

Fearless

How to Live In Safety and at Ease Without Fear of Harm

In times of great uncertainty and what feels like deep insecurity, I want to help you discover today how you can live Fearless. How you can live in complete security regardless of current or future events in the world. From the life and teaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Jesus I want to reveal today how you can live in safety and at ease without fear of harm.

Recently I read a book called **Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy** by Eric Metaxas. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Feb. 4, 1906 – April 9, 1945) was a Protestant Lutheran Pastor, theologian, and active in the German resistance to the policies of Hitler and Nazism. His team of conspirators managed to get a bomb on Hitler's plane but it failed to detonate. They later managed to get a bomb in a suitcase underneath a table that Hitler was sitting at in a plot led by Claus von Stauffenberg becoming known as the Stauffenberg plot on 20th July 1944. The bomb exploded but unbelievably Hitler was protected from any harm by a very thick oak table leg deflecting the blast which Hitler interpreted as divine protection.

Due to his opposition to the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer was arrested and executed at the Flossian concentration camp, during the last month of the war. This short video gives you a little flavour of his life:

https://youtu.be/mLiRuu_-SIY

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The only Christmas that Bonhoeffer spent at Tegel was in 1943. Harald Poelchau, one of the official prison pastors, asked him to help write a sheet that would be distributed to the prisoners. On it Bonhoeffer wrote a number of prayers, including the following:

***“O God, Early in the morning do I cry unto thee.
Help me to pray, And to think only of thee.
I cannot pray alone.
In me there is darkness, But with thee there is light.
I am lonely, but thou leavest me not.
I am feeble in heart, but thou leavest me not.
I am restless, but with thee there is peace.
In me there is bitterness, but with thee there is patience;
Thy ways are past understanding, but Thou knowest the way for me.”***

In his book Eric Metaxas says this on page 247 about Bonhoeffer.

“He knew something was deeply wrong with the church as it then existed, and not just with the Reichskirche and the German Christians, but with the best of the church, with the Confessing Church, and with the current form of Christianity in Germany in general. He felt that what was especially missing

from the life of Christians in Germany was the day-to-day reality of dying to self, of following Christ with every ounce of one's being in every moment, in every part of one's life."

"Bonhoeffer. Pastor, prophet, martyr, spy." Eric Metaxas (p. 247). Kindle Edition.
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He continues on page 249:

"One thing was certain: the evil of Hitler could not be defeated with mere religion. He longed to see a church that had an intimate connection with Christ and was dedicated to hearing God's voice and obeying God's commands, come what may, including the shedding of blood. But how could one hear the voice of God, much less obey God, when prayer and meditating on the Scriptures were not even being taught in German seminaries? Neither were worship and singing taught. He would teach all of that in the seminary he was going to run, come spring."

"Bonhoeffer. Pastor, prophet, martyr, spy." Eric Metaxas (p. 249). Kindle Edition.
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Bonhoeffer lived in Germany during horrendous times for Christians and the German church. He faced unprecedented challenge as a Christian and as a church leader. The pressure and fiery trial of the times revealed the state of the church. It's easy to look composed and healthy when times are good but fiery trials reveal the true nature of people. Today, our challenge as Christians and the church are very different. We are in a moment of pressure and fiery trial just now globally as a result of Covid. And this trial is also revealing the true nature of the church. Something is deeply wrong with the state of the church in the world today (generally speaking apart from some bright spots). Yet the solution and need of Christians today are no different from Bonhoeffer's. How did Bonhoeffer summarise the need?

1. The need for Christians to die to self and follow Christ with every ounce of one's being in every moment, in every part of one's life.¹ This is a description of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. There are many verses but here are 2:

¹ 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ' Galatians 2:20.

'Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ' Luke 9:23-24

'Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ' John 12:24-25

'Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ' Galatians 5:24

'Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. ' Matthew 10:38-39

'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. '

Galatians 2:20.

'Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. '

Luke 9:23-24

2. He longed to see a church that had an intimate connection with Christ and was dedicated to hearing God's voice and obeying God's commands, come what may. This is a description of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Bonhoeffer said:

"But how could one hear the voice of God, much less obey God, when prayer and meditating on the Scriptures were not even being taught in German seminaries?"

