

Discovering the Kingdom of God

31 Daily Devotions on the Kingdom of God

By Bill Barker

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Discovering the Kingdom of God Foreword

For most of my pilgrimage, I gave little consideration to the Biblical references, especially in the New Testament, on the Kingdom of God. I thought that when I read about the “Kingdom of Heaven” or the “Kingdom” or the “Kingdom of God,” the meaning was one and the same. That is to say, I simply concluded that all the references had to do either with eternal life for the believer in Jesus, or His second coming in respect to pre or post millennialism. I dare say my thinking was not that far removed from the great majority of Bible readers and students.

In very recent years, I began to ask of myself and others, what was it that Jesus our Lord truly wanted His followers to understand about His call to them? Upon closer inquiry, I started to notice that He spoke more in the four Gospels about the Kingdom of God than any other subject. I was amazed.

His first sermon was on the Kingdom of Heaven being at hand (Matthew 4:17). He prayed to His Father that His Kingdom might come on earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:9-10), and Jesus followed a few verses later by admonishing His people to seek God’s Kingdom and His righteousness more than anything else in life (Matthew 6:32-33).

Over and over I read statements about the Kingdom of God. There are more than 90 references in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and of that number, about 80% have to do with living as the disciples of Jesus on this earth! In other words, if our lives get right with the Lord now, Heaven for the believer will take care of itself. Our task is to live and serve for Jesus everyday while on this earth. That is clearly His call to us.

What a difference it makes to possess a Kingdom perspective for life. God’s Kingdom is greater than any kingdom mankind could ever devise. His work is our work. His plan from Calvary’s Cross to save lost humanity is now our plan. If we love Jesus, it becomes automatic that we are citizens of His Kingdom and obedient to His will.

It is so encouraging to realize that believers all over much of the world are preaching and teaching and writing about the Kingdom of God on earth. It is a movement of God. It has to be. He must be declaring from the Heavens, finally they are getting it! A focus on God’s Kingdom through His Son is the answer to the ills and wickedness that plague us all.

A most insightful writer in these modern times about the Biblical emphasis on the Kingdom of God is Selwyn Hughes of Waverly, England, founder of Crusade for World Revival. In his recent book, Treasure for the Heart, he observes that “any pattern of praying that does not make the Kingdom a priority is not Christian praying” (p. 154). He goes on to write, “One of the sad things about church history is that the church has never really been gripped by the vision of the Kingdom of God. There are notable exceptions, of course, but by and large the church has missed its way in this matter. One theologian points out that when the church drew up its creeds – the Apostle’s, the Athanasian, the Nicene – it mentioned the Kingdom only once in all three of them, and then marginally. The church will never move into the dimension God has planned for it until it puts the Kingdom where Jesus put it in the

Lord’s Prayer – in a place of primary consideration and primary allegiance” (p. 154). In addition, Hughes states that no wonder the church has stumbled from problem to problem when its priorities are not on the Kingdom of God as prioritized by God Himself (p. 155).

Also, Dr. Ken Hemphill has written in his inspiring book, The Prayer of Jesus, that

While God’s kingdom is a coming event, it is also a present reality.

So when we pray, “Your kingdom come,” we are at one moment recognizing the fact that God’s ultimate rule is simply a matter of time, and we are also committing ourselves to participate in seeing it unfold before our eyes. And that is what’s really exciting!

This aspect of the Lord’s Prayer continues to amaze me, not only because I missed the point for so long, but also because I now realize that it places me right on the cutting edge of kingdom living all day, every day.

Again, just as the line between prayer and life begins to vanish through the “praying without ceasing” mentality of the Lord’s Prayer, this kingdom focus dissolves the hard line between sacred and secular. If you take a good look at Jesus’ life, you see that all of it was sacred. Every event and occurrence in His life, no matter how ordinary or offhand, had a kingdom priority to it.

His disciples didn’t always understand this. They would shoo the children away to keep Him on schedule, and hustle the crowds along so they could get some rest. But Jesus saw everything through the lens of the Father’s kingdom. Even with this sense of divine urgency, He never appeared rattled, stressed out, or in a hurry. He simply watched to see where the kingdom was working, and He moved toward it with eyes and arms wide open. And so can we. (pp. 53-54)

Added to the increasing stream of written materials on the Kingdom of God is American missionary Bill Barker’s new book, Discovering the Kingdom of God: 31 Daily Devotions on the Kingdom of God. He has poured himself into a renewed, careful search of the scriptures, and the results of his studies are so insightful and inspiring. I am certain every one who reads the devotionals will be theologically enlightened and spiritually strengthened.

B. Carlisle Driggers, Retired State Executive Director, South Carolina Baptist Convention (1992-2007) January 27, 2007

Discovering the Kingdom of God Acknowledgements

The Bible tells Christians to encourage one another. These devotional thoughts on the kingdom of God would never have been put on paper without the encouragement and support of my wife, Arlene, Debbie McDowell with the South Carolina Baptist Convention, and Teresa Parrett with the Kentucky Baptist Convention. They not only provided me with the encouragement to write out my thoughts as I studied the kingdom of God; but they also edited the material.

I am also indebted to Dr. B. Carlisle Driggers, Executive Director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, for without his passion for the kingdom of God and his personal encouragement as I wrestled through the biblical concepts of God's kingdom, I would never have continued this journey of discovery. A journey from which there is not return. Jesus said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Instead He us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

Discovering the Kingdom of God Introduction

In May 2001, I became the Director of Appalachian Regional Ministry, a partnership ministry of ten Southern Baptist state conventions within the Appalachian region, the North American Mission Board and the Woman's Missionary Union. In the course of visiting with each state convention office and the staff within that convention that I related to, I visited the South Carolina Baptist Convention. In the course of our meeting I was handed a book written by Dr. B. Carlisle Driggers, Executive Director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, "*A Journey of Faith and Hope*," and asked to read it in order to understand the focus of the South Carolina Baptist Convention. The book records the development of Empowering Kingdom Growth as an emphasis in South Carolina.

Soon, traveling across South Carolina, speaking in churches and associations, I discovered a different spirit from what I was experiencing in other Southern Baptist Churches and associations—a spirit of cooperation and a heart for missions. Later in the fall I heard Dr. Driggers speak on the "kingdom of God" where he challenged each one present to read through the New Testament and examine closely each of the references to the kingdom of God. I took the challenge and quickly discovered that there were 139 references to the kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven). As I read each of the references in their context, I wondered how a subject of this magnitude and of such great importance to God could have escaped my attention through Bible College, seminary, and over 30 years of pastoring. Oh, I knew the answer, for I came from an eschatological belief that separated the kingdom of God from the kingdom of heaven and taught the kingdom of God as a future hope, not a present reality. From within that framework I passed off those who spoke of the kingdom of God as being present as either misguided in their eschatology or as a part of the liberal social gospel movement.

Soon after reading through the kingdom references in the New Testament, I began a pilgrimage to discover just what the kingdom of God is and how relevant it is in today's world. Over the next four years I read volumes of books by various evangelical authors—Russell Moore, Tony Evans, John Bright, George E. Ladd, E. Stanley Jones, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Dwight Pentecost, and many others who wrote from different perspectives on the kingdom. A portion of each morning was set aside to pursue this search to understand the kingdom of God. Again and again I was driven back to the Scriptures to search out what God was teaching me through His Word. I found myself praying each morning a simple prayer. A portion of each morning was set aside to pursue this search to understand the kingdom of God. Again and again I was driven back to the Scriptures to search out what God was teaching me through His Word. I found myself praying each morning a simple prayer.

, "Father, I want to understand what You are teaching in Your Word about Your kingdom in today's world. Please allow the Holy Spirit, who wrote Your Word, to open and illuminate my mind to understand Your kingdom."

In time I began to see the kingdom of God as both a present reality and a future hope, as that which is both "at hand" (Matthew 4:17) and that which is to come (2 Timothy 4:1; James 2:5). It was the present kingdom that Jesus often spoke about (Luke 8:1), that he sent the disciples out to preach (Luke 9:2), and that the early church proclaimed (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 28:23, 31). So important was the present reality of the kingdom of God that Luke tells us in Acts 1:3, that Jesus spent His last forty days on earth teaching His disciples about the kingdom of God. While Jesus could have spoken on many matters, apparently He felt that a clear understanding of the kingdom of God surpassed in importance all other subjects. As I repeatedly read the verse, I concluded that if Jesus placed such a high priority on the kingdom of God, then so should I and, more importantly, so should the church, which, while not the kingdom of God, is the visible expression of God's kingdom in the world.

