

The
Kingdom *Journey*



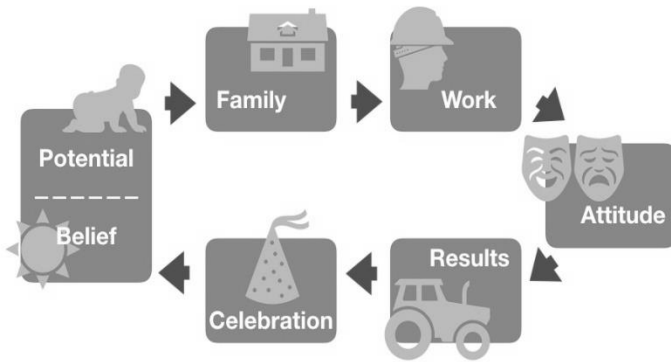
Jeb Airey

The Kingdom Journey

The Cycle of Next Steps for
Growing and Victorious Faith

The Kingdom Journey

The Complete Growth Cycle



The supernatural is the natural not yet understood.

Elbert Hubbard

Acknowledgement

For many years I have said that I wanted to write a book. I was encouraged by the people around me to produce such a work, but I procrastinated. Topics and stories came and went. Now, I have finally completed my first work. I owe a tremendous debt to those who encouraged me, particularly my family and friends.

I owe an enormous debt to Tony Robbins. It was his teaching on what he calls The Success Cycle that initially allowed me to see the human cycle within the Kingdom of God. When I saw it, all of the thoughts I had came together.

Jeb Airey

Introduction

For nearly 3 decades I have actively been pondering the Kingdom of God.

Until recently I felt very much like the joke about the blind men trying to describe an elephant to each other. One, grabbing the tail, claimed the elephant was thin like a hairy snake. Another running into the enormous side of the beast described it as a wrinkled, but a warm wall. Finally, the third proclaimed them all wrong. Grabbing the elephant's leg he observed the elephant as a medium sized tree.

Like those blind men, I knew I was missing the big picture when it came to describing the Kingdom.

Then in October 2017, at 52 years of age, I had a massive, life threatening heart attack. My doctor assured me that my problem was related to stress and not my diet or exercise. He told me bluntly that if I did not change my lifestyle I would be back on his operating table in as little as 5 years.

As the Lead Pastor of a local church, this threw me into a troubled spot. In John 10:10, I knew Jesus had promised his

followers “a rich and satisfying life” (NLT). If I was stressed out to the point of causing a clog in my widowmaker artery, how could I claim to be living rich and satisfied? Obviously, I had missed something very important!

This question led me to 8 months of learning-seeking to understand the Kingdom of God and how I was misapplying it to my life.

Then, in June 2018, flying into Mexico on a short-term missionary trip, an image came to my mind. I took out my writing pad and sketched a crude drawing of circles and arrows. This is the more refined version. I have come to call this the Kingdom Journey. It represents how we grow in God’s Kingdom.

Suddenly, everything I had been learning seemed to fall into place. I felt that I had an idea of how all of the pieces fit together.

It was like the blind man had moved about the elephant enough to get an idea of the general shape of the animal.

In this book, am not claiming to present a “perfect” representation of the Kingdom, but a way to better understand its pieces as a blurry whole. It helped me, and I hope it will help you.

Jeb Airey

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Part 1



Setting the Scene

Chapter 1



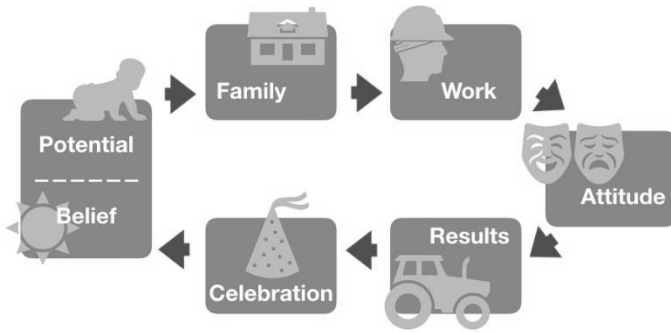
The Overview

Don't compromise yourself. You are all you've got.

Janis Joplin

The Kingdom Growth Cycle

The Overview



In September 2018, my daughter Jordan is scheduled to deliver her first child and my first grandchild. The anticipation for the entire family is remarkable.

Months before the child is actually born her husband, Tyler and I have already constructed her bed. The room has been painted and decorated. Clothes and toys have been purchased. This is just for starters.

A name, Rose, has been selected. Weekly we receive a text that explains a child's development in its mother's womb. For example this week, she had grown to the size of a cabbage.

Almost daily updates are given about how she moves and sleeps and how she loves to stand on her mother's bladder!

We just can't get enough and this child has not yet been born. What is it about the birth of a child that gets us so excited? Potential. There is no limit to a child's potential. A child represents the hope for the future and hopefully one that is brighter and better. In the child, we see endless possibilities.

Little Rose may develop the cure for cancer, heart disease, or Alzheimer's. Perhaps she will invent an anti-gravitation engine

that will let her grandfather fly!

Wouldn't that be fun? The child is untainted by the world and its corruption and that represents a purity and an innocence we have lost.

What then is the first thing we do with that child? We put that child with a loving family.

I remember when my wife, Deanna and I had our first child. As we drove away from the hospital, I thought the doctors and nurses must be crazy for letting us take this baby home. We had no idea what we are doing.

It's true, children do not come with manuals. We find out later why. Most parents are so motivated to care properly for their newborn they take absolutely no chances. Love is the ultimate motivator. Parents go from understanding little to being virtual experts on their child quickly.

And, that knowledge is constantly evolving with the child. For this reason, we do not choose to have our infants raised by the government. We know that the result would not be our child at all. A caring, loving family is needed to raise a child.

Then as we watch the child, something begins to happen. The child begins to work. Without understanding the language of its parents it instinctively begins to press the bounds of its ability. Though no one is able to tell it or show it how, the baby stretches and wants to turn itself over to the other side.

We see the child try again and again. We see this adorable look of determination in its eye. And, it will get frustrated when it does not quite get there. This child has an attitude and the attitude is, “I can do it.”

Of course, a healthy child’s work is rewarded. It gets results from its labor.

Then, we go crazy. We celebrate. We call our friends. We post on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. We compare our child to other children of a similar age that are not turning over yet. We think how much smarter and stronger our child is in comparison to others.

All in good fun, of course! Knowing nothing of the language, but simply listening to the excitement in our voice, this informs the child. Our glee tells the infant that it is important. It can give. It can love. We are happy and the child is pleased because he or she is the one who made it so. Thus the child learns things about its environment, its caretakers and itself. This directly impacts what the child believes about its world.

This is not about religion. It’s not a philosophical theory. The child knows nothing of that. This is about what the child understands to be true in reality. This, in turn, increases the child’s potential.

The cycle is now complete. The child will then, in turn, sit up, crawl, and walk. With each new development, the cycle repeats.

Potential > Family > Work > Attitude > Results > Celebration > Belief > Potential, etc.

Now you may ask, why all of the talk of babies?

The Kingdom Journey

When I studied the Kingdom of God, one thing kept bothering me. Jesus told his¹ (please see my footnote on pronouns) followers that they would have to become like a little child to enter his kingdom (Matthew 18:3). Then I thought when was Jesus ever like a little child?

The scriptures do not record Jesus as running, jumping, and playing. Maybe he did, but there is no record of it. Likewise, nothing tells us he enjoyed playing with toys or pulling little girl's pigtails.

Neither was Jesus naive like a child. He carried a wisdom that confounded the people around him.

Jesus did not require someone to hold his hand when he crossed the bustling streets of Jerusalem. Instead, even as a young man, he was able to take care of himself. Certainly, when

¹ Although many Christian authors choose to capitalize the pronoun "he" in reference to Jesus, I have decided not to do so. I believe the lower case "h" is more honoring as it emphasizes the sacrifice of his incarnation. I am following the convention of the vast majority of English Bible translations in doing this.

confronted and accused Jesus held his own and more. He was not intimidated or frightened like a child and was no man's doormat.

Yet, in John 3, Jesus did hold an entire conversation with a teacher of the Law, explaining to him that he needed to be "born again" to see the Kingdom.² At first, this teacher, a respected Jew named Nicodemus, took Jesus words to mean a physical rebirth.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed
Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back
into his mother's womb and be born again?"
John 3:3 (NLT)

Jesus then clarified that this was a spiritual rebirth. Apparently, even a teacher of the Law needed to be reborn as a spiritual child. Sadly, for many years I was as confused as Nicodemus.

I now understand that Jesus was telling the teacher Nicodemus that he needed to go back to the very beginning. Back before there was language. Back before there was reading and study. Back to the most primal understanding that we can have about ourselves and the world around us. He needed to go to his first truth. Nicodemus missed what we miss.

To begin again in God requires a spiritual rebirth. Nicodemus missed the call that is embedded by God into every loving parent's heart from first time that they hold their baby.

² John 3:3, 7.

It is not in a manual we take home from the hospital. There is no need for anything written on paper. This code is written on our hearts by God Himself. I call this Kingdom Growth Cycle, “The Kingdom Journey.”

Potential > Family > Work > Attitude > Results > Celebration > Belief > Potential, etc.

As I studied the Kingdom of God and the 100 plus passages in the New Testament related to it, I realized that everything about the Kingdom hit these seven concepts. One teaching would cover three or four. Another teaching would cover a different group. Then, for the first time, I truly understood what the Bible meant when I read,

“This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”
Hebrews 10:16 (NLT)

Since Jesus’ Kingdom was to be worldwide it had to cross cultures to be understood and followed. This was the reason the Romans converted so quickly to what they originally considered to be a Jewish sect. The Kingdom being preached was a Kingdom they already understood, at their mother’s knee. It was bred into them.

“You won’t be able to say, ‘Here it is!’ or ‘It’s over there!’ For the Kingdom of God is already among you.”
Luke 17:21 (NLT)

We look for it but Jesus says it has been with us all along.
Potential > Family > Work > Attitude > Results > Celebration >
Belief > Potential, etc.

In our world, the cycle begins to disappear as a child ages. Then, the cycle sadly stops around age four, but we are always seeking to return to it.

This is why a child in a playground will look at a complete stranger and call out, “Hey Miss! Watch me swing. I can go really high.” It’s why we become workaholics, bloated drunks and everything in between the two. We are seeking our father’s and mother’s approval or rebelling against our inability to have it.

We want to do something with our lives and hear the celebration, again.

Jesus told Nicodemus to do what we all naturally want to happen. We all want to go back to that simple cycle, basking in the approval of our family, and believing in our own potential.

Not surprisingly and as only God could offer, the Kingdom is what makes that possible.

So, here is the Good News Jesus says, Be born again. Go back to the beginning. Believe in me and God will make a way for you to remove all the corruption, all the pain, all the hurt and all the disappointments of your life. Believe the Good News and see every ounce of your potential returned to you-the same

potential you had as a newborn baby. Except for this time, with God at your side, nothing will be impossible for you! All of this is available for you, but only inside the Kingdom.

