked grain from the stalks in the field, rubbing them with their hands to get to the grain. The action on the surface seemed innocent enough. The taking of grain itself was not a problem, since in Israel a portion of the field was to be left for those in need (Deut. 23:25).

But it was the Sabbath, the holy day of rest. Jewish tradition specified what one could and could not do on the Sabbath. The Mishnah (an ancient Jewish rule book), contained instructions about Sabbath practice. Shabbath 7:2 gave a list of thirty-nine prohibited activities known as the "forty less one." The Jews were aware of how particular these customs were, since they said that "the rules about the Sabbath ... are as mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many." (Mishnah, Hagigah 1:8). According to that list, the disciples had multiple violations: They were guilty of reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food.<sup>2</sup>

Tony Evans notes: God had commanded Israel to remember the Sabbath as a time of rest, spiritual refreshment, and no labor (see Exod 20:8-11). But the Pharisees were extra-scrupulous. They added numerous laws to God's law about what kind of activities constituted labor.<sup>3</sup>

It might be kind of wild to think about it- but the Pharisees were so obsessed with trying to perfectly, obediently enter the rest of God on the Sabbath, that they were thwarting the ability to rest, causing undue stress on themselves and others, and thereby being imperfectly disobedient!

It's possible to be so obsessed with keeping rules that we end up missing or breaking the most important rules. It's possible as followers of Jesus to be so obsessed with trying to perfectly follow Jesus, that we end up totally not following Him! It's obvious to most of us now that the white folks in Greensboro, NC, who were harassing and abusing black folks at a Woolworth's lunch counter, were totally in the wrong. But to them at the time? They thought they were doing the right thing. The

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<sup>3</sup> CSB Tony Evans Study Bible Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers.

majority of the culture around them, and even the laws of their city and state, promoted their hatred and bigotry. Group think, no matter how “un-thinking” it was, had fully set in and promoted mainstream idiocy.

And the laws of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were also promoting hatred. These religious leaders were literally hating on the Messiah and His followers. They were hating on the One that they were actually looking for! They were rejecting the One they should have worshiped!

Additionally, some Pharisees just happened to be keeping an eye on Jesus’ disciples. The text does not tell us why, but the fact that they knew what the disciples were doing shows how carefully the disciples were being watched. They asked them, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” The question was specific, since it used the legal term *exestin*, which refers to what is legally allowed. In the Jewish view, they should have prepared a meal ahead of time to be ready for the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup>

The religious leaders, as usual, were obsessively trying to follow the law, and were using that obsession as a weapon against Christ and His disciples.

This text just begs the question, “when is it right to call someone out, and when is it wrong to call someone out?” The Pharisees were certainly calling out Jesus and His disciples. They were accusing them of going against God in their practice. This was serious stuff. Was their accusation warranted? Was it accurate?

When are our accusations against others warranted?

I’ve certainly been called out for things that I’ve done in the Church and to the Church (God’s People). I’ve been in ministry on and off since 2005, when I was twenty four years old, which was the year that I started my first ministry internship.

Back in 2007, which was two years after I began vocational ministry, I decided it would be a great idea to write a book about my experiences working in the Church and in a variety of ministry contexts, since I had had so much experience, right? 🙄😏 Hindsight is 20/20 my friends, but our current insight into our current scenarios is often so so blind!

I called the book “The System Vs. the Rebellion”. In it, I proceeded to candidly tell stories of interactions with Church situations and Church people. It was uncensored,

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raw, and full of my underdeveloped opinions and convictions. It was blatant. It was arrogant. It was brash. It was loud.

And then in 2010 I thought it would also be a marvelous idea to start putting out some of the content of the book into a blog. People in the experiences I was writing about then began to read this content. It started crazy amounts of conflict and arguing online.

Were these folks correct for calling me out and telling me to stop posting this stuff? Absolutely. I eventually repented to everyone and took it all down, regretting the foolishness of what I had done and wishing I had never written or posted most or even all of it!

When I was trying to get “The System Vs. The Rebellion” published, one agent told me that my book was some of the worst stuff he had read. Desiring to grow amidst my immaturity, I asked him why. He said the content and delivery was good, but it was like so many book proposals and manuscripts he had read- it was so obviously an immature person offering their bad advice on how to fix the Church. Ouch! God sure humbled me through that experience!