Over time I came to understand that the kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God in this age in the hearts and lives of those who yield themselves to Him. To recognize the kingdom as being present allows Christians to experience the blessings of Christ's reign now as well as anticipate it in the future age. Ignoring the presence of the kingdom in this age robs the Gospels of their emphasis and Jesus of His message (Luke 5:43). The kingdom of God has come in the Person and ministry of Jesus (Matthew 12:28). The mystery of the kingdom is its secret intrusion into history (Matthew 13). To see the kingdom as futuristic deprives it of its influence on the earth today. Perhaps the failure of the modern church in the United States to have the positive influence needed is due to the failure of mainstream evangelical Christianity to teach the present reality of "God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven."

The following devotional thoughts are some of my reflections on the kingdom of God as I continue to study the subject and struggle to understand its truths in today's world and the implication of these truths on Christians in general and my life in particular. As a result of this journey of discovery, I have learned to pray as Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10), and to put into practice the exhortation of Christ to "*seek first the kingdom of God.*"

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Discovering the Kingdom of God

Seek The Kingdom

In the Word: Matthew 6:31-34

Day 1

*"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).*

What is your purpose in life? What is your reason for living? A mother may answer, "It is my children." A businessman might answer, "It is my work." How would you answer the question?

In the first recorded message of Jesus, He "came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" (Mark 1:14-15 NASB). To Jesus the kingdom of God was the very essence of life, so much so that He talked more on the kingdom than any other subject. Within the Gospels we find 139 references by Jesus to the kingdom of God or its equivalent.

Therefore when Jesus says, "seek first the kingdom of God," it is not just a statement or part of a sermon, it is His heartbeat, it is a matter of great importance, it is a life choice. In fact, if you are a true follower of Jesus Christ, it is your life choice, the core purpose of your existence.

E. Stanley Jones writes, "If Jesus made the kingdom of God the center of his message and the center of his endeavor, the greatest need of man, as I see it, is to rediscover the kingdom of God. Man needs nothing so much as he needs something to bring life together into total meaning and total goal. Life for the modern man ... needs something to give total meaning to an otherwise fragmented life." He continues, "He is confused—the most confused and yet the most intelligent person that ever existed. He knows everything about life, except how to live it."¹

Discovering and seeking the kingdom of God is life transforming. It gives real meaning and purpose to living the Christian life. In the sidebar write your definition of the kingdom of God.

Jesus said that when we pray, we are to say, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Prayer: "Father, may Your Kingdom come, may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

My purpose in life is

Day 1

My definition of the Kingdom of God

*"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."
(Luke 4:43)*

*"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."
(Hebrews 12:28)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

What is the Kingdom of God In the Word: Matthew 6:5-13

Day 2

“Pray then like this... Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9,10)

If I am to seek after the kingdom of God, if I am to pray for the kingdom to come, then what is the kingdom of God? Is it a physical kingdom that will be inaugurated with the return of Christ? Or is it a kingdom that is present in the world today, a kingdom in which I am living as a child of God.

In the New Testament two key phrases refer to the same thing: the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. Passages referring to God's kingdom appear 50 times in the Gospel of Matthew with the phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurring 33 times. Mark, Luke and John refer to it as the “kingdom of God.” Both phrases refer to the sphere of God's dominion over those who belong to Him. Thus, the “kingdom of God” is where God reigns.

It began when God himself entered human history as a man (John 1:14) and indicates a present reality and a future hope. Today the kingdom of God is manifested as Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of those who are believers (Luke 17:21). One day the kingdom will be fully realized when Christ returns and all evil in the world is judged and removed (Revelation 20:4-6). In His first Advent, Christ came to earth as a suffering Servant; when He returns He will come as King and Judge to rule victoriously over all the earth. And so we pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

If the kingdom of God today is the reign of Christ in the hearts of believers, then we must give His kingdom our highest priority (Luke 6:46) and live in obedience to His Lordship. E. Stanley Jones writes, “There is a way to live and Jesus and his kingdom are the way, and we have missed the way and hence our present chaos and confusion.”²

Why seek first the kingdom of God? Because Jesus knew that until He rules and reigns in the hearts of believers they will never be truly free, they will never experience true joy and happiness, they will never discover their real purpose in life.

Prayer: “Father, I want to truly discover Your kingdom in our world today. Open my mind to understand Your truths as You teach me.”

What does it mean for Christ to reign in your heart?

Day 2

*Matthew's use of "kingdom of heaven" relates to his Jewish audience and their reluctance to use the name of God. But there is no theological distinction implied between "kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God."
(Life Application Bible Commentary)*

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

See, [it is] there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] and among you [surrounding you]. (Luke 17:21 AMP)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

God's Kingdom Is Here
In the Word: Matthew 3:1-12

Day 3

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2)

The preaching of John the Baptist centered on one message, preparing the hearts of his listeners for the coming Messiah. Since this preparation could only occur through repentance, John called the people to repent, that is to turn away from their sins and turn toward God.

Without apology or hesitation, John preached that the people could not say they believed and then live any way they wanted. To be truly repentant, people must do both. John spoke of repentance as a radical turning from sin that would manifest itself in the fruit of righteousness (Matthew 3:7-8). They had to understand that they were sinners, that sin is wrong, and that they needed to change both their attitude and their conduct.

John's call to repentance was a totally new concept for Jews who considered themselves already "the people of God." In the Old Testament, "repent" means the radical return to God of those who have broken the covenant with him and John used the word this way.

The obvious question then is why did they need this radical repentance? Because the kingdom of heaven (God) is here, it has arrived. This kingdom began when God himself entered human history as a man (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4-7).

The message of John is the message for us today. "Repentance means that we must do an about-face—a 180-degree turn—from the kind of self-centeredness that leads to wrong actions such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality.

A person who stops rebelling and begins following God's way of living prescribed in his Word is a person who has repented and entered the kingdom of God. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin, as John urged. Then God will receive you and help you live the way he wants. Remember that only God can remove sin. He doesn't expect us to clean up our lives before we come to him."³

Prayer: "Jesus, I want to thank you for coming into the world and providing the way for me to become a part of God's Kingdom."

Why do you think repentance is required
in order to enter the Kingdom of God?

Day 3

*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance."
(Matthew 3:7-8)*

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:4-7)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The King Is Here
In the Word: Matthew 4:12-17

Day 4

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

Jews of Jesus' day understood exactly what Jesus meant when he proclaimed "*the time is fulfilled*". The Greek word used for time, *kairos*, refers to a particular time period with its beginning marked by an extremely important event. This placed Jesus' coming in the center of God's plan for revelation and redemption. The Old Testament prophets often spoke of the future kingdom, ruled by a descendant of King David, that would be established on earth and exist for eternity. Thus when Jesus spoke of the "time" and the presence of the kingdom of God, the Jews understood him to mean that the Messiah had come to "fulfill" or inaugurate his long-awaited kingdom. Jesus reassured them that God was in sovereign control. He had begun to act in a new and decisive way. The most critical time had come. The door to God's great future had been flung open.

Of course, this caused great excitement among the people. The problem arose, however, in the misunderstanding of the nature of this kingdom. The kingdom of God began when God entered history as a human being. But the kingdom of God will not be fully realized until all evil in the world has been judged and removed. Christ came to earth first as a suffering Servant; he will come again as King and Judge to rule victoriously over all the earth. The kingdom he inaugurated on earth would not overthrow Roman oppression and bring universal peace immediately. The kingdom of God that began quietly in Palestine was God's rule in people's hearts. The everlasting kingdom would not begin for many years (it has not yet begun), yet the kingdom was as near as people's willingness to make Jesus king over their lives. As Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 NIV). The everlasting kingdom may still be many years away for us, yet it is as near as accepting Jesus' sacrifice for salvation. (Life Application Bible Commentary)⁴

Today, the kingdom of God is the rule and reign of Christ over those who have been born again. Does Christ rule and reign in your life?

Prayer: "Father, today I surrender all that I am, all that I possess, my talents, my time, my life to You. You are my Lord and my King."

Why did Jesus come to earth?

Day 4

"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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."
(Philippians 2:5-11)

"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God In the Word: Isaiah 11:1-9

Day 5

“He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4).

Deeply rooted within the teaching of the Jewish rabbis of Christ's day was the promise of the coming of the kingdom of God. The prophets had declared the kingdom as a day in which men and women would live together in peace, where social problems would be solved and the evil would pass away (Isaiah 2:4; 11:6). They had predicted the coming of the Messiah whose mission would be the re-constituting of the Jewish nation; the re-occupation by them of the land of Palestine; the setting up again of the earthly throne of David; and the exaltation of the people of Israel to the place of supremacy in the world (Daniel 7:13-14).

So intent were they on the physical kingdom of God that they missed the kingdom when it came. Consequently, when Christ came to His own people proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 4:17), but making it known that the kingdom He proclaimed did not correspond with their idea of it; when He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), and taught that his kingdom was of such that a man must be born of the Spirit in order to enter it (John 3:3), then they rejected Him ("received Him not") hated Him, betrayed Him and caused Him to be put to death.