Will you now receive the Kingdom? Will you accept Jesus' invitation?

Next Steps

Often when someone is saved, they ask, "What's next?" We tell them about water baptism, bring a friend, giving, reading in their Bible and serving. For the new believer, everything except baptism is structured fairly loosely. Few churches give the kind of personal support a person needs at this stage.

You should look at each element in the Kingdom Journey as a cycle of linked next steps. Repeated enough, you will create a flywheel effect in your life and find a momentum for growing and living that will keep the freshness of your faith.

In Part 2, I will explain my take on each of the elements of the Kingdom as I understand them. First, there are a couple of other considerations we need to lay a healthy foundation.

Discussion Questions

1. How many children or grandchildren do you have?
2. Why do you think we love babies so much?
3. Why do we put children with families rather than the government?
4. Why do you think Jesus used the phrase “born again” to describe entry into the Kingdom of God?
5. Look at Hebrews 10:16. How have you observed God’s law in your heart and mind?
6. Seven elements of the Kingdom were presented. Which of the seven spoke the most to you?
7. In Matthew 18:1-4 Jesus told us that the greatest in the Kingdom were like little children. Why do you think he said that?
8. How does humility fit into the idea of the seven elements of the Kingdom Journey.

Next Steps for You

1. Think about the goodness of God. He sewed His Kingdom and how it works into your very being. How magnificent He is! His wonders never cease!
2. Dedicate yourself to understand the Kingdom and the Kingdom Journey more.
3. Consider any challenges you may have to this process. Have you been taught something that does not line up with what you are reading here? How will you resolve that conflict?
4. Consider how you will remember to keep the Kingdom Journey cycling in your life after you have completed this book.

Chapter 2



Repent!

In those days John the Baptist came to the Judean wilderness and began preaching. His message was, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

John the Baptist
Matthew 3:1-2 (NLT)

In mid-2018, my son, Jacob, called his mother and me from his place of work in California. We put his sister Jordan and her husband Tyler on speakerphone.

Jacob: I ended up taking a late lunch break and thought I would give you guys a call.

Deanna: You're on speakerphone with Tyler, Jordan, your dad and me!

Jacob: Great! I hope you guys can hear me okay, I am standing in a stairwell. All of my usual places to make a private phone call were already being used by others. It's kind of funny. Someone actually painted, "You S*ck" on the wall above the stairs.

All: [Laughter]

Deanna: Send me a picture of that!

The conversation went roughly 20 more minutes and then Jacob went back to work. A few minutes later, my son-in-law, Tyler received a text from Deanna's mother. It read, "I just received a text from Jacob with a picture that says, 'You S*ck'"

on it and I don't know what it means." Again, we all got a good laugh from that.

Meaning to text several of us the graffito he had discovered in the stairwell, Jacob accidentally included his grandmother in a group text.

Speaking later to Deanna's mother, she said, "All I could think of was all of the mistakes I have made texting." She thought it was just as funny as we did.

So, is that what repentance is? Not laughing at an indiscriminate put-down, but the put-down itself. Is the requirement for repentance accepting God saying, "You s*ck so you had better turn yourself around!"?

The only reason that I bring it up is because that is generally how the concept of repentance is explained in sermons. Sure, pastors don't generally say, "You S*ck" but the blanket sentiment is there.

The question is, "Is repentance a statement about me or about what I am doing?"

The Greek word used by John the Baptist and then by Jesus is transliterated as *metanoéō*. There can be no doubt what this word means. *Metanoéō* is the combination of two words. '*Noéō*' has to do with the mind. '*Meta*' is the direction of an object. *Metanoéō* then is the change of direction of the mind. It is to withdraw from one course of action and change to another.

Metanoéō or ‘Repent’ is a change of mind that is significant enough to warrant a permanent change in direction. Repentance is then about changing what I am convinced to be true. If we change that, we change our direction. So, it is not about me, it is about what I believe to represent truth.

We follow our truth.

Repentance vs. Sorrow

Repentance is different than sorrow. Sorrow does not necessitate a change. We can express sorrow without the added feeling that a change on our part is required.

For example, someone might say, “I’m sorry I forgot to pick you up from work.” Though this expresses a genuine feeling of remorse it falls short of the concept of repentance. Repentance would require a change of some kind.

‘Sorrow,’ in this instance, sees the mistake as an accident that is unlikely to reoccur so no change in behavior is required.

“I’m sorry I spilled my coffee on your shirt.” “I’m sorry I forgot to return your book today.” “I’m sorry I was speeding, officer.” More than likely we are not sorry we were speeding, but rather that we were caught speeding. Our friend may forget our book again tomorrow and if our desk mate is prone to clumsiness, we may want to keep a change of clothes at the

office.

This is where repentance lays: It is right between, “You S*ck” and “I’m sorry.”

As previously noted, *Metanoéō* or ‘Repent’ is a change of mind that is significant enough to warrant a permanent change in direction. If the direction change is not permanent this is a sign that we may have ‘repented’ for the wrong reasons. True repentance requires a level of revelation to the point in which previous actions are abhorred.

The great orator and preacher Charles Spurgeon once said, “Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.”³

“Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God. Don’t just say to each other, ‘We’re safe, for we are descendants of Abraham.’ That means nothing, for I tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these very stones.”

Luke 3:8 (NLT)

‘Repent’ is not about the person, but rather the direction the mind is leading the person.

³ Spurgeon, Charles. Quote found at <https://theologue.wordpress.com/2014/12/02/charles-spurgeon-on-repentance/> [Accessed September 1, 2018].

To Whom Repentance Applies

The words most closely associated with repentance, are ‘sin’ and its derivatives.

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.
1 Timothy 1:15 (KJV)

It is common for the word “sinner” to be associated with those who have not found Jesus as their Savior. However, this is not what the Apostle Paul is saying about himself. He is making sure that his protege Timothy understands the application of the word “sinner” in a different context. That context is the way that it applies to all Christians.

This is why he tells Timothy that it is worthy of “all acceptation.” At this same passage the NIV updates the English to “full acceptance.” Paul is teaching Timothy, so Timothy will pass this essential truth along to “all.”

What is this truth?

Paul wrote to Timothy using the Greek language. The Greek word translated “sinner” here is transliterated as *hamartōlos*. Here is the entry for ‘sinner’ in Thayer’s Greek Lexicon.

a. not free from sin. **In this sense all men are sinners**; as, Matthew 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:8,

32; Luke 13:2; Luke 18:13; Romans 3:7; Romans 5:(8),19; **1 Timothy 1:15**; Hebrews 7:26.⁴

At 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul is expressing to us that the term “sinner” can apply to those inside the faith in a healthy way.

We all know too well that becoming a Christian does not make us perfect. Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For, the Bible tells us in James chapter 3 that if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way.⁵ The conclusion of James chapter 3, though, is to say, “but you can’t.”

In Luke 11:4, Jesus taught his disciples to pray this way, “and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us” didn’t he? If we sin, that by some definition makes us sinners. Not the kind that of sinner that is unsaved, but the kind who recognizes that God still has a work to do in them. Look at this commentary entry for 1 Timothy 1:15.

Of whom I am chief.--The intense humility of the strange, beautiful character of the Gentile Apostle prompted this bitter expression. St. Paul, it has been well said, knew his own sins by experience, and every other man’s per

⁴ THAYER’S GREEK LEXICON, Electronic Database. Accessed August 15, 2018. www. Blueletterbible.com. Bold emphasis belongs to the author.

⁵ James 3:2 (NLT).

speculationem.⁶

Many do not want to understand themselves as a “sinner.” I understand the heart behind this. For the sincere, it is out of a genuine desire to receive God’s new identity through salvation. This person wishes to be born again in God and with none of his or her previous baggage. That is indeed an honorable goal.

Paul counters that argument by declaring “I am chief” of sinners.

He teaches us that by understanding that we are still sinners (after salvation), we can greatly appreciate not only what Jesus did for us in the past, but what he is still doing.

Jesus loved me while I was a sinner before salvation and he still loves me as an imperfect sinner after salvation. My status as a sinner has nothing to do with God’s love for me or my salvation.

To understand myself as a sinner is to express the “intense humility” of Paul.⁷ This keeps me from creating an “us versus them” mentality. I maintain my love for the unsaved. They become people I befriend, rather than people I avoid. I understand why they do what they do. I do not become aloof.

Here is my last thought on this matter. We often forget that

⁶ Ellicott, C. J. 1. (1896). *A New Testament commentary for English readers*. London: Cassell.

⁷ *ibid*.

there are two types of sins related to us. First is the sin of commission. These are represented by the wrong things that we do. This is what we most identify as sin. It includes adultery, theft, drunkenness, lying, gluttony, murder, cheating, and stealing.

However, there is another category of sin that is more prevalent than the previous. This is the sin of omission. Whereas the sin of commission is about what we have done wrong, the sin of omission is about what we have failed to do right.

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.⁸

God speaks and we do not listen. Through His Word, He gives us instruction and we ignore it. We are too old, too young and too busy. The result is missed opportunities to love. That too is a sin.

We all sin and are all certainly sinners, but the idea does not have to be seen as negative. It can instead be further proof of our absolute dependence on God in our daily lives. It can be a celebration of the infinite sacrifice of Christ on the cross and his love for us. It can be a reminder that when we say “sinners” we are, in some way, speaking of ourselves.

⁸ James 4:17.

What Repentance Does

Repentance is not about hindering a person by chaining him or her to a set of rules, but about freeing a person to move in a superior direction. For this reason, repentance is often thought of as after-wisdom.

In the past, the church has certainly been guilty of using public “repentance” as an opportunity to judge. The joy found in the forgiveness from God has unfortunately been offset by guilt and shame heaped on a “sinner” by the church.

This is a sad commentary on the state of the church. The repentant person’s heart is soft toward God and eager to discover how he or she can serve the Lord better. Repentance is the response of the Good News and hope of a better direction.

Repenting just makes sense.

The First Word of the Gospel

As a priority, “repentance” is the first word of the Gospel or Good News. Notice that repentance is associated with something good and for a very good reason.

From then on Jesus began to preach,
“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the
Kingdom of Heaven is near.”
Matthew 4:17 (NLT)

Repentance always signals the arrival of the Kingdom! What could be a better reason than that for changing direction?

Repentance gets us into the Kingdom. It is the change of heart that opens the on-ramp to God's rule on Earth. Repentance is also the gut check as to why the Kingdom is not working in me.

Repentance is the investigation we perform on ourselves when we feel stagnant or lost.

For many years, I have practiced repentance in this form. When I am quiet I ask God to show me things throughout the day I could have done better. The moments when I rushed by someone in need. The anger I displayed. The frustration I felt. When I lied.

From there I ask God to help me to understand why I did what I did or why I failed to act correctly. This leads me to an important moment with God of repentance and growth.

As a daily habit for many years, I can gratefully testify, what a great gift repentance is!