Bonhoeffer knew that the evil of Hitler could not be defeated with mere religion. In fact, no evil can be defeated with mere religion. Bonhoeffer longed to see a church not of religious people but full of true disciples of Jesus Christ. And for Bonhoeffer true disciples had died to self and follow Christ with every part of one's life come what may.

He longed for a church of true disciples who had an intimate connection with Christ and were dedicated to hearing God's voice and obeying. He believed how people heard from God was through prayer and meditation on Scripture. In fact, all his students had to meditate on one verse for 30 minutes per day, 7 days per week to hear what God was saying to them. Bonhoeffer longed for a church who heard and obeyed. Remember the Hebrew word Shema for 'hear' in the Old Testament. What did it mean again? ²

² In V8-13 the Hebrew word shama is mentioned 4 times. Its translated as hear, listen, hearken and submit.

Psa 81:8 (KJV+) Hear, ^{H8085} O my people, ^{H5971} and I will testify ^{H5749} unto thee: O Israel, ^{H3478} if ^{H518} thou wilt hearken ^{H8085} unto me;

Psa 81:11 (KJV+) But my people ^{H5971} would not ^{H3808} hearken ^{H8085} to my voice; ^{H6963} and Israel ^{H3478} would ^{H14} none ^{H3808} of me.

Psa 81:13 (KJV+) Oh that ^{H3863} my people ^{H5971} had hearkened ^{H8085} unto me, *and* Israel ^{H3478} had walked ^{H1980} in my ways! ^{H1870}

H8085 (Strong)

שמע

shâma`

shaw-mah'

A primitive root; to *hear* intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience, etc.; causatively to *tell*, etc.):

Total KJV occurrences: 1158

For thousands of years, every morning and evening Jewish people have prayed these well-known words as a way of expressing their devotion to God. They are called the SHEMA.

“Listening in the Bible is about giving respect to the one speaking to you and doing what they say. Real listening takes effort and ACTION.”

Bonhoeffer longed for a church who SHEMA, who listen and obey. That’s why he wrestled with the ethics of joining a conspiracy to kill Hitler. Why? He listened to God’s call upon his life and he knew he had to obey. He felt God’s call to him was to join the conspiracy and face whatever consequences would follow. Ultimately, he was imprisoned and martyred for that decision.

Hearing and Obeying the Voice of Wisdom

“Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech: “How long will you who are simple love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? Repent at my rebuke! Then I will pour out my thoughts to you, I will make known to you my teachings. But since you refuse to listen when I call and no one pays attention when I stretch out my hand, since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you— when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. “Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me, since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the Lord. Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.””

Proverbs 1:20-33 NIV

The last verse v33 says that whoever listens to me (the voice of wisdom) will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm. Now if we wrongly interpret this verse we will think that this verse offers us a life of safety and ease from every trouble. Biblical interpretation however involves interpreting a verse in light of what we know from the whole of Scripture. So what do we know from the whole of Scripture about trouble in the life of Christians? Jesus said in this life you will have trouble. John the

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

(Deu 6:4-5)

The first word of the SHEMA is hear or listen which in Hebrew is pronounced as SHEMA. Shema is a very commonly used word in the Hebrew Bible. But Hebrew authors use the word SHEMA to mean more than just letting soundwaves enter your ear. It means and is used for “pay attention” so SHEMA means hear and pay attention to but there is more. It includes response. Asking God to SHEMA in Hebrew is asking God to hear and to respond, to hear and act. It’s similar when God asks people to listen. When God asks His people to listen it’s the same as asking them to Listen and Obey. That’s the fascinating thing about Shema. In ancient Hebrew there is no separate word for obey – meaning to carry out the wishes of someone. In the Bible, if you wanted to say: I will listen and do what you say – you would use the single word – SHEMA. In Hebrew listening and doing are 2 sides of the same coin. So in the Bible, if people were actually listening they would ACT and DO as requested. Hence the phrase, you have ears but are not listening. So in the end, Listening in the Bible is about giving respect to the one speaking to you and doing what they say. Real listening takes effort and ACTION.