During the twentieth century, conservative Christianity in America became so fixated on the second coming of Christ and the establishment of the earthly kingdom of God that, like the Jewish rabbis of the first century, many missed the kingdom of God in their midst. While the kingdom is future, it is also now present, in our midst, calling for us to live accordingly as citizens of the kingdom under the Lordship of Christ.

When I recognize that I am now in the kingdom, under the Lordship of Christ, then I must also recognize that I have a responsibility to live according to His kingdom values, not the values of another kingdom. I am His, bought with a price, His life.

Prayer: "Father, show me the way to live in your kingdom today."

Describe the last time you heard a sermon on living out the kingdom of God in our world today!

Day 5

“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.”

(Daniel 7:13-14)

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom Is Important In the Word: Acts 1:1-11

Day 6

To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)

A quick glance through the New Testament reveals that the kingdom of God is at the heart of the preaching of Jesus, of John the Baptist, the apostles, and the early church. Following the resurrection, Jesus spent his last forty days on earth teaching the disciples about the kingdom of God. With all that He could have talked about with His disciples— heaven, the future, He chose instead to spend His time talking to them about the kingdom of God.

If Jesus made the kingdom of God the heart of His message and the focus of His endeavor, then the greatest need of humanity is to rediscover the kingdom of God; in fact, I believe that the greatest need of modern Christianity is to rediscover the kingdom of God.

“Today people are in desperate need of something to bring life together into total meaning and purpose. Without meaning and purpose life becomes fragmented as people are pushed and pulled and tempted from all directions. Even the most intelligent person soon becomes confused living a life without meaning and purpose. He knows everything about life, except how to live it.

Modern humanity stands between two worlds, this one and the one not yet born, the one which is to come. He stands there empty, for meaning has dropped out of life. He would stand for anything if it gave him meaning and purpose for living and for dying.”⁵

Into that vacuum steps Jesus saying if you are seeking meaning and purpose in life then “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” That is, yield yourself completely to Me, let me be the Lord of your life today. Jesus is saying, “Follow my precepts, my teaching, my values, and you will find real meaning and purpose in life.”

“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. (Romans 12:1-2 NIV)

Prayer: “Father, today I surrender to Your Lordship over my life.”

If the kingdom of God was at the heart of all Jesus taught, explain why the teaching of the kingdom of God should or should not be important today.

Day 6

*“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”
(Acts 8:12)*

“And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.” (Acts 19:8)

*[Paul] “lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”
(Acts 28:30-31)*

The phrases “the kingdom of God” and “the kingdom heaven” are used 139 times and referred to over 45 more times in the New Testament .

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Defining The Kingdom of God
In the Word: Luke 17:20-21

Day 7

"the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:20-21 (NIV)

Having concluded among themselves that Jesus was not the Messiah, the Pharisees mockingly asked Jesus "when the kingdom of God would come." They believed the Messiah's reign would be immediate, that He would come and overthrow Rome and set up the His Kingdom. However, the kingdom of God that Jesus had already inaugurated was altogether different. It was a kingdom which would manifest itself in the rule of God in men's hearts through faith in Christ.

Paul stated it well in Romans 14:17, "God's kingdom isn't a matter of what you put in your stomach, for goodness' sake. It's what God does with your life as he sets it right, puts it together, and completes it with joy." (The Message)

The kingdom of God was neither confined to a particular geographical location nor visible to human eyes. It would not come with the normal pomp and splendor associated with the arrival of a king. It would come quietly, manifesting itself through the lives of people transformed by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-10), living under the Lordship of Christ (Romans 10:9), for the kingdom today is the reign of God in the hearts and lives of those who yield themselves to Him.

Furthermore, the kingdom of God will come in the future when Christ returns. The New Testament does not suggest that the Old Testament promises of an earthly kingdom were nullified, instead it teaches that the earthly, visible manifestation of the kingdom is yet to come (Revelation 20:1-6). Peter looks to that future day when "there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

So, the kingdom of God is present, already among us (Luke 17:21), and yet Jesus also frequently referred to the kingdom as a future event "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11 also see Matthew 13:41-43).

Since the kingdom of God is now present, we must ask first, are you in the kingdom? That is, have you surrendered to the Lordship of Christ in your life? If so, are you living out the kingdom values and lifestyle? If not, why not?

Prayer: "Father, there is much about your kingdom I do not understand, open my mind to understand and grasp your truth."

Describe the time when you surrendered
your life to the Lordship of Christ.

Day 7

"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Romans 14:17

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

(Ephesians 2:8-10)

"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

(Romans 10:9 NIV)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Power of the Kingdom In the Word: Acts 19:1-20

Day 8

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. (Acts 19:8)

How powerful is the kingdom of God? It is powerful enough to penetrate a society obsessed with the worship of the goddess Diana. It is powerful enough to impact a thriving city. It is powerful enough to turn people from darkness to light, to make them a new creation in Christ.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia and home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the magnificent temple of Diana. It was also an important political, educational, and commercial center in southern Asia Minor. It was a city that placed great value on materialism, sensuality, and the occult. It was a city under the control of Satan.

Into this city, similar to twenty-first century America, came Paul boldly doing his best to make the things of the kingdom of God real and convincing to them. Paul did not come with a self-help program or twelve steps to freedom from your pet sin. He did not come into the city and organize a demonstration against the religious prostitution taking place at the temple of Diana, nor did he take his fight to the local media.

Instead, Paul spent the first three months pointing his listeners to the things related to the kingdom of God. When he could no longer teach in the synagogue, he moved into the school of Tyrannus and for the next two years taught them until “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

So powerful was Paul’s teaching on the kingdom of God that within two years the sinful lifestyle of the city was so impacted that it was affecting the financial income of those who made their living from the “sin business.” During this time churches were founded in Ephesus, Colosse, Hierapolis, and possibly in some of the places mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. A city was changed by the teaching of Paul on the kingdom of God.

What would be the impact of your church on your community or city, if we were to rediscover the things of the kingdom of God?

Prayer: “Father, help us to rediscover Your kingdom and impact our world as Paul impacted his world.”

Describe how the teaching of the kingdom of God would affect your community or city!

Day 8

*“And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.”
(Acts 20:25)*

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17-21)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Entering The Kingdom
In the Word: John 3:1-21

Day 9

“Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3)

The kingdom of God belongs to the present as well as the future and is the rule of God, His reign, His divine sovereignty in action. So, if the kingdom of God is now present, then how does a person enter into the kingdom?

Having observed the life and ministry of Jesus, and filled with questions, a prominent Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus one night seeking to learn more about Him. Nicodemus opened the conversation by complimenting Jesus on being a teacher sent by God (3:2). Imagine his shock when Jesus reversed the flow of discussion from his identity as a God-sent teacher to the crucial question of the destiny of each person and how they must enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said, "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," and "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (3:3,5).

As a rabbi, Nicodemus knew what Jesus meant. He was aware that John the Baptist was baptizing people in water as a symbol of their inward repentance (John 3:23). What flashed across Nicodemus' mind was: "except you are born of all that water baptism signifies, which is repentance, and that which Spirit baptism accomplishes, which is regeneration, you cannot enter the kingdom of God." In a flash, Nicodemus saw very clearly that no one is born again if there is no repentance; and along with repentance comes a work of the Spirit in the heart. These are the nonnegotiables of being born again. Then, as the conversation unfolded Jesus made it clear that the kingdom of God was associated with eternal life and that one must be born from above (born again) in order to enter into the kingdom (John 3:9-16).

Have you entered the kingdom of God? A person can be moral, upright in the community, attend religious services and activities, practice piety, and still not be in the kingdom of God. The only way into the kingdom is by repenting of your sin and acknowledging Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Have you been born again? If so, take a few moments and thank God for your salvation. Ask Him to help you better understand what it means to be in His kingdom today. If you have never been born again, you can be born again by surrendering yourself to Christ and receiving Him as your Savior and Lord (Romans 10:9,13).

Prayer: *“Father, I want to thank you for allowing me to be a part of your kingdom through the new birth.”*

Write about the time when you entered the kingdom of God through the new birth?

Day 9

“From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” (Matthew 4:17)

*“John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized.”
(John 3:23)*

*“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”
(Romans 10:9,13 NIV)*

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
(Ephesians 2:8-9)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Rediscovering the Kingdom—1 In the Word: Acts 28:17-31

Day 10

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (Acts 28:30-31)

The Book of Acts begins and ends with the kingdom of God (1:3; 28:23, 31). From Jerusalem to Samaria (8:12) to cities across Asia Minor and Europe—everywhere the gospel was taken the kingdom of God was preached and local congregations were established. The preaching of the gospel and the kingdom of God went hand in hand. The call to salvation was a call to totally surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Over the centuries, whenever the church has declared the kingdom of God it has advanced, and whenever the church has ceased to declare the kingdom of God it has declined. The last half of the twentieth century in the United States was a period of time when the church focused on the kingdom which was to come and failed to preach that the kingdom of God was present today. The church was so concerned with getting out of this world and leaving it to the antichrist that little attention was given to preparing the next generation of followers and leaders. This harsh reality is reflected in our absence of a powerful witness in today's society.