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of repentance?
2. Do you tend to apply it to a person or to what a person does? Why is this distinction important?
3. What is the difference between repentance and sorrow?
4. Do you think that we have redefined repentance as sorrow?
5. Do you think of yourself as a sinner?
6. What are the dangers of a Christian no longer wanting to be called a sinner?
7. Why do you think repentance is the first word of the Kingdom of God?
8. Have you ever repented of your sins and received Jesus as your Savior?
9. Have you ever repented of anything and then

struggled to “change your direction”? Do you agree with the author that this is caused when the truth behind the action has not changed?

10. How can we change truths that seem to be locked into our minds?

Next Steps for You

1. Remind yourself of what repentance is. Let your mind consider this first word of the gospel.
2. When was the last time you said you were sorry to anyone?
3. When was the last time you said you were sorry to God?
4. When was the last time you truly repented to God of something that you did?
5. Have you allowed yourself to substitute sorrow for repentance?
6. Sit quietly and give God permission to work through your memories. Let Him show you sin in your life. Repent, truly repent, and let God wash you clean.

Chapter 3



The Optional Chapter

For the first several years after my conversion to the Christian faith in 1986, I kept track of my Bible reading in the back of my favorite Bible. In early 1988, I completed my reading of the New Testament for the 20th time. As I closed the leather binding and sat back in my chair, suddenly a conversation formulated in my mind.

It was a true aha moment. It scared me a little. The word “Bible” means little books. These little books are not necessarily in a chronological order. They jump from semi-related story to semi-related history to semi-related music to semi-related teaching. It is like a giant jigsaw puzzle where every piece is beautiful enough to gaze upon for a lifetime. Theologians spend hundreds of hours to explain two or three pieces.

Now, I had this 30,000 foot view of why we are here and I was not sure what to do with it. So, I did nothing with it.

Then, ten years later while attending seminary for a master’s degree in theology, Dr. Wykoff gave us a challenging assignment. We had to give a presentation on the topic “Why God Made Humans.” This was something he did every time he taught this particular class.

I knew this was the opportunity for which I had been waiting 10 years.

After several other students had made their presentations, it was finally my turn. In the safety of the educational environment, I shared the conversation below. After I was done to my surprise, Dr. Wykoff looked at me and said, “I think that is exactly why we are all here.”

It was an awkward moment because several other students still had to give their reports. I leaned back in my chair and pondered it all.

The conversation below is not found in the Bible. It probably never happened. It is fictional, but interesting.

An Ordinary Day In Heaven

It was an ordinary day in heaven, which meant it was anything but ordinary. Everything about the place was an enigma. It was both familiar and constantly changing. It was safe and explosive. It was beautiful and dangerous.

In the center of this evolution of space, thick and fierce lightning bolts flashed around the throne of God in impossible combinations of chaos and order. Fiery angelic beings seamlessly wove themselves through these flashes with ease, as though they were somehow friends. Beyond the beings and the

bolts, various dimensions of reality curved and twisted to create and then destroy. At each bend deafening claps of thunder rolled like the violent crashing of waves against the shore in a gale force storm.

Emanating from the throne was a severe brightness. It does not seem right to call it light. It created a warmth though it was like looking into the corona of a thousand suns.

It was a randomness of movement in beautiful patterns. There, in the center of what cannot be further described, was God. Other beings were coming and going in blurred appearances and exits. How they arrived and how they left was as much a mystery as was who they were and why they were there.

Among those coming and going, one entered and immediately stood apart. It was pure beauty and aromatic light. He approached the throne of God, like the others, but then something happened.

Everything went into slow motion. The place of God's rule adapted itself to this visitor in a way it had not done for the others. Something strange was happening. All of Heaven immediately noticed.

The Omnipotent One who lives forever spoke. "Say the words that are within you." "You know my words." "Speak them so they may be written in the Book." "Very well, write! For I will speak, and I will speak against you." The gravity of the

moment was not lost. No created being had ever spoken against or even questioned The One. The opposer continued.

“You give life and then take it. What being dares challenge You? What value is free will that cannot be expressed? You are served because Your awesome power is observed. If we were truly free none would choose You. None would serve You. We only stay and serve because Your awesome judgment is swift. You believe these surround You because of love, but it is not. It is fear. If they would be promised even a time without Your Hand, all would flee.”

The beings of Heaven listened, but no sound was made. Most believed this unprecedented and weak rebellion would be short-lived and the challenger, crushed. However, that majority did not realize a strong minority hoped for a different result.

The King of All began. “Be, light!” With that two word sentence, a universe began to be formed. “Man will be made in Our image. He will know of Us, but not directly experience The Throne. We will separate Our Place from his sight for all his days. He will not know the immediate punishment of My Hand. Indeed all beings are released from the fear of My immediate wrath. For a time, times and a half time, you and those that follow you will do as you please.

By this you will understand, some will choose Me because I loved them first. Others will not. The ones that find peace, hope, and joy in My Son will enjoy My Appearance forever. Those

that choose to serve themselves, thereby refusing My Savior, will be punished for their own sins.

Judgment will come for all and punishment for some.” The Opposer then turned to all of Heaven. I have set all of you free. I have made myself as God. I have exalted myself. I have given you a choice. I am the one to follow. I am the one who grants you freedom.

The Ancient of Days remained unchanged. This choice was always available and always real. No one is forced or has ever been forced to be at my side. If you wish to go, this is your option.

With this, The Opposer and one-third of all Heaven departed. Their mission now clear: They would prove The Thief correct! They would convince God’s creation to reject the True One and instead busy themselves with their own concerns.

The two-thirds that stayed were disappointed, but they understood something deeper. It was, in fact, the reason why they stayed. They stayed because they knew none of this surprised the All-Knowing One. He foresaw the battle that would now rage for our souls.

The Point is...

Who knows if my “Simple Day In Heaven” is anything close to

what happened? The details do not matter (remember, I said the chapter was optional). What matters is that our time on Earth is both limited and of great value. We have a few days to make a difference and then our opportunity is gone forever.

Most of us may never be world changers, but we are all called to be game changers. We may not influence nations or even cities, but we can change the lives of the people around us. We may be small, but we are not insignificant. We belong to something bigger.

When we push, mountains move, because God has His hand on each of us and together we represent the Kingdom of God on Earth.

This pleases God.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever wondered why God made humans?
2. How would you explain our existence?
3. Why is God loving and kind toward us?
4. Why did God make us where we cannot see Him?
Would it not be easier for people to become Christians if they could see God?
5. How well does the author's fictional story explain why humans exist?
6. If something like this actually happened, what does it explain?
7. What does the author's fictional story have to do with Jesus asking us to pray that God's Kingdom would "come"?
8. What judgment do you think waits for the Opposer?
9. What reward would be for those that follow God's

Son?

10. What kind of celebration would you anticipate when this age is finished?

Next Steps for You

1. Consider the epic battle that the Bible describes between all Christians and Satan.
2. Think through passages that you know that describe Christians as soldiers.
3. Put on music or pick up a musical instrument you play. Sing a worship song that describes our fight as Christians.
4. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. Imagine God placing each piece of armor on you. What does the armor look like? What emblem would you place on your shield?
5. In your imagination, pick up each piece of armor and consider its purpose.
6. See yourself standing with the people of God and ready to fight.
7. Making up a tune, aloud or in your mind, sing through Psalm 144.

8. Declare yourself a warrior for God.

Chapter 4



Competing Kingdoms and the Gospel

The word “Kingdom” can be broken into two obvious parts: “king” + “dom.” “Dom” is a suffix that is placed at the end of many English words to convey the state (the statute or judgment) to which it is attached. Thus, “freedom” is the “state of being free.” It is the “reign” or “rule” of freedom.

So, “Kingdom” is the “dominion” or “reign” of a king. When you hear the word “Gospel” or “Good News” it is the telling of the arrival of God’s Kingdom. This is the reason the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, are referred to as “The Gospels.” They contain the “Gospel.”

You may ask, “Why are there four if they contain the same information?” This is because they offer four different points of view to four different audiences. Remember that this “Gospel” is for all nations. Different people groups think differently. So, God made sure there was a variety of “telling” that would contain the same message, but used different methods of communication.

Matthew wants to tell us all about how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. This Gospel is for the Jews who believe in the Old Testament and the religious skeptics of today.

Mark was writing to the Romans. These are people who appreciate action. So, Mark skipped everything about the birth of Jesus and moved right into his amazing life. Mark uses the word “immediately” a lot. It is for people who love action. Mark also uses the word “and” a whopping 1300 times. Its best application is for business people and entrepreneurs.

Luke was a doctor and focused his attention toward the Greeks. The Greeks were fascinated with the human body and the mind. They were truth seekers who loved to ponder new ideas. Luke did not disappoint. On every page he communicates that happiness is found in seeking the truth about God’s son. Know a seeker? This Gospel is for them. The first three Gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels because they all share stories with each other.

John’s gospel is different. Instead of focusing on movement and parables, he rather gives us a lot of emotion. He tells us about the love of God for us and His Son. He speaks to us about the human-side of interaction with Jesus. He is not into titles, but rather substance. In this way, this Gospel is for anyone looking for something deeper from life.

The Gospel as a whole tells us of the arrival of God’s Son to declare the arrival of His Father’s Kingdom. Through the Son’s death on the cross the penalty of our sins would be paid for all who would exchange their lives for his.

Jesus in explaining “the Kingdom of God is near” or, as in

Matthew's Gospel, "The Kingdom of Heaven is near" was declaring the arrival of the state of God's heavenly reign on Earth. In other words, a transformation of rule is occurring. This is no small declaration. Every person would be bracing for a new overlord. Every leader's expectation would be a one-level demotion. Every king would lose his sovereignty. Every queen her place of rule.

With this understanding it is easy to see why the common people were so appreciative of Jesus and why the leaders were so threatened. The general public had nothing to lose. The leaders had everything to lose.

Even more worrisome, this kingdom's rule was not going to be limited to a religious belief system, a political philosophy or even a national boundary. No wonder his own religious leaders conspired against him. No wonder the sworn enemies of the Jews and the Romans became cozy bedfellows when it came to his demise. His existence threatened their ambitions.

For all of his good, for all of his miracles, for all of the hope he brought, he was too dangerous to be left alive. He had to be stopped. So, his own disciple sold him for silver. His own people turned him over to their captors. Then, he bore our pain, suffered and died.

As we study the Kingdom of God, it is important to realize that the people that crucified Jesus did not do it because he offered to die for our sins. He died because his message of a new

system of rule was too radical and threatened to turn the world upside down.

Interestingly, it not only threatened the earthly kingdoms of Rome and the Sanhedrin, but also the Kingdom of Satan.

Ultimately, Jesus came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). This was not welcomed and Satan sought to move Jesus from his mission on several recorded occasions.

For example in Luke 4, Jesus underwent a severe series of temptations under conditions of starvation and physical exhaustion (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13) at the hands of Satan. He confused Jesus’ right-hand man, Peter (Later in Luke 22, Satan entered Jesus’ apostle Judas Iscariot (Luke 22:3) to sell Jesus out. This was all done with the idea of stopping God’s Kingdom from infringing on his.

Behind the scenes, Satan, as the master puppeteer, was actively orchestrating the demise of God’s Son.