Baptist was beheaded. All Jesus' disciples were martyred. Paul was imprisoned and faced much persecution and hardship. This is why according to the rules of Biblical interpretation it can be dangerous to extract a single Bible verse and interpret it on its own in isolation. Obviously this verse does not mean that if you listen to wisdom's voice will live a trouble-free life in light of the whole of Scripture. There are 2 types of trouble you can face in life however.

1. Unavoidable. We live in a broken world with broken people and as a result we experience difficulty and hardship. Coronavirus and bullying are 2 examples. Joseph was bullied by his brothers. In choosing to follow God, there is also the unavoidable trouble that goes along with that such as persecution and the trouble that can come from obeying and following Him.³ Bonhoeffer's life is an example of that.
2. Avoidable. We can avoid a certain amount, in fact a lot of trouble by following wisdom's voice. If we hear and obey wisdom's voice we can avoid the consequences, trouble, pain and suffering caused by poor decisions. This is the avoidable consequences of sin. Sin is a poor choice. A husband who cheats on his wife for example as all too often happens. Much trouble, pain, suffering which is avoidable comes to the wife, children, the wider society and back to the husband. Proverbs puts it this way: *"Since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them."* That's the avoidable consequences or fruit of poor choices that destroy and ultimately kill them. James puts it this way:

'Instead it is each person's own desires and thoughts that drag them into evil and lure them away into darkness. Evil desires give birth to evil actions. And when sin is fully mature it can murder you! So my friends, don't be fooled by your own desires!'

James (Jacob) 1:14-16

³ 'Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,' 2 Timothy 3:12. 'Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ' John 15:20. 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ' Revelation 2:10. ' "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. ' Matthew 5:11-12. ' Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ' Romans 12:14. 'And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ' Mark 4:17. 'And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. ' Mark 4:17

It may not kill you physically but it kills relationship with your heavenly father and kills your true identity of who you were created to be. Then, you have to live a much lesser version of yourself.

So what does it mean then when proverbs says “whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm”? I think it means 2 things.

1. You will be safe from a lot of avoidable and “unnecessary” harm, hardship and difficulty. By avoiding foolish decisions and following wisdom’s voice you will avoid the fruit of foolish decisions. You will avoid the consequences of foolish decisions. For example, If you do not drink and drive or use your mobile phone when you drive you will live in safety and ease, without fear of harming yourself or the child you could harm and kill.
2. You will live in safety and ease without fear of harm. I think we need to interpret this with an eternal perspective as opposed to a temporal perspective. Your eternal destiny as a child of God, forever with Him in heaven is secure and unshakable. So you can live with safety and ease without fear of harm to your eternal relationship with God. Your eternal destiny is secure. This eternal security allows us to experience and discover joy even in suffering and pain. James puts it this way, 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,' James 1:2. Paul says; 'That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' 2 Corinthians 12:10

Bonhoeffer puts it this way:

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*“In a letter to Maria, Bonhoeffer had once written:
Stifter once said,*

“Pain is a holy angel, who shows treasures to men which otherwise remain forever hidden; through him men have become greater than through all joys of the world.”

It must be so and I tell this to myself in my present position over and over again—the pain of longing which often can be felt even physically, must be there, and we shall not and need not talk it away. But it needs to be overcome every time and thus there is an even holier angel than the one of pain, that is the one of joy in God.”

He says pain shows us treasures which otherwise remain hidden forever. That’s dad’s testimony from last week about the pain of his time in hospital with Coronavirus.⁴ But Bonhoeffer said pain must be overcome by a holier angel, the one of joy in God. This is the incredible reality of being able to find joy even in the most

⁴ <https://youtu.be/eCpu6mv2oiE>

painful of circumstances as James talks about “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,...”. James 1:2

In proverbs we read about wisdom’s instruction. Not many accept it and therefore are heading towards trouble and disaster that could be avoided.

Proverbs 1:33 says: 'but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.'"

There is a place of eternal security. It is possible to live today with safety, ease and without fear of harm.

I will continue in part 2 of my talk or the full version recorded to look at some more of Bonhoeffer’s life lessons. Also, to discover what is Wisdom’s voice that proverbs talks about. I will also look at a parable that Jesus taught revealing the same message that those who listen = Shema – hear and obey wisdom’s voice will live a life of safety, ease and without fear of harm.

But let’s come back to the crying need of the church in Bonhoeffer’s day and ours today. What were the 2 crying needs?