As a result, while Christians were anxious about getting out of the world, various kinds of personal and national sins emerged. Because it is impossible to maintain values in a vacuum, when Christianity is absent, when the kingdom of God is not preached, sin moves in.

Problems such as abortion, child abuse, divorce, drug use and addiction, alcoholism, sexual perversion and pornography fill the market place. Where a biblical worldview once prevailed, humanism has moved in and the Ten Commandments, prayer, and Bible reading are being removed from public places.

It was a similar world into which the early church went preaching the gospel and declaring the kingdom of God. As the church lived out the kingdom of God they changed their world. When today's church rediscovers the kingdom of God, it will once again impact the world.

Prayer: *“Father, help me to understand what it means to live out the values of your kingdom in our world today.”*

How would a rediscovery of the kingdom of God impact your church?

Day 10

How would a rediscovery of the kingdom of God impact your community?

*“To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”
(Acts 1:3)*

*“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.”
(Acts 8:23)*

*“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”
(Acts 8:12)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Rediscovering the Kingdom—2 In the Word: Luke 4:40-44

Day 11

But he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." (Luke 4:43)

Going to extremes can be dangerous. Partially in reaction to the spiritualizing of the kingdom of God, and partially in reaction to the discovery of the kingdom of God in the eschatological dimension, for many evangelicals over the past fifty years, the kingdom of God became totally futuristic at the expense of ignoring the kingdom as now present. While initially understanding the teachings of Jesus on the kingdom of God as purely eschatological brought about a renewed emphasis on evangelism and missions now present in the United States, the long term impact of neglecting the kingdom of God is now evident. Consider the following:

- It is estimated that there are over 200 million unchurched people in America making the U.S. the third largest unchurched nation following China and India. (NAMB)
- No county in America has a greater percentage of church members today than a decade ago. (Barna and ASCG)
- In the USA we lose 72 churches per week or 10.27 per day. We gain 24 churches per week or 3.42 per day. That's a net loss of 48 churches per week or 6.85 per day. (NAMB)
- North America is the ONLY continent where Christianity is not growing.
- Evangelical churches have spent \$250 billion in the last 50 years and have failed to gain an additional two- percent of the American population. In other words, we aren't even reaching our children! - George Barna in American Profile.
- It is estimated that 53,000 people in the US leave churches every week and never come back. (Harvest America, Vol. 1, No 2, 1994)

Jesus called for His followers to be salt and light, to be like a mustard seed, to be like yeast in this world, to live a lifestyle that reflects the life of Christ within the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:13-16; 13:31, 33). The church in the twenty-first century will only become effective when it rediscovers the kingdom of God in our world today.

Prayer: "Father, again I pray, help me to understand what it means to live out the values of your kingdom in our world today."

In a sentence express how you view
the condition of the church in America
today.

Day 11

This supposed Christian nation leads the world in every category of violent and domestic crime and social decay." - Tom Clegg

*Rise up, O men of God! Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings.*

*Rise up, O men of God! The kingdom tarrys long.
Bring in the day of brotherhood and end the night of wrong.*

*Rise up, O men of God! The church for you doth wait,
Her strength unequal to her task; rise up and make her great!*

*Lift high the cross of Christ! Tread where His feet have trod.
As brothers of the Son of Man, rise up, O men of God!*

(William P. Merrill, 1911)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Rediscovering the Kingdom—3
In the Word: Luke 19:11-27

Day 12

"I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." (Luke 19:26)

The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Accordingly, the kingdom of God is realized and present in one sense, and yet consistent and future in another. This is not a contradiction, but simply the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises and a new covenant has been established, while its final manifestation and consummation lie in the future. Until then we are to be good and faithful servants, living under the Lordship of Christ. It is our failure to be faithful servants in living out the kingdom that has gotten Christianity in America in the predicament it is in today. Again, consider:

- While the US population increased 11.4% or 24,153,000 people over the last 10 years, the combined communicant membership of protestant churches declined 9.5% or 4,498,242 people. (NAMB)
- Half of all churches last year did not add one new member through "conversion growth." (Barna and ASCG)
- According to Barna Research, of the 350,000 churches in the US: 80% are plateaued or declining, 15% are growing because of biological or transfer growth, and 5% are growing because of conversion growth. Other authorities say that only 1% to 2% of the churches in the US are growing.
- Cults are responding to the void. For example, during the reign of Spencer W. Kimball as President, Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the Mormon Church, it nearly doubled...to 5.8 million members with a force of 30,000 short-term missionaries.
- The largest Christian church in the world is in Seoul, S Korea (a Buddhist nation) while the largest Buddhist Temple in the world is in Boulder, CO.
- The second largest Christian church in the world is in Leagers, Nigeria (a Muslim nation) while the largest Muslim training center in the world is in New York City, NY.

Perhaps it is time we rediscover the kingdom of God, its lifestyle and its teaching, and the Christ whose example we are to follow (1 Peter 2:1).

Prayer: "Father, again I pray, help me to understand what it means to live out the values of your kingdom in our world today."

Take time to pray, asking God to give you an understanding of what it means to live in His kingdom.

Day 12

*Living for Jesus, a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me.*

*Living for Jesus Who died in my place, bearing on Calvary my sin and disgrace;
Such love constrains me to answer His call, follow His leading and give Him my all.*

*Living for Jesus, wherever I am, doing each duty in His holy Name;
Willing to suffer affliction and loss, deeming each trial a part of my cross.*

*Living for Jesus through earth's little while, my dearest treasure, the light of His smile;
Seeking the lost ones He died to redeem, bringing the weary to find rest in Him.*

*O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee,
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give Thyself for me.
I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy throne.
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.*

(Thomas O. Chisholm, 1917)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Gospel of the Kingdom
In the Word: Mark 1:14-15

Day 13

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)

The three synoptic gospels record that following the baptism and temptation of Christ, He began His earthly ministry in Galilee proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (NIV).

The English word gospel means "good news." In the New Testament it means the "good tidings" of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through the finished work of Christ. Thus, the message of Jesus "about the kingdom of God was not merely instruction or prophecy or promise; it was the proclamation of good news. It was gospel."⁶

The prophets had promised a time when the good news would be proclaimed that God was visiting his people (Isaiah 40:9-10; 61:1-2) to bring salvation. Luke's gospel records that in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus claimed that this gospel was no longer hope but an event (Luke 4:18). "The time of fulfillment had come." Jesus had been anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. In the proclamation of the gospel, promise had become fulfillment.

"The Kingdom was present not only in deed but also in word."⁷ The dynamic presence of the kingdom of God is found in both the deeds and words of Jesus. He preached the gospel of the kingdom, He demonstrated the kingdom's presence with His authority over demons, sickness, and nature, and He taught that the kingdom was more than a new birth, it was a lifestyle, a transformed life, a whole new way of living (Matthew 5-7).

A rediscovery of the kingdom of God in modern Christianity will bring about a lifestyle so radically different from the world, a value system, a worldview so different from the world that men and women will be drawn to the kingdom of God. The gospel is as much about living today as it is about spending eternity with God.

Prayer: "Father, help me to understand Your kingdom in today's world."

Define the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

Day 13

"Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." (Isaiah 40:9-10)

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn." (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Surrender and the Kingdom
In the Word: Luke 9:57-62

Day 14

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

Life in the kingdom calls for a complete surrender to Jesus as Lord and to His values. Luke records for us an occasion when two men approach Jesus and a third man is invited by Jesus to, "Follow Me." In each case the men were willing to follow Jesus on their terms, but not with total surrender. Jesus is not calling for the men to neglect their families, but He is calling for total surrender if they are going to follow Him. He must be the highest priority in their life.

Modern Christianity has reduced God's total plan for men to simply an acknowledgment of Christ as Savior. The prevailing thought is a person's decision for Christ does not have to be followed by a surrender of their life to Christ, just a commitment. The call is to get people saved, not to develop a kingdom lifestyle.

The dictionary defines *commitment* as the act of binding yourself (intellectually or emotionally) to a course of action, and *surrender* as the act of yielding, or resigning one's person, or the possession of something, into the power of another. While we often speak of commitment, the real issue is surrender.

Jesus preached repentance, Jesus preached surrender to Himself. In Matthew 19:16-26 we read the account of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus and said, "What must I do to have eternal life?" And Jesus said, "Sell all you have," and do what? "Give it to the poor" and "Come follow Me."

What is Jesus saying? The young man said, "I want eternal life." Jesus said, "Yes, that's fine, but we are going to deal with something else first, are you willing to follow me?" He could have asked him anything, instead he gave an arbitrary command, "Sell all, give to the poor." Because He knew that money was the god of this man's life. Jesus said, "Let's deal with the issue, I know that you want eternal life, but are you willing to give up everything, if I ask you?" The Bible says the young man went away sorrowful. Salvation is an exchange of all that I am for all that He is. It's saying, "I won't follow me, I'll follow you."