I heard Francis Chan once say that he heard advice from someone not to write a book until he was over 40, because we wouldn't want what we think in our 20's and 30's to be published! That's some good advice! I'm 42 now and I've written three full books in the past few years- I'm carefully reconsidering pursuing publishing again, but definitely want it to be helpful and (mostly) mature content! 😊

Fast forward in my life eleven years later to 2021...

I was working as a campus pastor for the Chapel in Kenmore for this Church some of you may know called “The Chapel in Akron”. They had a pastor named Tim Armstrong at the time who was bullying the staff, using fear to lead, threatening people, silencing and controlling people. I negatively experienced his leadership first hand. It came to a head and the whole Church and its seven campuses had a big fall out. That's why what was once “The Chapel in Kenmore” is now “Streetlight Community Church”. Read more here: <https://julieroys.com/tag/tim-armstrong/>

I was definitely struggling in the situation, and though mostly careful, often wasn't quiet about it, and sometimes, in frustration, wasn't tactful about it. Leading up to that fallout, which officially happened in the summer of 2021, I had multiple people approach me multiple times from within the Chapel to “call me out on my sins”.

I had key leaders in the Church call meetings with me and sit me down, telling me that I wasn't supporting the Church or "Pastor Tim" in some of the things I was saying in my sermons (which were live streamed), and some of the things I was posting online.

Granted- I certainly, in the midst of the difficulty and hurt, didn't remain 100% above reproach in all that I did. But some of the pain I was experiencing from having to put up with Tim's leadership was certainly coming out in a number of ways. I always attempted to avoid directly talking about Tim because of the gravity and complexity of the situation, but was trying to honor this verse that Paul wrote:

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph. 6:12)*

I was certainly calling out the evils of bullying, utilitarianism, consumerism, greed, image management, and other hypocrisies I was seeing. At times I did so mockingly or bitterly, but in better, Spirit-led moments, I did so in the power of Christ and with the truth of the Word of God as the rightful weapon.

But I, along with many others, prayerfully defended where I stood. Many of us believed this man was unfit to lead and we said so. Some who defended him changed their tune and repented. Others tried to play both sides of the situation to their advantage without ever repenting.

And in the end I'm confident that God proved that to be the right side of history within this Church. Tim did get removed. Many came forward telling terrible stories about how he had treated them. In the reprehensible chaos, God brought healing.

To summarize, like the religious leaders were here, sometimes we think we're doing things of God and we're wrong.

Other times, it is fully of God to call out wrongdoing in the lives of those who claim to be His people. Jesus never shied away from this. Just look at how He answered some of the Pharisees who were accusing Him and His disciples of dishonoring God in this situation!

*3 Jesus answered them, "Haven't you read what David and those who were with him did when he was hungry— 4 how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat? He even gave*



*some to those who were with him.” 5 Then he told them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Luke 6:3-5)*

Jesus defended the actions of his colleagues by citing the Scriptures. He began with the challenging remark, “Haven’t you read... ?” Jesus in fact knew the Pharisees had read 1 Samuel 21:1 - 7 and 22:8 - 9, but he argued that they had misunderstood it. So his reply began with an implied rebuke. In that passage, David gathered showbread from the tabernacle so that he and his men could eat it — a clear violation of the law. Jesus explicitly noted that they did what was not lawful (again using the legal term *exestin*). They ate “the consecrated bread” (“the bread of the Presence,” Ex. 25:30) that the law said was only for priests. Since David was not disciplined by the high priest at the time, the Old Testament suggested that what he did was appropriate. Jesus’ reply had the Pharisees in a dilemma. In effect, if they condemned him on this issue, they criticized David as well.<sup>5</sup>

One moral of the story here is this: If you want to really rile people up who think they know the Bible better than you, just quote the Bible to them to tell them why they’re wrong! See how that goes! 😏

If you’re living and breathing I’m sure you’ve observed followers of Christ behave in un-Christlike ways! If you’re a living and breathing human and a follower of Jesus I’m sure you also have behaved in such a manner! What is to be done about it though? When is it right to speak, and when is it right to stay silent? Sometimes grace and silence must be granted and patience is required. Sometimes truth must be boldly spoken in love.