1. The need for Christians to die to self and follow Christ with every ounce of one’s being in every moment, in every part of one’s life.
2. He longed to see a church that had an intimate connection with Christ and was dedicated to hearing God’s voice and obeying God’s commands

I want to ask you today, do you want to be a follower of Christ? Today do you want to start or continue that journey? Are you ready to dedicate or rededicate your life to him. A life of surrender to His will in every part of your life. A life committed to hearing His voice (primarily through the Bible and other ways God speaks) – the voice of wisdom – including advice and rebuke, advice and correction. We are to do that individually and together as followers of Jesus which is why in Jan we are trialling Friend3 groups of 3 to help us do the 2 things above together. This is the way to live Fearless. This is how to live in safety and at ease without fear of harm.

Part 2.

Bonhoeffer in a sermon he preached as a pastor in London before being imprisoned spoke about living even without the fear of death;

“No one has yet believed in God and the kingdom of God, no one has yet heard about the realm of the resurrected, and not been homesick from that hour, waiting and looking forward joyfully to being released from bodily existence. Whether we are young or old makes no difference. What are twenty or thirty or fifty years in the sight of God? And which of us knows how near he or she may already be to the goal? That life only really begins when it ends here on earth, that all that is here is only the prologue before the curtain goes up—that is for young and old alike to think about. Why are we so afraid when we think about death? . . . Death is only dreadful for those who live in dread and fear of it. Death is not wild and terrible, if only we can be still and hold fast to God’s Word. Death is not bitter, if we have not become bitter ourselves. Death is grace, the greatest gift of grace that God gives to people who believe in him. Death is mild, death is sweet and gentle; it beckons to us with heavenly power, if only we realize that it is the gateway to our homeland, the tabernacle of joy, the everlasting kingdom of peace. How do we know that dying is so dreadful? Who knows whether, in our human fear and anguish we are only shivering and shuddering at the most glorious, heavenly, blessed event in the world? Death is hell and night and cold, if it is not transformed by our faith. But that is just what is so marvelous, that we can transform death.”

“Bonhoeffer. Pastor, prophet, martyr, spy.” Eric Metaxas (p. 531). Kindle Edition.

Bonhoeffer realised that faith can transform death. Not only can faith transform death but it can transform any dark valley so you can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and yet fear no evil. You can transform death, darkness and every dark and difficult situation in life by faith. But how do you live with safety and ease and without fear of harm? What is the way? Proverbs tells us it is for the one who listens to me.

Pro 1:33 (KJV+)

But whoso hearkeneth^{H8085} unto me shall dwell^{H7931} safely,^{H983} and shall be quiet^{H7599} from fear^{H4480 H6343} of evil.^{H7451}

The Hebrew word for listens is in KJV translated hearkeneth and is the Hebrew word Shema (see footnote 1) which means to give respect to the one speaking to you and do what they say. It means hearing and obeying.

The key to finding total and permanent security is listening to the right voice. There are many voices that speak to us daily. Voices from our self, from our enemy, from the media, from politics and from the whisper of God. God’s whisper is drowned out by all the noise. That’s why we must search hard for quietness and find stillness. We need to tune our radio frequency to Kingdom FM. Not the Kingdom of Fife FM

but the Kingdom of heaven FM. The voice of Gods wisdom offers you complete security.

Now the voice of wisdom offers both advice and rebuke (or correction). Proverbs 1:25-26 NIV

“since you disregard all my advice and do not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh when disaster strikes you; I will mock when calamity overtakes you—” NIV

'You have ignored all my advice and have not been willing to let me correct you. '

Proverbs 1:25. GNB

The voice is wisdom speaks. It speaks words of advice and words of rebuke or correction. The one who Shemas (hears and obeys) wisdom's voice of advice and correction will live with safety and ease and without fear of harm. Wisdom shows you what is right (advice) and warns you what is wrong (rebuke or correct). We need both. And in fact a loving father would give both. If he sees his child doing something that would harm them, of course he would warn His child and correct them and tell them to Stop. Do you not think your loving Father wants to speak to you also both advice and correction? Do you not think He wants to speak the loving, caring, compassionate words of a loving Father into areas of your life where you are hurting yourselves and others?