Prayer: "Father, today I surrender my all completely to You. You are Lord."

What does it mean to totally surrender to Christ?

Day 14

*"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."
(Luke 6:46-49)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

More About Jesus
In the Word: Matthew 11:25-30

Day 15

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:29)

Do you desire to truly know God and His Kingdom? If so, hear the words of Jesus, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him ... learn from me" (Matthew 11:27, 29).

William Barclay writes, "This passage closes with the greatest claim that Jesus ever made, the claim which is the center of the Christian faith, that he alone can reveal God to men. Other men may be sons of God; he is The Son. John put this in a different way, when he tells us that Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:19). What Jesus says is this: "If you want to see what God is like, if you want to see the mind of God, the heart of God, the nature of God, if you want to see God's whole attitude to men--look at me!" It is the Christian conviction that in Jesus Christ alone we see what God is like; and it is also the Christian conviction that Jesus can give that knowledge to anyone who is humble enough and trustful enough to receive it."

Do you desire to truly know God? Do you desire to know more about living in His Kingdom? About living His kind of lifestyle? If so, Jesus promised, "If you will walk with me, if you will work with me, then you will learn from me."

This promise of learning is given to those who are diligent. It is not given to those who are lazy. Those who wear the yoke of Christ will be taught. Those who serve will be trained. Those who labor will learn. Those not interested in working will not learn from Jesus.

While Christ is not physically with us today, He has sent the Holy Spirit to live in everyone that is born again (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Pray today that the Spirit of God, who guides and teaches those who seek to know more about God and His Kingdom (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13), will teach you His truths in the days ahead.

Prayer: "Spirit of God, my Teacher, teach the things of God to me"

Describe what it would take for you to be
more like Jesus?

Day 15

More About Jesus

*More about Jesus, would I know, more of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for me.*

*More about Jesus, let me learn, more of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be, showing the things of Christ to me.*

*More about Jesus, in His word, holding communion with my Lord;
Hearing His voice in every line, making each faithful saying mine.*

*More about Jesus, on His throne, riches in glory all His own;
More of His kingdom's sure increase, more of His coming, Prince of Peace.*

Refrain

*More, more about Jesus, More, more about Jesus;
More of His saving fullness see, More of His love who died for me.*

- Eliza E. Hewitt, 1887

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Learning from Jesus
In the Word: Ephesians 4:17-32

Day 16

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus. Ephesians 4:20-21 (NASB)

In great contrast to the unbelieving Gentiles described in verses 17-19, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that they had been taught and had learned about Christ from himself as well as from other teachers. To know Christ is the greatest knowledge that anyone can have.

That knowledge is the truth and that knowledge opposes what the evil world teaches and applauds. Therefore, what the Ephesians and the other believers were taught should make all the difference in their lifestyles.

To show that the believer is to be radically different from the nonbeliever, Paul describes the new life we have in Christ. In direct contrast to the preceding description of the unregenerate person, Paul describes the new life of the believer by illustrating three truths. He writes:

- believers have *new minds*: "But that isn't what you were taught when you learned about Christ. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught . . . to be renewed in the spirit of your minds."
- believers have *new hearts*: "[You were taught] to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires."
- believers have a *new behavior*: "Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

From darkened minds, hearts, and behavior, to new ones—this is the complete contrast from the old self to the new. Does your life reflect this contrast, the marks of the new life of the believer? Are there evidences of it in your thinking, desires, will, and behavior?

Prayer: "Father, from Christ I want to learn not only what it means to be a believer, but how to live the Christian life."

How is a Christian to be different from a non Christian?

Day 16

Holiness

*Holiness, holiness is what I long for holiness is what I need
Holiness, holiness is what You want from me*

*Faithfulness, faithfulness is what I long for faithfulness is what I need
Faithfulness, faithfulness is what You want from me*

*Brokenness, brokenness is what I long for brokenness is what I need
Brokenness, brokenness is what You want from me.*

*So, take my heart and form it; take my mind and transform it
Take my will and conform it; to Yours, to Yours, oh, Lord*

(By Scott Underwood)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Living in the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Matthew 5:1-12

Day 17

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

On a hillside near Capernaum Jesus spent some time teaching his disciples, and the crowds that followed him, that God required faithful and sincere obedience, not ceremonial religion. In His famous *Sermon on the Mount* Jesus challenged the teachings of the proud and legalistic religious leaders of that day, calling the people back to heartfelt obedience, not just an outward observance of laws and rituals.

Over the centuries since Jesus gave the *Sermon on the Mount* various interpretations have been offered from those who felt that it was an impossible ideal. Some have taught that it was only for Jesus' disciples, others saw it as a mandate for the church to usher in the kingdom of God by means of reforming society, and still others viewed it as laws of the kingdom age yet to come. Thus, by either ignoring the principles Jesus taught or misusing them, the modern church in America has lost its cohesiveness and its effectiveness as salt and light in our world.

When we examine carefully the *Sermon on the Mount* we see that it is "life lived as illustrated in the life of Jesus and in a lesser way in the lives of those shaped and guided by the Kingdom. So this is a not an exhortation to live by the Kingdom, but an exhibition of life lived in and by the Kingdom."⁸

"So this sermon is not written in the subjunctive or the imperative mode. It is in the indicative mode. "How blessed are," not how blessed you should be, or must be, but how blessed are. This is a description of how the universe in the individual and in society works. Furthermore, it is given by the most authoritative Person in that universe—Jesus Christ. In the language of today: 'He is telling it like it is.'"⁹

Kingdom living is not about me, it is about Him. It is learning from Jesus His way of living (Philippians 2:5; 1 John 2:6; John 13:15) and in doing so we truly learn the meaning of "Blessed are you."

Prayer: "Father, since living in heartfelt obedience to You is the way to truly living a blessed life, give me a heartfelt obedience towards you."

Explain what you think it means to have
heartfelt obedience!

Day 17

There is a way to live and Jesus and His kingdom are that way, and we have missed the way and hence our present chaos and confusion.

(E. Stanley Jones)

*"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 2:5)*

*"Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."
(1 John 2:6)*

*"For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."
(John 13:15)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Disciples of the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Luke 14:25-33

Day 18

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27)

As Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem large crowds joined him and from His remarks, many of these casual followers considered themselves his disciples. Perhaps they thought he was the Messiah and wanted to be there when he inaugurated his kingdom or maybe like children they were following Him in hopes of receiving goodies or benefiting from one of His miracles (John 6:26).

Jesus turned around and told them flatly what it meant to truly follow him. They would have to give up everything, even the most treasured relationships with their families. They would have to put Jesus first in their lives. Jesus never adapted His message to majority preferences, but instead always plainly declared the high cost of discipleship. Thus, Jesus not only warned them of the difficulties they would encounter, he also gave each of them the option to rid themselves of any obligation to him (14:33).

Jesus was not a crowd pleaser. Jesus was not a salesman and He did not try to sell Christianity by telling people the benefits they would receive, the wonderful experiences they would have, and the reasons they should follow him. Instead, he told them the costs, the hardships, and the difficulties they would experience, and he encouraged them to carefully evaluate the costs before they followed him.

Besides being willing to love Jesus more than any other and more than life itself, the true disciple must be ready to carry the cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Those listening were well aware of what it meant to "carry the cross." When the Romans led a criminal to his execution site, the criminal would be forced to carry the cross on which he would die. This showed submission to Rome and warned observers that they had better submit too. Jesus gave this teaching to get the crowds to think through their enthusiasm for him. He is encouraging those who were superficial either to go deeper or to turn back. To follow Christ means total submission to him, perhaps even to the point of death. In the kingdom of God there is no place for the casual follower.

Prayer: "Father, having counted the cost, I totally surrender to You."

What does it mean to count the cost before following Christ?

Day 18

*All to Jesus, I surrender; all to Him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.*

*All to Jesus I surrender; humbly at His feet I bow,
Worldly pleasures all forsaken; take me, Jesus, take me now.*

*All to Jesus, I surrender; make me, Savior, wholly Thine;
Let me feel the Holy Spirit, truly know that Thou art mine.*

*All to Jesus, I surrender; Lord, I give myself to Thee;
Fill me with Thy love and power; let Thy blessing fall on me.*

*I surrender all, I surrender all, all to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.
(J.W. Van Deventer)*

"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'" (Luke 9:23)

Read Luke 9:23-27

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Living Out the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Matthew 5:13-16

Day 19

"You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." (Matthew 5:13, 14)

God has an agenda for our lives. In a world where people live segmented, compartmentalized lives because they lack a kingdom world view and families disintegrate because they exist for their own fulfillment rather than for the kingdom, we need to rediscover the kingdom of God and His agenda.