That plan backfired completely. The Bible records Satan’s regret at the failure of his plan. He was so devastated that, as a ruler of this world, he would have not allowed Jesus to be crucified had he understood the mystery of his Kingdom come.⁹

It is sad to consider how happily Christians accept what Jesus’ death on the cross does for them, without truly understanding the reasons behind it.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Bearing our sin on the cross was the only way we could enter the Kingdom of God while on Earth.

To bring the Kingdom of God to the Earth, Jesus first had to defeat the kingdoms that were already here. That was done on the cross and proven by the resurrection. Now what? The Kingdom is here on earth, but not “as it is in heaven.” For that to happen it must continue to “come” and expand.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever visited a country or lived under the rule of a monarch?
2. How is being ruled by a king or queen different than living in a democracy and having a President?
3. Jesus clearly preferred the term Kingdom to reference God's territory. Why do you think he did?
4. Why do you think Satan allowed Jesus to be killed in the first place?
5. Why do you think he was so distraught at Christ's resurrection? What did that mean for him?
6. How often do you think the average Christian thinks about expanding God's Kingdom?
7. How can any human expand His Kingdom?
8. What does it mean to expand God's Kingdom?
9. When you think Bible passages on the Kingdom of

God, which ones come in mind to you?

10. Do you know your part in expanding God's Kingdom?

Next Steps for You

1. The Gospel may be bigger to you than you once thought it was. Have you really, actually given your life to Christ? If you are not sure, read the chapter of this book called, The Meaning of Life.
2. Think about all the things happening in your life. Imagine for a moment that you suddenly received an inheritance of \$50 million. How would that change your life? How would that help you with your problems?
3. The Gospel declares that the coming of God's Kingdom is like finding a precious stone worth many times what you paid for it. Make the connection. How does the Gospel change your life?
4. Jesus did not only declare the Gospel through his words. His life carried the message as well. How is your life carrying the Gospel?
5. As far as the events in your own life and the events of the world, how important is the Gospel?
6. Slowly pray through Matthew 6:9-13. What is God

speaking to you through the words?

Part 2



How The Kingdom Comes

Chapter 5



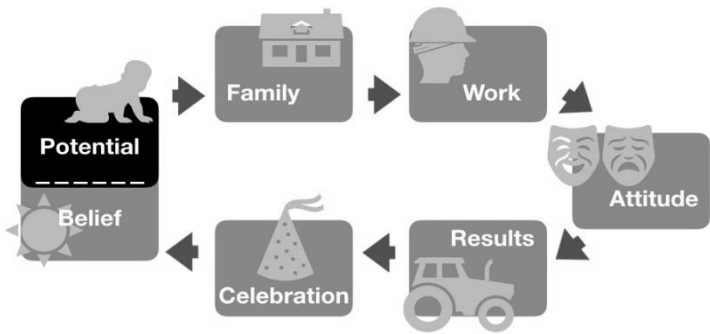
Potential

The kingdom of God is depending on you to make the atmosphere more conducive for the purpose of prospering the Kingdom of God.

Sunday Adelaja
The Mountain of Ignorance

The Kingdom Journey

Step 1: Potential



Buzz. Buzz. It was about 2 a.m. when my cell phone began to vibrate on the edge of the bedside table. The name on the display let me know this was something important. “Leon, what’s going on?”

“I’m down at the church and you need to get here.” When I arrived, what I saw made me do a force blink. Somehow, a human pilot had managed to drive his pickup truck through the double set of glass doors at the rear of the sanctuary building and lodge it into the corner of the men’s restroom wall in the hall.

In my mind, to accomplish this goal he would have had to have been traveling at a velocity great enough to jump two curbs and become airborne as he entered the building. In other words, he never slowed because he never saw the building.

Upon closer examination, the police pointed out that exact fact. There were no breaking skid marks on the floor. The engine of the vehicle had actually moved several inches forward on the frame upon impact. And, the crash sent such a tremor through the interior concrete walls of the church that doors that had not been touched were flung from their hinges and ripped into pieces.

The church's interior motion detectors told the rest of the story. The driver, obviously dazed, got out of his truck and instead of exiting the building through the hole he had just placed in it, wandered down the long hallways until he circled the entire building. Then, he examined his truck and exited the building.

As you probably guessed, this is not the story of a prodigal son making the desperate decision to return to God and the church of his youth. Instead, this was the sad commentary of a man who drank until he was nearly blind at a local bar. He then became a danger to himself and others by becoming completely lost and ended up driving down the private road that led to the rear of our church.

When the police found him later hiding in the trees of the property, he was still wasted, but remarkably, not seriously injured. As the wrecker was pulling his truck out of the back of the church, the police popped him into the back of a patrol car. The whole event was surreal. I remember standing there at 3 a.m. and seeing him peer through the window of the rear passenger side door. He looked amazed.

The officer lowered her window to speak to me. He just keeps saying, 'Is that my truck?' over and over. He's drunk. I'll send you the report.

As she drove away an emotion struck me that I was not expecting. I wonder what happened to him? Who wants to end

up going to jail for driving drunk into a church?

Of course, I never found out the answer to my questions. Instead, it led me to another one. What Happened? If we consider the limitless potential of a human infant and then plot its results, the gap is often alarming. The pressure of this world, instead of leading us to a more progressive and productive future, often leaves us shattered, alone, and even despairing of life.

In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Hotline saw its calls double from the period of 2014-2017.¹⁰ According to the USA article that reported the findings, this corresponds with an increase in suicide rates in our country.

If “it’s the economy, stupid” then why is this true? Currently, most economic indicators are trending in an upward fashion.

It seems there is a downside to all of the potential with which we enter this world. Falling short can cause serious depression. The human soul has a great capacity to understand where it is versus where it should be. It can feel an overwhelming sense of disappointment at its course of life.

Many of us are not so different from the drunk driver who

¹⁰ Pitofsky, M. (2018). *'Like a busy emergency room': Calls to suicide crisis centers double since 2014*. Usatoday.com. Available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/07/18/suicide-hotlines-uptick-calls-suicide-rates-rise/698556002/> [Accessed 20 July 2018].

blasted through the rear of our church. We are lost and we know it, our coping mechanisms doing more to blur our vision than help it, yet something drives us forward. We reason that we might crash into something, but it is better to feel something—even pain—than sitting still and watching our lives evaporate.

The More Things Change The More They Stay The Same

Imagine what it might have been like to live in the world as we began this common era. In the Roman Empire, the population of the average town would have been made up of 25% slaves.¹¹ That means 1 in 4 of the people you would see were slaves.

Most of these slaves were of European descent and would have looked similar to their Roman captors. Many were well educated. The only real difference between them and their owners was that they had the unfortunate luck to have lived in a city in the crosshairs of the Roman legions. These slaves were ex-merchants, ex-soldiers, ex-doctors, and ex-teachers.

They were free people, whose lives were turned upside down at the might of a Roman general. Wholesale slave traders made

¹¹ En.wikipedia.org. *Slavery in ancient Rome*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Slavery_in_ancient_Rome&oldid=852417308 [Accessed 2 Aug. 2018]. Across the vast empire the slave population was a whopping 10%!

their living following the army and would purchase entire towns of people who had survived the onslaught and surrendered to Rome. These were men, women, and children.

Now, being sold naked on an auction block, their only asset was the 6-month guarantee offered by their slave trader.

This was the Pax Romana in which John the Baptist first preached the Kingdom of God. This is the conquered world Jesus inspired by giving it the opportunity to be born again. No wonder their message resounded through the countryside. Perhaps at first, one might dismiss his message as one of the many itinerant magicians who traveled the country. However, as the rumors persisted, you would have to wonder, “Could this really be possible?”

Could I really be free? Could I begin again?

Your Potential Restored

There was nothing Jesus was more jazzed about than the Kingdom of God. For Jesus, the Kingdom was everything. It was his life and the point of his life’s work. Everything he did was done with the idea of bringing or expanding it. From the beginning of his public ministry, he heralded its arrival.

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed

every kind of disease and illness.
Matthew 4:23 (NLT)

If he taught, he taught the Kingdom. If he healed, he healed to bring the Kingdom. If he multiplied fish and bread, walked on water, or told a parable, it was all about announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God or to further someone's understanding of it.¹²

Even after Jesus' resurrection, he is still focused on the Kingdom of God and wanted to make sure his disciples are as well.¹³

This is interesting. The only formal sit down teaching Jesus ever gives is on prayer. We call it the "Lord's Prayer" but it was actually for the disciples. In this example prayer for his disciples, Jesus teaches them to pray, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The prayer to 'bring the kingdom' ranks a higher priority than "give us this day our daily bread".¹⁴

Even the thief on the cross understood enough about Jesus to ask him to "remember me when you come into your Kingdom."¹⁵

Was there hope even for a man hours from a cruel death for

¹² Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 9:35; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1, etc.

¹³ Acts 1:3.

¹⁴ Matthew 6:10-11.

¹⁵ Luke 23:42.

a crime he did commit?

If there was hope for him, there is hope for you. Jesus was so excited about announcing God's Kingdom because it encircled everyone with possibility and renewed potential. Everyone could be restored in greater and greater measure.

Potential is the first element of the Kingdom Journey. It is the first "next step" to see God's Kingdom "come" in your life and the lives of the people around you.

Christianity Is Everywhere. Where Is This Hope?

When Jesus came to the earth, his greatest criticisms were leveled against the religious leaders of the time. They taught the law, yet perverted it. They lead the feast rituals for profit instead of for meaning. They preached the prophecies and missed the Coming One.

How different are we from them? If we were being honest, how much do we know or understand about the Kingdom of God?

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else,
and live righteously, and he will give you
everything you need."

Matthew 6:33 (NLT)

Jesus words should be as sobering as slamming your vehicle into a building for the average Christian.

How little of our lives are consumed with understanding the Kingdom better!

Like many of you, I have heard this Matthew 6:33 preached on a dozen times or more. Generally, we are told this means that if we have a list of 10 things to do we should put the Kingdom of God as first on the list. For this reason, we should pray and read a devotional in our Bible at the beginning of our day.

Viewed a tiny bit more closely, though, we know this to be incorrect. Jesus is not telling us to make the Kingdom first on a list of ten things, but first in everything on the list! Only this level of commitment to the Kingdom will allow all that is lost be restored. Christianity does not work as an add-on to our busy schedule. Following Christ must become our lives. We must replace our original schedule with a new schedule.

Everything in our lives must bow the knee to Christ. To regain our potential, to find our life requires us to turn from our pursuits and go in a completely different direction (repenting)

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Your best life is out there and only a true pursuit of

the Kingdom can restore it to you. Start right now. This is what it means to be born again. This is who you are. This is your new identity in Christ.

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12 (NLT)

Notice that those who believe, those who are Christians, have been given a right. In other words, just because you have become a Christian does not mean that everything is going to happen automatically for you.

You live in the USA. As is the case in all democracies you have been given the right to vote. Whether you exercise this right or not, is up to you. It is encouraged, but not required. It is a privilege of freedom.