I sure remember some of the nasty things that followers of Christ were saying in 2020 about black people, the black Church, and the race conversation in general. I certainly wasn’t advocating for the progressive political approach in response to these things, but I sure was stumbling around, trying to seek out what God had to say about all of it amidst my ignorance! Hey y’all- I had a white suburban upbringing from 1981-2000, and then had been doing hip hop ministry with young black kids from 2018 up to that point- how confused do you think I was???

And it was funny how people would respond to me about the race issue who claimed to follow Jesus and know the Scriptures! It was like they’d be totally biblical and loving when it came to everything else, but the Holy Spirit would just leave the room and all hell would break loose outta their mouths when it came to race!

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I remember one dude asking if he could hire one of the hip hop students I was working with to come and clean his yard for him. Almost all the rappers I was working with were black dudes in their teens. I offered one kid as a possibility for the job and asked if he'd get paid. This dude responded by saying, "well c'mon, it's not like slavery is still around, of course I'll pay him something!" He then expected me to respond like a fellow white bonehead and joke with him. Instead, I called him out for being racist in what he said and aggressively told him to cut it out, which maybe wasn't the best approach, but you can bet that certainly didn't go over well!

We eventually went back and forth about it, and I eventually talked about how the apostle Peter too struggled with being partial towards Jewish folks and being unfair towards Gentiles. Acts 10-11:18 told that story. This guy responded by saying, in effect, "how dare you talk that way about the apostle Peter- he's one of my heroes in the faith!" He had a lot of money and was part of our Church. He took his financial offering with him and split. I attempted to set up meetings to reconcile with him on numerous occasions and he blew me off.

Now I wasn't perfectly reflecting Jesus in this situation, but I sure know that Jesus wasn't afraid to use scripture to challenge people who thought they knew the Word of God better than Him! And after all- wasn't Jesus **the** Word of God? ***In the flesh?***

The point of Jesus' reply to the religious leaders simply made a comparison between David and himself. The thrust of his point has been defended in two ways. Either Jesus was arguing that God's law never intended to exclude people from meeting basic needs like eating, so that David became an example of what the law really intended, or Jesus was arguing that in certain situations of need, the law could be superseded. The text itself was not clear which of these options was behind Jesus' remark. However, it is no accident that this text followed the previous text on the new way Jesus brought, because this event showed a different approach to Sabbath issues than the traditions of the Jewish leadership. New wine was going into new wineskins.<sup>6</sup>

Kant argued that "doing what is right is not about the consequences of our actions (something over which we ultimately have no control) but about having the proper intention in performing the action."<sup>7</sup> In the midst of Jesus' perfect obedience to God, He sometimes broke cultural customs and standards, some of which were even implied in Levitical law. Jesus didn't care about the consequences of His actions as much as He cared about God's intentions in all His actions.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://open.maricopa.edu/societyandbusiness/chapter/a-framework-for-making-ethical-decisions/>



The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) divided the Mosaic laws into three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial.<sup>8</sup> The religious leaders of Jesus day tended to equivocate the civil and ceremonial with the moral. Sometimes they exacerbated civil and ceremonial Mosaic law to the point of misinterpreting it and completely missing the moral. Jesus certainly preserved all the moral aspects of the law while often challenging the civil and ceremonial aspects of the law.

We may be in a different era where we're 2,000 years removed from the civil and ceremonial laws, but one thing is for sure. As followers of Jesus, we certainly do "miss the point" at times!

One time, my friend was struggling with pornography, and was newly married. He got together with me and another guy in a small group to admit his struggles and ask for prayer and accountability. We were at a restaurant together, while my wife Sarah was meeting with his wife in the same restaurant on the other side of the dining room at a different table.

Full of righteous zeal and the immaturity of having followed Christ for about five years, I confrontationally explained to my friend what Jesus taught about adultery in Matthew 5:27-30. I told my friend if he didn't go over to his wife right now and tell her about his porn problem that I would! I pressured him until he agreed to tell her later on that night while they were on their own. The other friend with us just looked at me with his jaw dropped. My friend told his wife and they stayed together and tried to work things out, but man I was basically trying to take the place of the Holy Spirit in my friends' life!

Did I understand the moral implications of Jesus' teaching on adultery in Matthew 5:27-30? Yes. Was I living them out? Yes- I had been porn free for seven years at the time and was enjoying being married in my twenties to my beautiful wife. I certainly got the moral implications of all that Jesus was saying.