In a world where the church has become divided, ingrown, and unable to transform the culture landscape in any significant way, we need to rediscover the kingdom of God. Tony Evans writes, "Churches are having a limited impact on society because they fail to understand that the goal of the church is not the church itself but the kingdom."¹⁰

Using images that were commonly used by the listeners, Jesus said that kingdom people are to be like salt and light. They are to have a kingdom influence on the world.

Even as salt preserves and brings out the best flavor of food, so believers should affect others positively. If salt has lost its taste, it has no value. Jesus clearly told his disciples that if they wanted to make a difference in the world, they would have to be different from the world. He also tells them that God would hold them accountable to maintain their "saltiness," their usefulness. If we are too much like the world, we are useless. As Christians we should not blend in with everyone else. Jesus tells us, as he told the disciples, that we must be different if we want to make a difference. We dare not allow the world to dilute our effectiveness. If we do, we are of no value to Him.

Then Jesus goes one step further and teaches that even as salt makes a difference in people's food, so light makes a difference in their surroundings. Later He would explain, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Christ's disciples must live for Christ, shining like lights in a dark world, showing clearly what Christ is like. Who could hide a city that is sitting on top of a hill? Lanterns glowing from behind its walls send a light at night that can be seen for miles. Because Jesus is the Light of the World, his followers must reflect his light. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like.

Prayer: "Father, let me be salt and light to all I come in contact with today."

What does it mean to be salt and light
in today's world?

Day 19

The church is so subnormal that if it ever got back to the New Testament normal it would seem to people to be abnormal.
(Vance Havner)

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

(1 Peter 2:9)

"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."

(Ephesians 5:8-10)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Living in the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Ephesians 4:25-32

Day 20

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

When Christian people live by kingdom principles, they exemplify Christ to the world. When they violate kingdom principles, Christ suffers, especially when it relates to our interpersonal relationships within the body of Christ. In His sermon of the final judgment Jesus made a profound statement, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

Thirty-five times in the New Testament we see a recurring word of an action verb followed by a word pattern of "one another." We are told to prefer, accept, greet, encourage, forgive, be patient with, comfort, wait for, honor, and live in harmony with one another (See Romans 12:9-18). Even a casual survey of the New Testament reveals that God places a high priority on the way Christians treat one another. Why? The way we treat other believers is the way we are treating Christ. If we could grasp this truth, it would revolutionize the church, for the way I love you as a brother or sister in Christ is the way I love Christ. The way I treat you as a brother or sister in Christ is the way I am treating Christ (See Acts 9:4-5).

The early church understood this principle and the world said of them, "Behold, how they love one another." While some might say that this is being idealistic, the Bible teaches that this love is a supernatural love that cannot be duplicated by any earthly love. It is a love that has been poured out into the heart of every believer (Romans 5:5) and transcends all other emotions or desires.

In I John 4:19-5:3 we read, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

Prayer: "Father, may I love others as You have loved me."

What would happen if Believers loved one another as Christ love us?

Day 20

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." (Romans 12:9-18)

*"And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"
(Acts 9:4-5)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Christians Personify the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Luke 6:37-42

Day 21

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. (Luke 6:40)

The kingdom of God is to be Christlikeness personified. Christians are to reflect Christ in every aspect of life including lifestyle and relationships. In I Corinthians 10, Paul told his readers that his goal was to seek the good of others, not himself. With this in mind, Paul called upon believers to imitate him as he was imitating Christ (11:1).

The word "Christian" appears three times in the New Testament. Acts 11:26 records that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. This was not a name they adopted themselves, but one given to them by non-Christians and was intended as a negative term. It basically means a "little Christ," or one who patterns his life after that of Jesus Christ. It is synonymous with words such as disciple, saint, and believer. The term Christian marked out the disciples as being, above all the people, the followers, the servants of Christ.

By the time Paul preached to Agrippa in Acts 26:28, the term was in widespread use, at least among those familiar with "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2). Agrippa, somewhat amused, asked Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" The witness of believers had been such that people everywhere knew about Christians, even if they did not know exactly what a Christian was.

Peter exhorts his readers in his first epistle that there is no shame in suffering as a Christian (1 Peter 4:16). He contrasted such suffering to punishment inflicted justly for a crime. Suffering for one's testimony was seen as a reason to praise God, in that the believer was being faithful (2 Timothy 3:12).

In our day the term "Christian" is used as both a noun and an adjective. A person may be said to be a Christian, that they profess to be a believer in Christ, drawing attention to the fact that they personify a follower of Christ in their attitude and actions. The Bible says, "[Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he [Christ] walked" (1 John 2:6). The kingdom of God is to be Christlikeness personified.

Prayer: "Father, I want to live in such a way that others will see Jesus in me."

Why is living a lifestyle that reflects Christ so important?

Day 21

"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV)

"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked." (1 John 2:3-6)

"Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name." (1 Peter 4:16)

Vance Havner, the evangelist, is quoted as saying that what we need are more "Christian Christians." The name "Christian" draws attention in that believers are centered on a Person, Jesus Christ, and that their lives reflect Him.

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Living Out the Kingdom of God
In the Word: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Day 22

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. (1 Corinthians 4:20)

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4, Paul is dealing with some troublemakers who were spreading malicious gossip and false teaching among the Christians in Corinth. In verse 20, Paul says that being a big talker is one thing, but living by God's power is quite another. Some people talk a lot about faith, but that is all it is—talk. They may know all the right words to say, but their lives do not reflect God's power. They can talk the talk, but they cannot walk the walk.

A thorough reading of chapter 4 reveals that these arrogant backsliders talked a lot about their freedom and independence and rights, as do many professing believers today who buy into the world's philosophy and like to adapt to its ways. While they were professing to be citizens of God's kingdom, to have surrendered their lives to Christ, their profession was in words only, it was a false profession. The power of God's kingdom, of His rule in a life, was not seen in their lives. They were not demonstrating love and peace nor the building up of God's family, instead they were doing the very opposite. They were gossiping, spreading rumors, making accusations, disturbing people, causing division, and were about to destroy the church. Therefore, Paul says that he will not flee the problem. Rather, he will deal with it. They no doubt thought they had good arguments for Paul in the event he showed up.

However, Paul would be checking their spiritual power, not their words, the inside not the outside (Luke 11:39-40). God's people are to reflect God's kingdom, His rule and glory, which does not consist in words, but in power. This is a central principle of great importance. Faith that does not result in right living may have many words to support it, but it will have no power. A person's true spiritual character is not determined by the impressiveness of his words but by the power of his life (Matthew 7:21-23).

So, Paul is saying that the kingdom of God is not just fancy talk, it is to be lived. There is a big difference between knowing the right words and living them out. Here, the "kingdom" refers not to the future reign of Christ but to the present reign of God in believers' lives. A person can live only by God's power when he/she has the Holy Spirit within. The Holy Spirit dwells in every true believer (Romans 8:9).

Prayer: "Father, may my life always be lived under your rule."

Why do Christians struggle with the
Lordship of Christ in their life?

Day 22

"And the Lord said to him, 'Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?'"

(Luke 11:39-40)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

(Matthew 7:21-23)

"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." (Romans 8:9).

Discovering the Kingdom of God

My Kingdom or the Kingdom of God
In the Word: 2 Peter 1:3-15

Day 23

For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:11)

Having been rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the only One who provides redemption and the forgiveness of sins, believers live in the tension of the "already" and the "not yet" (Colossians 1:13-14). The teachings of Jesus instruct us that the Kingdom is both a present reality and a future climax. We have "already" tasted of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5) to a degree in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). Yet, we wait for the consummation of the age and the beginning of eternity.

It is into this tension that Peter writes to Christians who were scattered throughout northern Asia Minor to offer to them hope and encouragement in the face of growing persecution and opposition to Christianity. As a distinct minority in a non-Christian world, Peter, in his first letter, urged believers to be holy "as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1:15-16). This meant keeping their focus on Christ, obeying him, and living as citizens of God's "holy nation" (2:9). It would involve submitting to authorities (2:13), respecting others (2:17), doing good (3:9-13; 4:19), sharing the Good News (3:15), keeping a clear conscience (3:16), being disciplined (4:7; 5:8), and being humble (5:1-6).

Now, in his second letter, Peter urges the faithful followers of Christ, to continue to grow in their goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love (1:5-7). Real faith is demonstrated by faithful behavior. Peter knew that believers who are diligent in Christian growth won't backslide or be deceived by false teachers, who were also prevalent.

Today we also live in a non-Christian society, one that is filled with pressures and temptations that threaten to conform us to the world's values and lifestyles. Instead of giving in, we should be "holy," standing out from the crowd because of our love, humility, and discipline—all evidence of our strong commitment to Christ.

Prayer: "Father, may I ever be faithful to live out Your lifestyle in today's world."

Why is living out the lifestyle of the kingdom
of God so difficult in today's world?