Your new identity as God's child is like voting. It is a right. To enjoy the benefits of your renewed potential, you will have to exercise this freedom. You will need to grow in God. If you chose not to do that, you may find yourself in Heaven, but you will not have experienced the full potential of the wonderful life a child of God is promised. Things will stay pretty much the same for you as they were before you decided to follow Christ.

This is why so many Christians appear to live exactly as their counterparts who are not children of God. This is sad, but if they do not choose to exercise their right, they do not have to do

so.

Dear friends, even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation.

Hebrews 6:9 (NLT)

I agree with the writer of the Book of Hebrews. I believe better things are in store for you. Let the Kingdom be the reason you are living and then you will truly live. You will really understand what it means to explore life as a child of God. This is great adventure God has for you.

Discussion Questions

1. As we grow, we find that a lot of our dreams were really fantasies and we have no interest in them as adults. What did you dream of becoming when you were a child?
2. As you consider the people of Jesus day, how desperate do you think they were to hear a message of a do-over where all of their potential could be restored?
3. How have things changed today? Do you think the message of society has led people to the point where they feel satisfied with their lives?
4. If we have progressed so well, why are so many people discouraged?
5. Has the the allure of the Good News lost any of its luster?
6. How is the message of “potential restored” different than how you have heard “being born again” explained

in the past?

7. Make this personal. Do you know anyone who could use this explanation regarding their potential? Could you use it?

8. What in your life needs to be restored? (Keep in mind this is a cycle and several revolutions may be necessary to heal all of your wounds.)

9. Are you certain that you are a born again Christian? (The last chapter of this book will lead you to salvation.)

10. With whom will you share what you learned?

Next Steps for You

1. Read Psalm 18:29. David is using the power of music and positive visualization to encourage himself in the Lord.
2. Think about the way you speak of yourself. Do you allow yourself to use words like “loser,” “idiot,” or “stupid”? How do you think this fits into the Kingdom of God? Does God want you to speak of yourself this way?
3. Let your mind reflect on the times when you have given yourself a negative confession like “clumsy” or “dumb.”
4. Think of the times when you have done this to others.
5. When we speak poorly of ourselves and others we downgrade their value or potential. Jesus taught us to judge actions rather than people. When tempted to downgrade yourself of others replace your normal words with something positive like “fascinating.”

6. Go back through your memories and as you remember the negative words replace them with something more positive. For example in your memory you may have tripped and said, “Clumsy!” In your memory, instead hear yourself say, “Fascinating!”

7. Read Luke 1:37. Imagine whatever is impossible in your life as possible with God. Take the steps God leads you to take.

Chapter 6



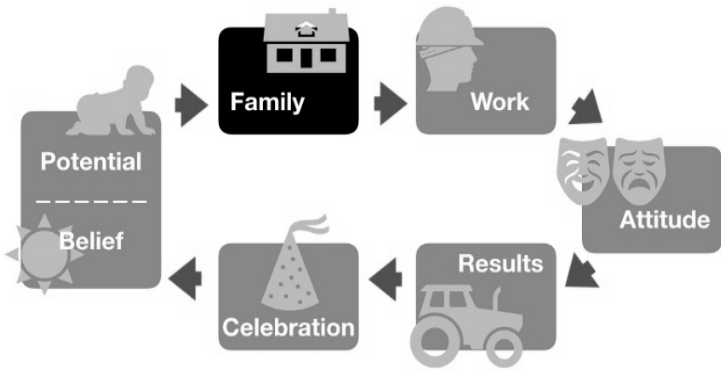
Family

*Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe,
call it a family: Whatever you call it, whoever
you are, you need one.*

Jane Howard

The Kingdom Journey

Step 2: Family



God does not want us to worry about pleasing Him, not because we should not please Him, but because He is so easy to please. He is not the eternally disappointed one. He is proud of you.

Think about this: God loved us before we were saved. How much more must He love us now that we are His? Why would you think He is mad at you all the time?

These thoughts are crucial as we consider the second element of the Kingdom Journey: “Family.”

We are still following the natural progression of what happens when a child is born.

I was present in the delivery room for both of my children. They are two years apart. Since my wife required a cesarean section procedure for both births, I dutifully watched the doctor scrub his hands. I counted every gauze used in the operation to make sure nothing was left behind in my wife’s abdomen. The amazing miracle of life was happening right in front of me!

As soon as each child was born, it was brought to its mother. Because Deanna was having surgery, the children were then brought to me and I held both of them. Even though the moment

was brief it is extremely important. It is called “Imprinting.” In these first few seconds of life a vital connection is made between the child and parent.

This is how important family is. The parents are there from the beginning and oversee each and every step of development.

This is the picture of what God had in mind for His church. As in the case of a newborn child, to be born again is to allow God to “imprint” Himself on you.

Let’s Sing a Hymn

My family was the type that was in church every Sunday. We sat on the back row of a Presbyterian church in a tiny southern town. There were five children and we always sat in the same, ascending order. My father sat nearest the center aisle, my mother next to him and then me as the baby of the family. From there it went up in age: Sister, sister, brother, brother.

There we were, a beautiful family taking up an entire row, sitting near other families also in rows and never once do I recall a sermon on the family. This was typical for the time. Most sermons, until recently, were not-so-shockingly about God. I realize all sermons are at least theoretically about God, but what I am saying is that most sermons were about God in the proper sense. They would describe His character or an attribute in some

way.

Now, the study of “God proper” takes a back seat to something called “application.” People have heard enough about God’s character and would like to develop a little of their own. Now we want to know how to apply the “principles of the Scriptures” to real life (imagine that!). As a result we now talk a lot about things like, “how to deal with jerks at work,” “how to create a budget,” and of course, “how to have a better family.”

Go to any church’s website and there will likely be a series on the family.

Here is the problem: There are no examples of a highly functional family in the Bible. There are very few examples of one biological family member supporting another. Instead, the stories are filled with deception, betrayal, and pride.

The truth is, the Bible lesson to be learned about our biological family is generally, “If you suffer from the abuse of your parents or siblings you can rise above it.”

I’m a little tongue-in-cheek here, but before you dismiss that as crass, let your minds go through the examples of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David (on many levels). How about the fact that the first murder ever committed was between brothers in the first family? How about the fact that for many prominent Bible characters we know nothing about their family except perhaps their parent’s names? Most did not achieve notoriety because of family support but despite its absence.

Talk about a challenge. Try being a pastor looking for examples of a good family in Scripture. The only way to do this is to take small snippets from larger stories or to appeal to general comments.

With all this negative talk, you might be asking yourself, why then is family in the Kingdom Journey? The answer is pragmatic. Despite the recorded dysfunction he experienced, (or perhaps, better, because of it) Jesus used family to describe the Kingdom of God.

Turning to The Lord's Prayer, notice how Jesus begins with, "Our." The word "our" was very apparent to me when I was growing up in a household of five children. With that many kids running around, you never forget that you are not the only one of your kind. There are others. And, although you should feel free to say, "My Father" you are doing so knowing that there are other offspring.

Jesus began his prayer this way because he wanted us to know how essential the family relationship is to see the "Kingdom come." So, right off the bat, at the forefront of our interaction with God, Jesus teaches us to see ourselves as a part of something bigger. Though we may claim God individually, we should do so being hypersensitive to the knowledge we are part of a larger tribe. He is mine and yours. We are His. He is "Our Father." We are in the Kingdom as a collective, as the children of God.

How sad it is, then, that so many Christians have chosen to abandon weekly attendance at the church of their un-choosing. I understand the reasons so well. But, truthfully, most of these “reasons” breakdown into excuses.

“We moved and can’t find a church we like.” There are 400,000 churches in North America. You’re being too picky.

“I work on Sunday.” Find a church that has an alternative church service that fits your schedule. Or, find another job.

“Sunday is the only day I have for fun.” That lack of self-awareness and gratitude is appalling. “I can have church at home.” The word “church” means people gathered for a purpose. Stop being selfish and participate.

“I don’t have any money to give.” Giving is not the same as paying dues. Wake up. Create a budget. Live within your means and become a contributing member of the family of God.

“I’m looking for the perfect church.” If you find it the moment you walk in the door it will no longer be perfect.

“I was hurt at my last church.” This one requires a little more discussion. Not to be insensitive, but everyone gets

hurt at church. Sure, it is to varying degrees. Some of the hurt is reprehensible, like when altar boys are molested. Fortunately, that is extremely unusual. Most of the hurt that I know of is when:

- Someone said something crude or rude;
- Someone sat in your in your chair or pew;
- The music was too loud;
- The temperature was too hot or cold;
- They won't let you sing or play on stage;
- They will not let you start a ministry;
- They will not let you teach on a certain subject;
- The pastor did not notice you missed a few weeks at church;
- No one came to see you in the hospital;
- No one said "Hi" to you or someone did not speak to you; or,
- You volunteered and no one said, "Thank you."

In my tenure of pastoring, these are the common "hurts" of the local church. Nowhere does the Bible list these as legitimate reasons to be out of church. That doesn't mean the hurt isn't real. It means that within you there is a strength to get past these obstacles and overcome them. It is essential that you take you

place in Christ's Body, the local church.

The church isn't perfect and, by the way, that is the point. Listen, I know better than most that church people and pastors can do unspeakable things and I am not trying to make light of that. However, I am trying to get you to see where perhaps you have been manipulated. Is it reasonable to blame 2.2 billion Christians for what a few people did? There are 400,000 churches in the US. How many of those would you punish with your absence for what was done?

Let me ask you a question. Suppose you went to a stylist and received a poor cut. Does that mean you don't get your hair cut again? What if you go to a pizza parlor and the pie is not that good, do you quit pizza. No. You try a different restaurant. That is it.

So, why is it that when we have a bad experience at one church we want to abandon the entire concept? You can try to sell that excuse to your friends and they might buy it, but God will not. Church, and by that I mean, a local little 'c' church is too important for that.

It is the hands and feet of Christ. It is the light in the darkness. While we can have limited success alone, the Kingdom is designed to work as a group, large or small. We are adopted into the family of God (Ephesians 1:5) with the Spirit of Adoption (Roman 8:15). As adoptees, we have the right to become the children of God (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-16, 19;

Galatians 3:26; 1 John 3:1-2).

As hard as you try, you cannot escape the imagery of the church as a close family in the New Testament.

As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.
Ephesians 5:31-32 (NLT)

Because of the names of the many of the books of the New Testament, the importance of the church is often lost on the average American Christian. For example, the book of Romans was written to a local church in the city of Rome. The same could be said for the books Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Thessalonians. These are all books written to real local churches in real cities.

Other books were written to leaders of churches like Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Even, the book of Revelation was written to seven local churches of Asia Minor.

Friends, I am sorry-not-sorry to burst your bubble, but the New Testament was written to the local church and disseminated from there to the larger Church, not the other way around. The importance of the local church to the Kingdom of God cannot be exaggerated.

Read it for yourself, the New Testament (including the

words of Jesus) does not contemplate a believer outside the church except as an apostate (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

This comes as no surprise. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matthew 16:18b). Certainly, whatever Jesus is building we should be actively building as well.

When we are saved, we are saved into the Body of Christ. This is another term for, you guessed it, the church (Colossians 1:18). Ephesians 4 even tells us that the gifts of the Spirit are divided so that we are forced to depend upon one another.