But was I shepherding my friend well? No. Was I operating in the humility of Christ? No. I was missing the point massively.

The Pharisees, many of whom often genuinely honored the holiness of God, were "missing the point" in Luke 6:1-5. Jesus was certainly extracting the true moral principles within the law, and He wasn't afraid to part ways with the status quo of His time and offend the elite in order to uphold God's righteousness and goodness. His friends were hungry, food was available. The silly rules about what one could and could

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<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_views\\_on\\_the\\_Old\\_Covenant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_views_on_the_Old_Covenant)

not do on the Sabbath just didn't apply in the situation. Jesus didn't care about that. God didn't care about that. The religious people smugly cared about it so much that they were entirely missing the heart of God the Father.

And Jesus was not done. He added a note about his authority, arguing that "the Son of Man was Lord of the Sabbath". This argument went one step further than the parallel with David. The fact that Jesus was Son of Man, that he was the commissioned agent of God, meant that he had the right to regulate what took place on the Sabbath. This remark underlined his unique position. His actions were not the issue; his authority was. He ruled over the application of one of the Ten Commandments. The question for all to ponder became: "Does Jesus reveal God's way and have authority over it, or does he not?" The statement at the end of the passage implied Luke's reader should carefully consider the response.<sup>9</sup>

So since Jesus is the Lord of **the** Sabbath, He is certainly Lord of **our** Sabbath, and Lord of **our rest**. is He not?

So what kind of Sabbath does Jesus want for us? We need to take this question to Him. Mike Breen balances the concepts of work and rest so well when he writes:

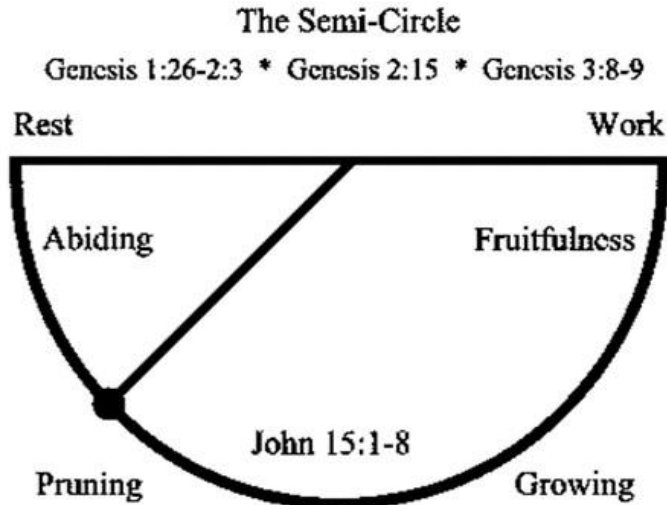
*We were not created just simply to exist. Our Creator expects us to produce an increase. Clearly we are not to be lazy and wicked servants; we were made to bear fruit. But does this mean we are to be workaholics? God designed us to be productive. But we build our identities around our activities. We are not living in the truth of who God created us to be. We have become human "doings" rather than human "beings".<sup>10</sup>*

We'll talk more about the balance of work and rest for our Streetlight Church family when we get to that in our DNA Spiritual Formation sessions on every second and third Sunday of the month, 12-2pm (with free pancakes and coffee!) from November 2023 to April 2024! Mark your calendars this will be important! I want you at all our Sunday gatherings and I want you even more at these sessions! One thing we'll talk about is the pendulum swing of the "semi circle" - which looks like this:

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<sup>10</sup> Building a Discipling Culture Copyright © 2016 by Mike Breen



And I'll explain it more- it's so good and so helpful!

But for now here's the big point: If Jesus is to be Lord of our rest, then we need to enter into His re-creative, replenishing presence, and have Him guide our rest. That way, we can really learn to work **from** rest instead of working, working, working, and then regularly crashing, burning and frantically **resting** from **work**.

What's a big indicator that we're just **resting** from **work** instead of working **from** rest? Every time we get a free chance to rest, we numb ourselves. Pick your poison- alcohol, sex, nicotine, THC, TV, TikTok reels, cocaine, overeating, meth, laziness, heroin, fentanyl, psychedelics, rage, over-consumption of conspiracy theories, CNN, or Fox News, and more.

Sometimes we plain over-indulge in some of these things because our priorities simply suck- that's another issue entirely!