Day 23

Take Time To Be Holy

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.
(William D. Longstaff)

"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Workers in the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Colossians 4:7-18

Day 24

These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. (Colossians 4:11)

Writing from a prison cell, Paul closed Colossians by sending personal greetings from himself and others who were serving alongside him to individuals at Colosse. As energetic and well known as Paul was, he did not operate alone. Many men and women served the Lord by helping Paul in his ministry of spreading the gospel.

Three of Paul's fellow workers were Jewish, Mark, Justus, and Aristarchus whom Paul called "fellow workers for the kingdom of God." In this expression of gratitude for his co-workers, Paul gives additional insights into the kingdom of God.

The first insight reveals that it is His (Christ's) Kingdom not my kingdom. In an age when individualism prevails within Christendom, the words of Paul bring us back to the reality that it is not about my kingdom, it is not about my desires, it is not about my church or denomination, but the thing that matters is His kingdom.

Here is Paul under house arrest, yet his mind was on the kingdom of God (Acts 28:30-31). He spoke of the kingdom of God to all who visited him and he wrote letters, commonly called his Prison Epistles, to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians. He also wrote personal letters, such as the one to Philemon. Paul recognized that he was under the authority of Christ (Romans 1:1) and engaged in doing those things that mattered most to Christ, the building up of His kingdom, not Paul's kingdom. Earthly kingdoms perish, what was once a great church closes, denominations fade away, but the kingdom of God endures for all eternity.

In His closing instructions to the disciples Jesus told them to go and make disciples as they preached, baptized, and taught. They were to go under His authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) to the ends of the earth, covering every inch of real estate and sharing the good news of the kingdom of God with everyone. No one was to be excluded, all persons, all people were to be included.

Prayer: "Father, may I be a worker in Your kingdom, sharing the good news of the gospel and teaching others Your kingdom truths."

In what ways are you a worker in
the kingdom of God?

Day 24

Is your church about His kingdom
or someone else's kingdom?

*"He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."
(Acts 28:30-31)*

*"This letter is from Paul, Jesus Christ's slave, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News."
Romans 1:1 (NLT)*

*"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'
(Matthew 28:18-20)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Workers for the Kingdom of God—2
In the Word: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

Day 25

These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. (Colossians 4:11)

Yesterday, we looked at the first insight Paul gave when he spoke of “my fellow workers for the kingdom of God.” In that simple statement he reminded every believer that it is God’s Kingdom not my kingdom that we are called to serve.

The second insight we glean from Paul’s words speak of cooperation. In acknowledging those who worked with him in the kingdom of God, Paul is also acknowledging that kingdom work is not accomplished single-handedly, for we are all to be co-laborers together with Christ. He illustrated this truth in 1 Corinthians 4:5-9, “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”

Working together we can accomplish more than we can working alone. Amish farmers know that two horses working together in harness can pull almost four times what one horse can pull alone, a lesson modern Christianity seems to have forgotten. Just think of what Christians could do if they, empowered by the Holy Spirit, cooperated together.

While each of us has various functions—Paul planted (originally brought the gospel message) and Apollos watered (continued in teaching)—each one was a team member with a common goal. Their goal was the same—to bring people into God’s kingdom and to see them mature in their faith. Now, that’s a kingdom mindset.

Yet, that being said, each servant is still individually responsible for his or her work—they will be rewarded individually, according to their own hard work (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul and the other preachers and teachers of the true gospel message worked together as partners who belonged to God. Thus, their ministry belonged not to them, but to God.

Prayer: “Father, give me a cooperative heart in Your kingdom work.”

How can I best use my spiritual gifts to work with others in the kingdom of God?

Day 25

We Are Called to Be God's People

We are called to be God's people, showing by our lives His grace,
one in heart and one in spirit, sign of hope for all the race.
Let us show how He has changed us, and remade us as His own,
let us share our life together as we shall around His throne.

We are called to be God's servants, working in His world today;
taking His own task upon us, all His sacred words obey.
Let us rise, then, to His summons, dedicate to Him our all,
that we may be faithful servants, quick to answer now His call.

We are called to be God's prophets, speaking for the truth and right,
standing firm for godly justice, bringing evil things to light.
Let us seek the courage needed, our high calling to fulfill,
that the world may know the blessing of the doing of God's will.

(Thomas A. Jackson)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Workers for the Kingdom of God—3
In the Word: Romans 16:1-16

Day 26

These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. (Colossians 4:11)

The third insight we discover is this, the way we treat those who labor in the kingdom of God is of great importance. Paul often closes his letters with words of appreciation to those who labor with him. For example, as he closes out his letter to the Christians in Rome, he acknowledges a long list of people who were his coworkers (Romans 16:1-16).

When we acknowledge those who labor with us in kingdom work, we are not only recognizing their contribution to kingdom work, but we are also expressing appreciation for their labor and unique spiritual giftedness. It's amazing what we can accomplish for God when no one worries about who gets the credit and we allow God to be in control.

Working with others in the kingdom of God was a difficult lesson for Paul to learn. At the start of his second missionary journey, Paul failed to recognize John Mark's spiritual gifts and immaturity, instead he focused on his failures. This focus resulted in a schism between Barnabas and himself (Acts 15:36-41). While we do not read of the schism being mended between these two men, we do read of Paul's later gratitude for Mark when he wrote to Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul, the great missionary, apostle, and preacher had to learn the value of working together to accomplish kingdom work.

Suppose for a moment all the physical parts of a human body get into a quarrel. The hands, the mouth, the teeth, and the tongue are particularly disgruntled. They think, "Why should the stomach get all the gravy while we do all the work?" So, they decide to go on strike and show the stomach how important they are. For a short time everything goes well. Then, the stomach growled and acted up, but they refused to feed him. Soon, the hands nerves noticed that they were losing pep and strength. They could not work. They felt exhausted all the time. As the other parts discussed this development they realized that when all the parts of the body worked together they could accomplish great things for no one member of the body was living off the efforts of the others. All had to work together or all would suffer. It was all for one and one for all. That's the way it is in the kingdom of God (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12).

Prayer: "Father, I thank you for the labor of others in Your kingdom."

List the names of your fellow workers where you serve and give God thanks for each one of them.

Day 26

"But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26)

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

(Romans 12:3-8)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Hindrances to the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Matthew 6:1—7:6

Day 27

*But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.
(Matthew 6:33 AMP)*

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave nine beatitudes that sound the way to victory and followed them with nine hindrances that strike the note of defeat. These hindrances are rooted in the inner division that comes from trying to walk on two sides of the road at the same time or from straddling the fence. They lead to backsliding, which in turn leads to backbiting and conflict within the kingdom of God.

1. You do your beautiful religious acts with divided motives – you give gifts to God, but you also give your gifts to impress others (Matthew 6:1-4).
2. You pray in two directions – to be heard by God and to be overheard by others (6:5-6).
3. You fast with a divided purpose – you do it before God and you do it in hope that others will give you credit for your self-denial (6:16-18).
4. You try to lay up treasures in two directions – on earth and in heaven (6:19-21).
5. You see in two directions – your outlook is divided (6:22-23).
6. You are trying to be loyal in two directions – trying to serve God while obsessed with money or possessions (6:24).
7. You are anxious in two directions – toward what you will eat, drink, or wear and at the same time towards the kingdom of God (6:25-34).
8. You are criticizing in two directions – toward your brother with a rather heavy emphasis and towards yourself rather lightly (7:1-5).
9. You are giving yourself in two directions – giving yourself to God and also giving to that which is unholy (7:6).¹¹

Living out the kingdom of God in today's world calls for singleness of purpose and mind. When we surrender to Christ and His reign (His kingdom), that means alignment with Him. We are no longer to be divided, but in unison with His goals, His purposes, His will. Moreover, He gave us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live out the kingdom life with complete devotion to Him (John 14:26).

Prayer: “Father, may I live my life in total devotion to You.”

How does a divided heart negatively
impact our relationship with Christ?

Day 27

Jesus Calls Me

Jesus calls me, I must follow, Follow Him today
When His tender voice is pleading I must not, cannot delay?

Jesus calls me, I must follow, Follow every hour
Know the blessing of His presence Fullness of His power.

Jesus calls me; I must follow, Follow Him always
When my Savior goes before me, I can never stray

Follow, I will follow Thee, my Lord, Follow every passing day...
My tomorrows are all known to Thee, Thou wilt lead me all the way
(Howard and Margaret Brown)

“If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.” (Mark 3:24-25)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Ethics and the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Matthew 7:24-28

Day 28

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Jesus, in His teachings on the kingdom of God taught that the way we treat other Christians is critical. To receive them is to receive or welcome Him and to reject them is to reject Him, and to reject Him is to reject the Father (Matthew 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). Jesus also taught that to offend one of His children was to offend Him as well (Matthew 18:6), a matter He takes seriously.