There is a reason that when infants are born that we do not turn them over to the government. We recognize that a child needs a family. We do this knowing that family environment will be far from perfect and will likely exist on a high level of dysfunction.

We believe, despite its flaws, that the family provides a better context than the state.

What grows us are the environments we cannot escape. It is the repeated presentation of those flawed and broken relationships that define who we will become.

If you get a low grade on a report card, you cannot choose a more understanding mother for the evening. If you bomb a presentation, you cannot ride home in the car of a parent that

does not care. You have to face the consequences of your own gaffs and the injustice of ones that get unfairly pinned on you. “Family” is a world of imperfect justice.

Why would we be surprised that the church is the same way? For a while, it was popular to advertise that your church was a “safe place.” I refused to do that because I knew better. Church is no safer than my family was.

- It was at my house that my sister broke my collarbone.
- It was at my house that I nearly electrocuted myself, twice.
- It was at my house that I was mercilessly made fun of for being the baby of the family.
- It was at my house that people yelled, screamed and cried.
- It was at my house that I nearly choked myself by running full speed into a clothesline.

And, so many more. Of course, there was some good in there as well. To move the Kingdom of God forward, to see it expand, we have to be willing to “be the church” in the same way an athlete needs “to be the ball.” We have to make a commitment to stay, to participate, to give and to invite others over for dinner. We have to agree to avoid a consumerist approach.

Sometimes people say, “I just don’t feel I’m being fed.” I get that. Sure, the church should feed you, but you should also feed

the church. I agree, the church should meet the needs of your family, just as long as you are meeting the needs of some other family in your church. Anything less and you are not being realistic. Church is what you put into it. It is not some mystical being, like any other organism, it is a little more than the sum of its parts. You are one of those parts.

In a family situation, I do not think it is right to complain about the meal unless you are willing to help prepare it.

For some reason, members of a church can get the idea that the ideal church is conflict-free. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 11:15-32), there is the tension between the father and his younger son. Then, there is the younger son's defiant departure. Then, the worry of the father in the son's absence. Then, the rejoicing by the father at the return of his son and then the anger and jealousy of the elder son. Finally, there is the attempt by the father to console the elder son.

Conflict may not be pleasant, but it helps us work out who we are and the things that are important to us.

When you are involved in your church to the point that you can see the imperfection of it and it can see the imperfection in you, you have hit the sweet spot. From here, you can grow and mature.

For What Ails Ya

For some reason, attending church has become like taking medicine. Why would you take something you do not need? One problem with that analogy is that you forgot that you are the church. It does not have to be about you to be important. Someone else might need something. Forget might; they do need something.

I find that people are poor at diagnosing their own problems anyway. Think about it like this: You do not know you are lost when you first become lost. If you were immediately aware, you would take one step backward and be back on the trail. The problem with being lost is that by the time you realize you are lost, it is too late.

It is the same in daily life. When we start to lose our own path, rarely do we realize it until we have gone pretty deep into the hole.

In a close family, members of that family are always the first to call someone on ill-advised behavior. Whether we listen or not is something different. God meant our church family to operate in the same fashion. To make that work properly, our posture has to be greater than that of twice a month attendance.

It's an epidemic for folks to run late to church and then run

out of the church just prior to the end of the closing prayer. If that is your commitment level, that is your business. You should know, though, that will result in about 1% of the church family experience. That will not convince your church family that church is important. In fact, it will teach them just the opposite.

People say, “I don’t want to force my kids to go to church. So, if they don’t want to go, we stay home.” “I’m afraid if we force them they will hate it.”

Think about that. Do you use that standard in any other important area of life? Do you ask your kids, “Hey, it’s your bedtime, but only go to bed if you want to. I would not want to force you because you might learn to dislike it.” Here are some more crazy phrases I hope no parent ever says:

“There is no reason to go to school today unless you think it’s important.”

“Don’t wash your hands unless you want to do so!”

“Only brush your teeth if you feel like it.” “Five more minutes? Take an hour. Go to sleep when you feel like it.”

“You don’t want to go to the doctor? Okay. It is your call.” “All your teammates are counting on you, but if you don’t want to go to the baseball game you can just skip it.”

When parents let kids make important decisions, the children

do not gain respect for the activity. Instead, they generally lose respect and avoid it. Be a parent. Children are not responsible because they are children. It is not their decision. It is your responsibility to guide them to what is important.

My mother and father gave me no choice. If they did not feel like going I never knew it. That was the genius of it. They kept that burden off of me. They did not let me see any cracks in their armor because they knew I would exploit them. Instead, my mom would walk by my door and say, “Put your socks on.” Thirty seconds later, “Put your other sock on!”

My dad would yell, “Let’s go!” So, did I grow up hating church? Nope. I thought it was important because they thought it was important, which is exactly the case in every other activity. Also, this works the same way with adult children.

Also, my mother and father put a little thought into it. Every Sunday on the way home my dad would stop by the convenience store and buy everyone candy. It was the only day this was done, so it made Sunday special. After lunch, he would take time and play games with us so we could win extra candy.

Over the years, I have learned this is more about the parent than the child.

Right? If you can get your kids to school at 7:30 a.m. five days a week, why can you not have your child to the church by 9am on Sunday morning?

Come on mom and dad. You are smarter than this. Set out the clothes on Saturday night. Get things ready. Go to bed at a decent hour yourself.

I tell people, at least use the same standard you would for work, sports, school or going to the doctor.

I have had people tell me, “Well, we missed last week because the weather was so nice and we needed to get out of town.” Then, someone else will say, “Well, we missed two weeks ago because it was raining.” This communicates to your children and me that we go to church on crappy days, as long as they are not too crappy.

Here is the thing. Do whatever you want, but just realize following Christ is not like a hobby. It is repenting. It is turning your life 360 degrees. It is sacrificing. It is trading your life for Christ’s. It is being born again. It is not about you, but rather Christ in you. And, that will always lead you to serve others.

If other activities are more fun or more important than attending church, then that is screaming volumes to where you are in Christ and where you are leading your family.

The Bible does not describe the church as a date but as a marriage. This is a family. It is as close as you can get.

How important is your family? In a family, the cool thing and terrible thing is that everybody has everything on everyone else and that is what keeps things honest. They can remember 5

years ago when you tripped on the front step and spasmodically tried to regain your balance. They remember two years ago when you burned the toast. They remember yesterday when you mispronounced a word. These mess ups and missteps are arrows in their quivers to bring you back to earth if you get a little pompous.

Think of the biggest complaint people have about the church. The word is that church-going Christians are, "...just a bunch of hypocrites." The sad thing is, they are right. We are hypocrites precisely because we do not let the people into our lives who were meant to help us. We have kept a distance for so long it became a habit.

Think of it: It is hard to use smoke and mirrors in a family because the family has seen your show too many times to be fooled by it. They can see right through your hypocrisy. Our solution is to hide, but this is counter-productive to the Kingdom.

As a larger society, we have chosen to be divorced from our church family. We maintain visits if it feels like too much time has passed, but otherwise, we have our lives and the church has its.

That is not what Jesus had in mind. He wants the best for you, but this will not be accomplished as long as the church is like an In-N-Out Burger joint.

"Hey, you are sitting in my chair!" This is one of my greatest pet peeves. When I hear this my urge is to hurt someone. I have

told my congregation that if they ever say something like that to someone I will leap from the platform and beat them up.

Why? It is a true reflection of the sad state of the human soul that uttered it. Really? Is that what Jesus would do? Would he be upset because someone was in his chair in the synagogue? YOU M-O-V-E. It is so ridiculous I cannot stand it. I want to go all John the Baptist on you!

Repent, Sinner! The Kingdom of God is near! Seriously, repent. Yield. Thank God someone is in your chair! Welcome them. Smile and say nothing about it. If that is of any concern to you, speak to your pastor. You need help.

The church is so much more important than where you sit!

Growing the Family

Speaking of someone being in your chair, a better check for where you are with this element of the Kingdom is not church attendance, but evangelism and inviting others.

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost,

what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!"
Luke 15:1-7 (NLT)

Though we want the Kingdom of God to grow within us, the ultimate expression of the Kingdom expanding is in reaching those outside it. This grows the family and makes it stronger. Jesus taught us in the Parable of the Lost Sheep that this gives great joy to God. For those dedicated to the Kingdom Journey, the challenge before us is to keep our hearts tender towards those who seem to want nothing to do with us.

They are lost and they act like it. This makes our complaint against them the very reason we need to draw near to them. Too many Christians are content to curl up with their flat-screen TV binge-watching something on Netflix rather than to consider who they could lead to Christ.

We must be people that sinners want to be around. To bring the Kingdom we should always have someone or some plan aimed at leading those outside of the Kingdom to the Kingdom.

If we believe that there was unparalleled significance in what Christ did for us, how can we be complacent in allowing others to miss?

Lost people are just people who are not where they should be. They are looking for hope.

Bringing a lost sheep to God pleases the Father in a way nothing else can. Other things please Him, but this is unique. It should create a zeal within us. Let us be smart. Let us persist.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

These verses are so important to every Christian, they are named! Beginning at verse 16, they are referred to as the Great Commission. Other versions of the Great Commission are found in Mark 16:14–18, Luke 24:44–49, Acts 1:4–8, and John 20:19–23. Examined together they help us to understand that every Christian has a responsibility to gather the missing and the lost and to lead them to God’s Kingdom.

So, bad is the state of the invitation and evangelism, that in 2018 The Barna Group released a study saying that 51% of American churchgoers were unfamiliar with the term “Great

Commission.”¹⁶ So, if you have not heard the term before now, you are, unfortunately, in good company.

Regardless, we need to understand our responsibility not just to share the Good News with anyone who asks, but to proactively live a lifestyle that proclaims the message of salvation.

All the Friars... should preach by their deeds.¹⁷

To share the Good News we have to know something about the Good News. I have heard some people complain that they do not know enough to lead someone else to Christ. That is a legitimate excuse for a newbie, but what of a person who has been saved for a year? This is not rocket science. You know what drew you to Jesus, now you must understand your obligation to draw others.

One of the most effective ways to do this is by serving those within and without the church.

This requires planning and sacrifice. For all these reasons and many more, church engagement (a much higher level than attendance) is absolutely necessary to serving Jesus, moving the Kingdom forward and growing as a disciple. Just like in a

¹⁶ Barna Group. (2018). *51% of Churchgoers Don't Know of the Great Commission - Barna Group*. Available at: <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission> [Accessed 2 Aug. 2018].

¹⁷ Saint Francis of Assisi. Rule of 1221, Chapter XII. Circa 1200 A.D.

normal family, to mature we all need the family to irritate us and support us and challenge us and love us.

That is what makes family important and that is why God chose it as an integral part of his Kingdom. Through God's family, the church, let God imprint Himself on you!