But sometimes some of these things are an escape from reality. The Lord wants to dwell with us **in** our reality and guide us **through** it with His truth and grace! He doesn't validate our escape tactics! He's not in that stuff at all y'all!

Big indicator that we're working **from** rest? Every time we get a free chance to rest, we enter into a combination of soul care and self care fueled by the divine that is rejuvenating, sensible, and helpful to our overall condition before God, people, and ourselves. We get filled. We read. We meditate. We pray. We enjoy things we've been given by God and connect to God in the enjoyment- films, coffee, monogamous, married sex, nature, music, naps, scriptures, great books, exercise, adventures, and

more. We allow the Lord to fill up our mental, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual buckets with the overflow of His love and goodness.

There's a **huge** difference between **resting** from **work** and working **from** rest! Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, so let Him be Lord of yours!

And Jesus sure wasn't done with challenging the concept of Sabbath in His time! Luke 6 goes on:

*6 On another Sabbath (Jesus) entered the synagogue and was teaching. A man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The scribes and Pharisees were watching him closely, to see if he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they could find a charge against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts and told the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand here." So he got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 After looking around at them all, he told him, "Stretch out your hand." He did, and his hand was restored. 11 They, however, were filled with rage and started discussing with one another what they might do to Jesus. (Luke 6)*

While teaching in a synagogue, Jesus sees a person in need, a man with a shriveled right hand, and takes the initiative to heal him. Such an injury would prevent the man from pursuing a vocation. In other words, while not in mortal danger, the man was limited in what he could do.<sup>11</sup>

Want to know how we're truly working in Christ's power from a place of His rest? We desire to **help** others instead of being **annoyed** by them! That's Christ in us leading us to that attitude for sure!

Jesus, the Lord and perfect keeper of the Sabbath, oozed with the compassion of God constantly. This man with a shriveled hand had a dire need and He wanted to help. Religiosity didn't get in the way for Jesus. Selfishness didn't get in the way either.

The scribes and Pharisees watched Jesus. The Greek word for "watched" means "to spy on" or "to watch out of the corner of one's eye" (cf. Ps. 36:12 lxx). They wanted to level a charge against Jesus. This attitude was emerging out of what was becoming a growing opposition. In the Jewish view, a person who was not in mortal danger could wait to be healed.<sup>12</sup> But Jesus didn't wait. He helped right away.

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Has your theology ever gotten in the way of you doing what God wants you to do? Have you ever avoided telling someone about the truth and love of Jesus because you don't believe God sovereignly called you to open your mouth? Have you ever not generously given resources that you had that someone else genuinely, rightfully needed because you felt the Lord was calling you to refinish your back deck? Have you ever condemned someone in your heart instead of loving them because they irritated your political, social, or theological scruples? I've done plenty of things like this. You're not alone. But this kind of spirit isn't the Holy Spirit, it's a religious spirit! It must be repented of! God has better for us than this!

Jesus also raised a fundamental question before doing anything, for he knew the Pharisees' thoughts. He told the man to come and stand before him and then asked, "I ask you: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" The question had an ironic edge, because Jesus was looking at the Sabbath from a relational angle. In fact, the way he pursued the question almost suggested that a failure to act here would be doing evil. The leadership, on the other hand, was **plotting** evil!<sup>13</sup>

The action became a test. Would God allow the healing to take place? Would He vindicate Jesus and reveal the answer to Jesus' question? Jesus looked at everyone and then acted. He asked the man to stretch out his hand, and the man was able to respond, indicating that healing had occurred. But rather than rejoicing at his restoration, the leadership became angry at Jesus' success. The word for "anger" was a strong term, describing irrational anger, even pathological rage. A turning point had come. The authorities had to do something to stop Jesus, and they began their plan. Refusing to accept the evidence Jesus had laid before them, they revealed hardness of heart and cast their vote against Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

Anything that Jesus is part of is always unarguably good! There is plenty of religion in His Name that He doesn't participate in! But anything He's in? You can be certain that it will be **rock solid** and **good! ALWAYS!**

So let's seek Him today! He has died, He has risen, He will come again! He's oozing goodness and wants His goodness to pour out as blood from His nailed pierced hands into the places of pain, hurt, confusion, doubt and loss that need healing in your life! Invite Him into the deepest recesses of your soul! You won't regret allowing Him to fully make His home in you!

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