Without the guiding principles of the kingdom of God, Biblical ethics soon evolve to situation ethics where our actions are judged within their contexts instead of by Biblical principles. The dictionary defines ethics as the discipline dealing with the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group, it deals with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation.

A careful reading of the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Jesus reveal an expected standard of conduct among Christians that sets them apart from the world and the world's system. When I speak wrongfully of fellow Christians, I speak wrongfully of Christ, when I bully other Christians to get my way, I am bullying Christ, when I offend other Christians, I am offending Christ. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35; see 1 John 4:7-21; Mark 12:30-31).

A Christian leader recently spoke of how he had been involved in changing the direction of his denomination and moving it back to a more Biblical worldview. In the process many leaders were hurt and some destroyed. As he reflected on the process he said, "In returning our denomination back to the Bible I'm not sure we practiced what we preached from the Bible." Then he said, "I'm fearful we practiced situation ethics not Biblical ethics, believing that the end justified the means." "I'm afraid," he concluded, "we have lost God's blessing. We have sinned."

Jesus said that to follow any way other than His way was to build upon the sand, and while for the moment it may stand, when the storms appear, that which is built on humanistic values and principles will collapse.

Prayer: "Father, enable me to love others as You have loved me."

How should Christians practice living out
the kingdom of God?

Day 28

*"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."
(Matthew 10:40)*

*"The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who
rejects me rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:16)*

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever
receives me receives the one who sent me." (John 13:20)*

*"But if you give them a hard time, bullying or taking advantage of their simple trust, you'll
soon wish you hadn't. You'd be better off dropped in the middle of the lake with a
millstone around your neck."
(Matthew 18:6 The Message)*

*"Jesus said, 'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'You shall love
your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
(Mark 12:30-31)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Church and the Kingdom of God
In the Word: Matthew 16:13-20

Day 29

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours. (1 Corinthians 1:2)

What is the relationship of the kingdom of God to the church? Are the kingdom and the church the same?

The Bible teaches that the kingdom is visible only by faith, while the church is the channel of that faith and gives visible definition to the kingdom. The church is the community of the kingdom, but is never the kingdom itself. Christians belong to the kingdom as the kingdom belongs to them, but they are not the kingdom. The kingdom of God is the rule of God and the sphere in which that rule is experienced. It is the totality of persons, who at any given time are submitted to and governed by the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the King. Whereas the church is a society of people.

The kingdom and the church are similar, yet different. When you are born again you enter the realm of God's rule and at that moment you become a part of Christ's church. It is the kingdom that creates the church not the church that creates the kingdom. While the reign of Christ is invisible and takes place in the hearts of believers, it is to be embodied and made visible in the church (2 Corinthians 3:2). The church is the community of the kingdom, but it is never the kingdom itself. The church is the people of God's rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. While entrance into the kingdom means participation in the church, entrance into the church is not necessarily synonymous with the entrance into the kingdom. One can be part of a local church and still not be part of the kingdom of God.

While the Bible never instructs us to preach the church, we are told to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12). When the kingdom is preached, the church is built! If we make the mistake and proclaim the church rather than the kingdom of God, then the church becomes self-serving. It is entrance into the kingdom, not entrance into the church that changes people. It is the kingdom that brings new life to repentant people and creates the church. The church is the fellowship of those who have experienced God's forgiveness and enjoy His reign.

Consequently, there can be no church without the kingdom and there can be no proclamation of that kingdom without the church. The kingdom and the church remain two distinguishable concepts: the rule of God and the fellowship of men.

Prayer: "Father, May Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

How will understanding the kingdom of God help us better understand the church?

Day 29

The Bible does not promise that the church will not be shaken. History records the ebb and flow of the church and its influence on culture. However, the Bible does teach that the kingdom of God is unshakable. In which are you placing your trust?

"You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all." (2 Corinthians 3:2)

"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." (Acts 8:12)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Unshakable Kingdom of God In the Word: Ephesians 1:15-23

Day 30

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. (Ephesians 1:17 NIV)

There is no better plan than the kingdom of God that was inaugurated, illustrated, and given meaning in Jesus Christ. With all the progress we have made in science, technology, and knowledge in general, we have yet to come up with anything that even comes close to equating with the kingdom of God. Governments and religious systems have offered rivalry kingdoms from the social gospel to a works based salvation, from communism to socialism, and they have all failed, for God's kingdom has no equal.

Yet, God's kingdom is not imposed on humanity as a code, for mankind is to develop in freedom as a moral being if he is to accept it as his own. Thus, this kingdom must be hidden in the nature of things and await humanity's discovery and acceptance. The kingdom is revealed in two ways—"wisdom and revelation." Wisdom is humanity's search from below; revelation is God's unfolding from above. It cannot be our wisdom from below alone nor God's revelation from above, alone. It must be a joint unfolding of God's revelation and humanity's discovery.

It is in Jesus Christ that God fully reveals Himself. In Christ we discover that what God has unfolded in nature He is unfolding in Christ. The God of nature and the God of grace are the same God. The laws of our being and the laws of the kingdom of God are the same and this is fully illustrated in the person of Jesus Christ who made himself and the kingdom one (John 1:1, 14).

Can you imagine any better order than one in which the spirit of Christ pervades, guides, and illustrates? It is as we discover and obey the laws of the kingdom of God that we find true freedom. This kingdom is an unshakable kingdom built from the foundations of the world so that it includes our human nature (Romans 1:18-32). God has structured us to be His, and when we find Him and His kingdom we find our homeland, our natural way to live, so that we are supernaturally living in an unshakable kingdom that will prevail.¹²

Prayer: "Father, give me wisdom to better understand your kingdom that I might truly know the true freedom that comes through Christ."

Why does living by kingdom principles give Christians true freedom?

Day 30

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

(John 1:1, 14)

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

(Romans 1:19-23)

Discovering the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is Already Here
In the Word: Luke 10:1-12

Day 31

And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' (Matthew 10:7)

The kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future hope. It is here and is to be proclaimed and lived out (Acts 20:25) and yet Christians are to live in anticipation of the day when the kingdom comes (Matthew 6:10). Jesus preached it as a present reality and sent the disciples out to do the same (Matthew 9:35). Today, we too must go out and begin to think and act as though the kingdom were already here.

If I am to think and act as though the kingdom were already here, then I am to prayerfully consider how I can apply the kingdom spirit and principles to all my relationships as far as it depends on me in my personal thought, life, actions, and habits; to my family life, to my professional or business relationships, to my ethnic and cultural relationships, to my recreational relationships, and to my church relationships.

I cannot change everybody but I can change myself and my relationships as far as they depend on me. In each of these I can say, "As far as I am concerned the kingdom is already here. In the light of it being already here, how do I think and act? I am certain of one thing about that kingdom, and the kingdom is the kingdom of love for everybody, everywhere, for I am a disciple to the kingdom of God, under its guidance, control and unfolding sovereignty (See 1 John 4; John 13:34-35).

I have a destiny, I am a seed of the new order. Jesus said, "the good seed is the children of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:38). I am sown in this particular place to be the interpretation, meaning, and message of the new order. I know the seed and the soil affinities, so that all the resources of the kingdom are at my disposal. Accordingly, I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). I am in the kingdom, I have a total Gospel, for man's total need, for the total world. I ought to be happy—I am! So I pray, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Prayer: "Father, may I live out Your kingdom in this world while eagerly awaiting the coming of Your kingdom."

How can I live out the kingdom of God
in today's world?

Day 31

*"And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again."
(Acts 20:25)*

*"Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven."
(Matthew 6:10)*

*"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."
(Matthew 9:35)*

*"I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency]."
(Philippians 4:13 AMP)*

Discovering the Kingdom of God

Endnotes

1. Jones, E. Stanley, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person*. McNett Press, Bellingham, Washington, 1995. p. 11.
2. *Ibid.* p. 36
3. Adapted from *Life Application Bible Commentary, Matthew 3:2. Matthew: Life Application Bible Commentary*. Editors: Bruce B. Barton, Mark Fackler, Linda K. Taylor, David R. Veerman. Series Editor: Grant Osborne. Editor: Philip Comfort. Tyndale House, 1996. WORDsearch 7.0.
4. Taken from the *Life Application Bible Commentary, Mark 1:14-15. Mark: Life Application Bible Commentary*. Editors: Bruce B. Barton, Mark Fackler, Linda K. Taylor, David R. Veerman, Neil Wilson. Series Editor: Grant Osborne. Editor: Philip Comfort. Tyndale House, 1996. WORDsearch 7.0.
5. Jones, Adapted from p. 11
6. Ladd, George Eldon, *The Presence of the Future*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1974. p. 164-165.
7. *Ibid.* p. 166
8. Jones, p. 154
9. Jones, (Adapted from p. 154)
10. Evans, Tony, *The Kingdom Agenda*. Word Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee, 1999. p. xiii.
11. Jones, adapted from pp. 183-184.
12. Jones, adapted from pp. 289-290