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the idea of being born again and God imprinting Himself on us, like a newborn is imprinted on by its parents?
2. Have you ever been upset because someone sat in your chair or pew?
3. What the most common reasons people give for quitting church?
4. Have you ever been through a period in your life where you stop attending church?
5. Why is the church so important to the Kingdom of God?
6. What would happen to the Kingdom of God on earth if the church disappeared?
7. Why do you think so many people complain that church has hurt them?
8. What should we do when we feel hurt by the church?
9. How can being hurt actually help us to grow?

10. How important is evangelism to the future of the church?

11. Who are you praying for to receive Christ?

Next Steps for You

1. Consider how God chose to introduce his son to us. Jesus was born into a human family. Why would God go to that trouble?
2. What must it have been like for Jesus, who existed as God before his birth, to have been restricted to life as an infant? What kind of sacrifice was just that?
3. Try to consider God's perspective. What is He saying about family?
4. Suppose your life circumstances as a child had required you to be adopted. What impact would the actual family that adopted you make in your life?
5. Every second of everyday, you have the privilege and honor of being a part of God's family. What does that mean to you?
6. Imagine yourself being a part of God's family in Heaven. What are you doing?

7. How will you let the idea of being a part of God's family change your perspective on something you are dealing with now?

8. How can you look at your church family more as your heavenly family?

Chapter 7



Work

Nobody ever drowned in his own sweat.

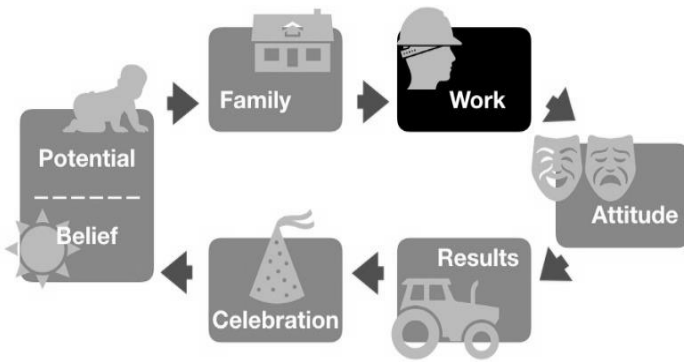
Ann Landers

Success is dependent upon the glands – sweat glands.

Zig Ziglar

The Kingdom Journey

Step 3: Work



The third element of seeing the Kingdom of God “come” in Jesus’ prayer has to do with work. This follows the natural progression we all enjoy as infants.

When we had our first child I suddenly noticed something that had escaped my notice until then. Babies are busy. They sleep a lot, that is true, but while they are awake they are keenly aware. You can see the wheels in their minds spinning.

My wife’s niece recently had a child. Though she is a newborn, she works her shoulders, moves her arms, smiles and generally pays attention to everything going on around her. She then eats, burps, poops, wears herself out, and goes to sleep. A few hours later the entire process is repeated again.

Eventually, because she is naturally working so hard she will sit up, crawl, walk, run and go on to be what I can only imagine. Her growth will not stop when she goes to school at 6 years or when she graduates high school at 18 years or perhaps college at 22 years.

Then, if her experience was like mine, she will get a job and figure out that she has to relearn everything, again. After 5 or 6 years she will figure that job out and move on to bigger and

brighter things, hopefully for the rest of her life. This is what we dream for her.

There is no limit for her. Her potential is boundless. She is in a loving family. She is going to do well as long as she continues to try.

Work is an essential part of the Kingdom Journey. We were made for work and to work. It comes naturally to us. God made us this way and has this expectation of us. Laziness is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments.

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways,
and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer,
or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and
gathereth her food in the harvest.
Proverbs 6:6-8 (KJV)

Even while we were with you, we gave you this
command: “Those unwilling to work will not get
to eat.
2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NLT)

I love the language the King James Version uses in Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard.” I would love to say that to someone without being struck one day. You could point your index finger in an angry preacher sort of way at a deadbeat and proclaim, “Thou sluggard.” Now, that sounds like fun!

Actually, that would probably not be appropriate (big surprise) because it does not speak to the heart of God on the matter. Work was meant to be a gift. Adam and Eve were placed

in a garden to work it. Life is not all work, but working toward some goal is a meaningful part of life.¹⁸

After generally stating “everything under the sun is meaningless” Solomon did find meaning.

So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God. Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 (NLT)

There is a connection between work and reward and this progress should make us happy. The New International Version of the Bible in verse 13 tells us that the people of God should, “find satisfaction in all their toil.” We spend too much of our lives at work for the gain of money alone to be the sole reason for work. All work has its unpleasant parts, but work should produce enjoyment either in the activity or from the results thereof.

When it comes to the Kingdom of God and work, the number of applicable scripture verses is mind-boggling. Work is presented as the beginning of a four-part subset equation of the Kingdom as it hinted to in Ecclesiastes:

Work

¹⁸ We can, of course, push work to an unhealthy extreme and become workaholics. The Bible also addresses this (Psalm 127:2). Either rise early or stay up late to work. Do not do both.

+ Attitude
= Results

Positive and Progressive Results = Celebration.

Attitude, results, and celebration will be dealt with in successive chapters, so they will only be lightly touched here. The point is, without the first step of work, the rest of the Kingdom Journey breaks down before it gets going.

Work As A Sign Of Salvation

I am asked from time to time, “How can I know if I am really saved?” I can answer that question from two perspectives. The first has to do with what is happening in you and the second from what is happening from you.

What is happening in you is about the Spirit of divine¹⁹ adoption speaking “Abba, Father” within your being.²⁰ My pastor used to describe it as, “a knowing in your knower.” That is a beautiful sentiment. The problem with that “knowing” is that it is unique to every person. Like most emotions it tends to be louder at certain times and softer or even silent at others.

Fortunately for us, there is a second way that we can tell if

¹⁹ The Berean Literal Bible includes the word “divine” in Romans 8:15.

²⁰ Romans 8:15.

we are truly saved. That is based on what is coming from us.

As I speak of work, I can already hear the shouts of angry villagers and the clamor of pitchforks outside my cottage window. Torch-clad locals, please rest assured that I believe that we are saved, “not by works, so that no one can boast.”²¹ We are God’s work-His masterpiece.²²

However, we are not masterpieces in the sense of being a trophy or painting for the wall. We are saved to perform good works.

My friends, what good is it for one of you to say that you have faith if your actions do not prove it? Can that faith save you?
James 2:14 (GNT)²³

I used to have a work buddy named Harvey. He would remark at random times,

- “Salvation isn’t an asbestos suit.”
- “Jesus wasn’t selling fire insurance.”
- “Jesus isn’t a ‘Get Out of Hell Free’ card.”²⁴

²¹ Ephesians 2:9 (NIV).

²² Ephesians 2:10.

²³ Good News Translation.

²⁴ Referring to the “Get Out of Jail Free Card” from the Parker Brothers’ game, *Monopoly*.

I think those sayings came naturally to him because he was a Southern Baptist.

Anyway.

The point is, God did not send His Son to die for us so we could be about our own business until we die.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

We were created in Christ for the purpose of good works. So, here is the test of salvation, are you serving others?

I love to say the mantra of the modern church is, "I'm too young, I'm too old, I'm too busy, I don't know how."

'Busyness' is the scapegoat of the Americans today. We have time to receive something from God, but not the time to perform the purpose of our salvation. How marvelously convenient! I want all the benefits and want to give as little as possible back. All the while the average American spends five hours per day watching TV.²⁵

I fell into this trap as well. I remember my son, Jacob

²⁵ Coblin, John. June 30, 2016. How Much Do We Love TV? Let Us Count The Ways. New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/business/media/nielsen-survey-media-viewing.html> Accessed last August 2, 2018.

coming up to me and explaining something to me. The problem he was describing had been going on for a long time so I said, “Why am I just hearing about this now?” He retorted, “Dad, you’re busy.”

This warning alone was not enough to dissuade me. I began to notice “busy” was my standard reply to every “How are you?” It wasn’t until I had a heart attack that I realized something had to change. Well, it was either that or my doctor telling me that if I did not change I would be back on his operating table in five years. Since I was 52 at the time, I had no desire to have two major cardiac events before I was 60.

Truthfully, I was busy. However, I was also using my busyness as an excuse to look important, to be prideful, and to be selfish with my time.

Ultimately, I vowed never to use that ugly phrase again. There will be seasons when we might be busier than others. The danger comes when this becomes a lifestyle. When this happens we have to be brave enough to realize that somewhere along the way we slipped out of God’s will.

The excuse, “God understands” is weak. Certainly, God understands in the sense that He follows your reasoning, but that does not mean He agrees with it. We were created for good works. This does not mean to work a full-time job, plant a church, start a business, and get that Master’s degree (I did this).

People say, “God sees my heart.” Sure He does. He has a

supervision that makes Superman's look inane. Seeing does not mean agreeing. Please, understand this is not about desire. Everyone has a desire to help others. This is about expressing your love for God by serving others.

Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."
John 21:17 (NIV)

If you love me, do something for someone else. Work is a sign of salvation. The question to ask is, "Am I willing to unbusy my life to show my love for God by serving others?"

When I looked at this closely, I had to repent, set some things aside, and make room in my life. If you have any interest in moving the Kingdom forward, please consider doing the same. Work is an essential element that expands the occupation of God's Kingdom here on earth.

But I Thought Jesus Already Did Everything

Since Jesus' victory conquered sin what is left to do? It is generally understood that there are two general distinctions in any ancient military. First, there is a conquering force. Then, there is an occupying force. These two forces have significantly different objectives.

The conquering force is not there to make friends. It is, after all, difficult to be friends with a group of armed hostiles that are lobbing bombs over the wall of your city, cutting off your food and water, and collapsing your economy.

This is enough to win a battle, but not enough to add a city to your kingdom. Of course, there are always rebels that have to be handled. But, there is also a need to smooth things over with the remaining citizenry. The locals need to go from sworn enemies to vital resources for the expansion of the empire. Someone has to work the fields and pay taxes.

The question is, how do you move people from hating you to being a contributing part of their new community? How do you get them to find peace from the memories of their killed-in-action brothers and sisters? What a seemingly impossible task!

Actually, by the time Jesus was born, Rome had become a master at this. For over 700 years they had been learning the lessons of successful conquering and resettlement. To do this they used a variety of techniques: grand infrastructure improvements (e.g. the building of temples, government buildings, aqueducts, roads), providing entertainment (e.g. gymnasiums and coliseums), enforcing stable laws, and, when necessary, forced, mass immigration.

Most importantly, however, they learned that it was important for the conquering army to go conquer somewhere else, and a new prosperity left in its place.

The whole idea was for the conquered people to eventually come to the conclusion that life, though still hard, was better under Rome. The improvements meant jobs, and as Roman subjects, they were unlikely to be defeated again.

The occupying force and the government they supported was central to accomplishing that goal.

What were these first generals called? Apostles. Shocking, right?

Long before Jesus or any New Testament writer used the word “apostle” it was in common use by the Phoenicians and later borrowed by the Romans. Through the centuries, these ancient people used the word generally as a person bringing a message on behalf of another. This person was often a lead military envoy, a military general, bringing news from the capital of the kingdom of the conquering and occupying force.

Though “apostle” was included in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament often quoted by Jesus) it was only done so twice. Jesus did not quote either of those passages. The term would have directly been associated with the dreaded Romans.