The truth be told we do not like correction or advice. By nature, we are stubborn. Try to give a young child a correction or advice and see their response. Adults are no less stubborn and very often resist correction or advice. This is due ultimately to pride. And herein lies the problem of Christian discipleship.

A religious person is happy to attend services and do the duties of religion. But they do not want advice or correction. Yet proverbs tell us to experience safety and ease and live without fear we have to Shema (hear and obey) wisdom's voice of advice and correction.

Interestingly, Jesus is referred to by Paul as the 'power of God and the wisdom of God.'⁵ To listen to obey wisdom's voice then is to hear and obey the teaching of Jesus. In fact, Jesus tells a very famous parable that makes this exact point.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ’

⁵ 'but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ' 1 Corinthians 1:24

Matthew 7:24-27

Notice here that Jesus in his parable indicates that trouble, hardship, difficulty and challenges will come to everyone. One house stands strong and the other fell with a great crash.

Note that the wise man and foolish man both hear the words of Jesus – the words of Wisdom – the words of advice and correction. But only the wise man Shemas – hears and obeys, hears and puts them into practice. The foolish man hears the voice of advice and correction – but does not put them into practice.

Every life will be tested and no one can escape the pressures of life. The only hope is to build our lives on a solid Rock, a solid foundation that withstands the storms of life.

In the parable the sand represents building our lives on the temporal. That which is temporary and does not last forever. The rock represents that which is eternal and unshakable. And what is the Rock?

'For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. '

1 Corinthians 3:11

'and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. '

1 Corinthians 10:4

Let's try and tie this altogether. Proverbs tells us that a life of safety and ease and without fear of harm comes to the person who hears and obeys wisdom's voice of advice and correction. We have discovered Jesus is the wisdom and power of God. To hear wisdom's voice is to hear the words of Jesus. But not only hear Jesus' words but put them into practice. This is what it means to Shema. Hear and obey. And the person who does this is like the wise man who built his house upon a solid rock foundation whose house withstood every rain, wind and storm. The one who hears and obeys Jesus' words is like the wise man, because he hears and obeys the Wise One. He has built his life upon the solid foundation of the Wise one and that Rock, that solid foundation is Jesus himself. Jesus Christ is the one and only firm foundation to build our life upon that is eternal and unshakable.

This is exactly what Bonhoeffer saw was the crying need of the church in Germany. Remember he said:

"One thing was certain: the evil of Hitler could not be defeated with mere religion. He longed to see a church that had an intimate connection with Christ and was dedicated to hearing God's voice and obeying God's commands, come what may, including the shedding of blood."

That's what Bonhoeffer longed to see. He was certain evil could not be defeated by mere religion. And today evil in our own lives and society cannot be defeated with mere religion either. God wants to see His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. What is His kingdom like? Its one of righteousness, joy and peace.⁶ And it comes to earth when his followers live in a close relationship with Jesus, hear his wisdom's voice of advice and correction and put into practice what they hear, no matter what the cost. This is how peace, joy, mercy and justice is brought to the earth, when Jesus' followers live out fully their lives and calling in action.

Bonhoeffer was convinced that a life of faith demanded action in obedience to the call of God.

'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.'

James 1:22

A Christian is called to be active not reactive. A Christian is more concerned about hearing and obeying God's voice through action. And this action in response to the God's call leads to a life of joyful adventure. It does not avoid hardship or pain or suffering but experiences the full joy of deep fulfilment of doing God's will. Metaxas comments on Bonhoeffer's life:

“This was how Bonhoeffer saw what he was doing. He had theologically redefined the Christian life as something active, not reactive. It had nothing to do with avoiding sin or with merely talking or teaching or believing theological notions or principles or rules or tenets. It had everything to do with living one's whole life in obedience to God's call through action. It did not merely require a mind, but a body too. It was God's call to be fully human, to live as human beings obedient to the one who had made us, which was the fulfillment of our destiny. It was not a cramped, compromised, circumspect life, but a life lived in a kind of wild, joyful, full-throated freedom—that was what it was to obey God.”

“Bonhoeffer. Pastor, prophet, martyr, spy.” Eric Metaxas (p. 447). Kindle Edition.

⁶ 'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,' Romans 14:17