

Intervention & Influence... Because of my willingness to extend myself on behalf of the hurting, I will find myself in situations where I must confront not only circumstances that have created pain for others, but also the evil people who have acted wickedly to create or maintain those situations, which enables them to take advantage of others weaker or more vulnerable than themselves. This is the most significant level of usefulness, since I am now confronting the black hole and evil people who actively are looking to negatively impact others for their own benefit, for sport, or just because they can. So, as I find myself engaged in helping others, I will, by default, find myself confronting the evil which has created the unjust and oppressive condition. I am now confronting wicked and ill-intended individuals who are hell-bent in preventing me from doing good to another person, because their power, position, system or territory is being impacted. They will begin to focus their sights on me, in order to maintain their power and the status quo (which allows them to benefit at another's expense). **It is at this point that I have moved from encountering persecution to actually dealing with wickedness (in its many facets and forms). This is what it means to "pick up my cross," for there is nothing but pushback, hardship, and personal cost in it for me at this point.** To maintain a stand for righteousness at this point will cost me personally, and may even change the course of my life. This type of reaction on the part of the wicked has less to do with my profession of faith, and more to do with my stand for truth, and for doing what is right, just, and fair. The underlying issue at this level of opposition is, at its core, Truth. That is why there can be no attempts to find "common ground" or "peace," for the enemy is playing for keeps, and intends to thwart any advances on the part of those who are righteous and good. And, the Lord will serve as The Avenger of Blood on behalf of those who act on behalf of those who are injured by the wicked. The integrity of the upright will drive them to take a stand against those who are wicked (*the most wicked of all the black hole types are usually those who cloak themselves in religious or family garb*). At this stage, without ever looking for trouble, I will find myself in the midst of a battle, having to stand against those evil individuals who benefit from things remaining as they were... at the expense of the vulnerable. To "leave well enough along" would mean to capitulate and turn a blind eye to a Nazi-like juggernaut (with the intensity and cunning of the force that made its way across Europe, slaughtering anyone who stood in the way of its goals of conquest). Compelled by the Lord's heart, my priorities at this stage will inevitable become those closest to the Lord's heart... that of the issue of justice, and consequently intervening on behalf of those being mistreated by the wicked (Isa. 59: 15-18, Isa 63: 1-6, Psa. 72:4). Once at this level, then the guns of the wicked will be trained on me, as I stand to stop the evil and defend the helpless. And, when the enemy comes racing in like a flood, that is when the Lord will fight on my behalf. His greatest gift to any just person acting in righteousness to protect the hurting is an imprecatory prayer. Psa. 37 & Psa. 58 are just a few of the Psalms (46% of the book of Psalms speak to this

Activism... the more I find my heart changing, the more I will involve myself both in the lives of others, and with the issues that make a difference from God's perspective. Thus, I not only start serving in a growth-promoting capacity in the lives of others (helping and spurring), but I also find myself serving as a shield of protection for the hurting against those who would negatively impact them. I begin to understand that I must act to stop evil before it has a chance to further impact both "the least of these," and the culture at large.

Involvement & Investment... I begin to find myself compelled to help others who are truly in need. I no longer am able to simply pass by a need assuming that "things will work out alright for them." I am now becoming touched by the pain of others, and am moved to do something to help. A life of vicarious involvement is no longer an option. I will not think of someone else meeting the need, for I will be compelled to meet that need myself. Without even realizing it, my life begins to become characterized by compassion-in-action. I start to understand the Lord's heart of compassion for "the least of these," but I actually don't even give it a second thought. At this point in my growth, I couldn't conceive of NOT getting involved. This genuine selflessness cannot be manufactured by the religious. This is truly why the Lord will use this level of character development and spiritual growth as a reflection of what the heart of a true believer is like, as opposed to the false Christian (Mt. 25: 31-46). At this stage, I find I am naturally investing in the lives of others, and am being very effective in helping the hurting. This is where the difference starts to become apparent. Though not proof positive; however, it certainly weeds out those who are superficial, false, and self-deluded.

Personal Ethics... As the Lord continues His work in my life, changing me into His image and giving me both the desire and power to do that which pleases Him, I will inevitably start to find that issues which impact others start to take on a greater level of importance for me, because I am now aware not only of my impact on others, but also of the impact of the decision of others have on those around them (especially as it relates to those who are in positions of power and influence). At this level I begin to see that social issues are actually the priority issues to the Lord. No longer can I turn a blind eye to issues that don't directly impact me. I start to have a sense of the Lord's bottom-line issues, and what it means to be salt and light. I understand that He just didn't save me to enable me to get to heaven, or just to live a balanced and well-adjusted life; but, to actually be an agent of preservation (salt) against rot and decay, and to serve as a means of promoting moral soundness within my culture. I not only find myself speaking out against that which will cause decay, but I also begin serving as a healing agent for others. Additionally, I start to have a sense that God places a high premium on issues such as commitment & loyalty. I understand that I am as spiritual as I am personally principled in my dealings with others.

Personal Priorities & Attitudes... as the Lord changes my heart, I find that my desires, motivation, and attitudes begin to change. Also, since my conscience has now become spirit-enhanced, I find myself uncomfortable with things that never used to bother me. And, as I find I have a desire to read the Bible, it informs my conscience of what His priorities are, of what He desires, and what He says about issues of my life. The truth of His word will have an effect upon what I spend my time, money, efforts, energy, priorities, and my leisure time on... and how I treat others, and what I give first place to in my heart.

Personal Conversion... this is not the end, but just the beginning. The cost is a complete surrender of me and my life; I become His slave. There cannot be any illusion that it is possible to accept Him as Savior, but not as Lord, for that is what He demands. He gave Himself for me, to save me from the judgment of my sins. In response, I give Him all of me. Half-hearted devotion is NO devotion at all. The nature of salvation will generate an automatic response of surrendering all to Him out of gratitude for what He has done for me. If conversion is real, no one will have to tell me that this is to be the norm. I would never consider that His Lordship is somehow separate from Him being my Savior. To dichotomize the issue is simply to allow a non-Christian to become self-deluded in his thinking, believing he will be welcomed into Heaven, when all he will really hear is, "Depart from me, for I never knew you." (Mt. 7:23)