Yet, “apostle” (in the Greek *apostolos*) is the word Jesus used to title his 12. This had to be shocking to some. Perhaps we can see the results of this shock in our New Testaments.

The gospels of Mark and Matthew never use the singular version of the word (apostle) and only use the plural version of

apostolos (apostles) once each. John stops short of using the word altogether, calling Jesus original disciples “the twelve.”²⁶

Only Luke is okay with calling the 12 “*apostles*,” and this is probably because of his Hellenistic upbringing. In our case, victory was won by our Apostle Jesus Christ.²⁷ He was the conquering force.

We support the work of the second kind of apostle, the occupation force. The Bible calls us ambassadors.²⁸ We are here to deal with the rebels, to help people to understand what Christ did for them, and to show them the benefits of changing allegiances and being disciples of Christ.

In Luke 19, Jesus tells us the Parable of Ten Servants to illustrate this idea. The purpose of the lesson was to help us to understand the role of God’s Kingdom servants in the absence of the King.²⁹

In the story, the servants were given money and told to “Put this money to work” (NIV), “Invest this for me” (NLT), “Engage in business” (ESV) and “Occupy till I come” (KJV).³⁰

Each of these translations describe the nature of the work of an occupying force. They were to invest, engage, and occupy to

²⁶ John 6:67, 70 and 71.

²⁷ Hebrews 3:1.

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:20.

²⁹ Luke 19:11.

³⁰ Luke 19:13.

expand the reach and the economy of the kingdom. When the king returned, each servant gave an account on the results of his actions. Servants were rewarded based on what they did for the king in his absence.³¹

In short, the Kingdom comes when we successfully engage in business for the King. This is process of placing others on the Kingdom Journey.

The Kingdom has come through Jesus, but we are needed to take full advantage of his victory.

The Kingdom Advances Through Partnership

If I were famous it would probably be for saying, “Faith is a partnership.” People say, whatever God wants to happen is what is going to happen. In one sense that is true: Things happen according to the way God set things up to happen. But, it is not true to think that everything that happens does so because it was what God wanted to happen.

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live.

³¹ Luke 19:16-26.

Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.
Ephesians 4:29-30 (NLT)

Language like this is everywhere in the New Testament, yet it makes no sense if God is always getting His way. How can I “bring sorrow” or “grieve the Holy Spirit” (NIV) if He is getting exactly what He planned to get.

We are not marionettes being controlled by a string. This is not a game. The stakes are real. We have real tasks to accomplish that are unique to us. If we do not feed the orphans, they grow hungry. If we do not provide clean drinking water, they go thirsty. Every day is real life and real death.

We have to decide if the most important thing on our to-do list is the Kingdom³² or something else. There is a part of Christianity that is talk,³³ but there is also a part that is doing.³⁴

Working It Out

At the church that I pastor, we have a small job description for each volunteer role. We do this to help people to make a wise

³² Matthew 6:33.

³³ Romans 10:9.

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:20.

decision regarding where they would like to serve at the church. Many of the volunteer positions require no preparation before Sunday. You show up a little before service and then you are ready to go.

Once, while handing out this 1/2 page description a man grumbled, “This is starting to feel like a job. I’m not really looking for a job.” Translation, “Even though this position requires so little that a partially trained rhesus macaque could do it, I still do not want to be held responsible in any way.”³⁵

A lot of good Christians understand the power of organization under any circumstances except at the church. In fact, the same people that would be furious if the little league draft day was unorganized would be likewise angry at any attempt to place helpers at the church on a schedule. After all, something may “come up” and then they would be unavailable.

These are also the same people who want to see more people saved in our churches. They truly struggle to connect the dots between their level of participation and the quality of discipleship the church can provide. What a shame.

The biggest area of concern for me is in the area of children’s ministry. Ask any pastor what the hardest volunteer to

³⁵ I know this sounds sarcastic and bit bitter. Think of it as my version of when Jesus looked at the Pharisees and called them a “brood of vipers” (Matthew 23:33) or “white washed tombs” (Matthew 23:27)! Seriously, wake up.

find is. I can almost guarantee it will have to do with children's ministry. This appalls me.

Jesus set the precedent for us when he welcomed the little children and blessed them.

People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. But Jesus called the children to him and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."
Luke 18:15-17 (NIV)

As a reminder, when Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" the "me" in that verse became the church. We are his hands and feet. We are the body of Christ. We can "hinder" them by neglect as well as active resistance.

If for no other reason than that this incident is recorded in three of the four Gospels, we should understand the import of what was happening here. The disciples tried to discourage the children from getting close to Jesus. This is because children were not valued a great deal in the culture at the time. Jesus was seeking to turn that idea on its head and exalt the role of children.

We live in a time that is the opposite. When I went to school my entire wardrobe might have been worth \$25. That is not because I was born in the 1800s. It is because school was a function-over-form activity. Kids today are walking around with

\$100 pairs of name brand shoes and \$1000 iPhones. The point is, with all of the money going toward bettering their lives, why would we not want to give them the highest form of discipleship as well?

To do that, adults have to get involved and understand, right here, serving the kids, I am advancing the Kingdom.

However, if you have looked at all of the open positions and cannot handle anything regarding children or youth (this is hard to believe), do something. Get involved.

The church is meant to be a little microcosm of society and a training ground to prepare us for ministry in the world. How will we ever minister to the world if we cannot deal with our brothers and sisters in Christ? The irritations we feel between our fellow parishioners as we minister are there for a reason and that reason is not so you will look for another church.

Matthew 18, is one passage in which Jesus trains us on how to deal with difficult people. First, we are to approach them individually. If they will not listen, then with another person. Finally to the entire church. If we would only follow this plan, we would mature. Instead, we get irritated and want to quit. We tell people how upset we are and get them upset. Finally, it seeps through the grapevine as gossip to a pastor. By then, the damage is pretty much done. Most pastors will not respond to gossip. So, generally nothing is accomplished except hurt.

We think we are doing someone a favor by moving on down

the road. We are not. The same person that is driving you coccoo for Cocoa Puffs will likely irk the next 25 people as well.

Here is what I tell our congregation, “Threaten to stay, not to go.” That is a powerful concept. Stake your claim. Make your case. If you are wrong, say you are sorry and grow. If the offender is wrong they can say “sorry” and grow. Either way, we grow.

If the first level of leadership refuses to do anything, go higher. Quitting is the coward’s answer. We need to learn how to work together in the church where everyone is supposed to love one another before we move onto the world where no one will even like us. We need to get it right in a “controlled environment” and then take on the people hostile to the faith.

“And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’

“And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’“

Matthew 25:40, 45 (NLT)

My father used to say, “Charity begins at home.” He was right. At your church home. Get started there so you can be ready for ministry to the world.

Discussion Questions

1. What part of this chapter was your favorite?
2. What advice would you give to someone who is busy all the time?
3. What did you think of the discussion of conquering vs. occupying forces? What did it mean to you?
4. How did the discussion on apostles change your view of the use of the term?
5. How is faith a partnership between us and God?
6. Do we have an obligation to the next generation or can we claim that we helped in the past and now it is someone else's turn?
7. Should church members feel an obligation to volunteer at their church?
8. In the discussion on the element of Family, getting along in the church was discussed. In this chapter the

discussion was continued and centered on working together. Do you think one reason people do not volunteer is because they do not know if they will like the other volunteers?

9. Where do you serve your church?

10. Where would you like to serve?

11. Make an appointment with church leadership to discuss where you are volunteering now and what you would like to do in the future.

Next Steps for You

1. Read Colossians 3:23-24. Meditate on this passage for a moment and let it speak to you about your work life. Do you have the right attitude toward your boss? Your co-workers? Your dedication to excellence? What adjustments should you make?
2. We tend to separate the work we do on the job from the work we do for God. How does Colossians 3:23-24 ask us to merge those two together? See these two parts of your life coming together.
3. Let your mind feel free. Imagine yourself serving others at church. What are you doing? Is that what you are doing now? Are you expressing your particular gifts and talents within the church? How can you change that?
4. Let your mind consider how you could better serve the poor in your area. What could you do to help?
5. What about the world. There are many issues. How

compassionate are you toward their problems?

6. Consider a foreign short-term missionary trip. Ask God for a heart to want to go and express selfless love. Take the next step.

Chapter 8



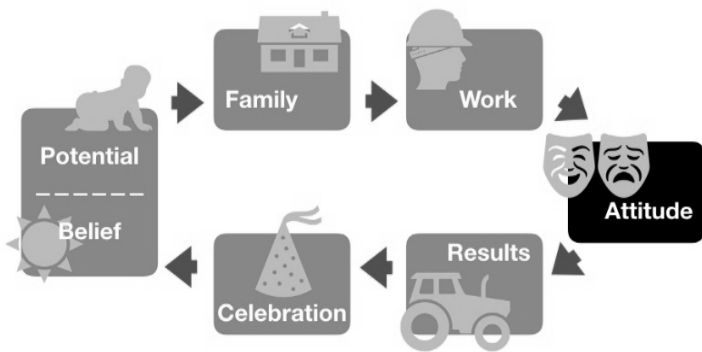
Attitude

*The people who are crazy enough to think they
can change the world, are the ones who do.*

Steve Jobs

The Kingdom Journey

Step 4: Attitude



The fourth element for seeing God's Kingdom "come" or expand is Attitude.

The first time I presented the Kingdom cycle was at a Bible School in Mexico. To illustrate how the different elements worked together, I used a whiteboard. Unfortunately, I can neither speak nor write in Spanish. So, I would write the element in English and my translator would write the word in Spanish.

When we came to this fourth element I wrote "Attitude" and he wrote "Actitud." I thought that is perfect.

Attitude is the 'tude you have while you work. It is most certainly the determining factor in the results (the fifth element in the Kingdom Journey) we will receive from our work (the third element in the Kingdom Journey).

So, what are the key attitudes for the Kingdom of God?

- Fear With Discipline
- Love Without Co-Dependency
- Intelligence With Courage

- Innovation With Excellence
- Generosity With Thanksgiving
- Priority With Focus
- Faithfulness With The Spirit
- Urgency With Preparation

Fear With Discipline

“The fear of the Lord” is one of those topics that modern Christianity does not seem to deal with very well.

In the Bible, “fear” is listed over 300 times as a virtuous part of our relationship with God. However, something about that does not feel right, so we tend to downgrade fear to respect. It is hard for us to reconcile the idea of God as loving and something to be feared at the same time.

I grew up in a rough neighborhood and rode the bus to school. There were fights on the way to and from school almost every day. We had a new bus driver monthly. I sat toward the front of the bus to stay off the radar, but eventually, I became a target and started being drawn into the fray.

When I told my dad about it, he acknowledged the problem. The next morning he walked with me out to the end of the driveway. When the bus pulled up he did not say a word.

Instead, he stared at the driver and the people on the bus with the most intimidating look I had ever seen. I was frightened and I knew he was on my side. After that, no one said a word to me.

Understanding the fear of the Lord is as simple as understanding the role of the parent. Parents provide and punish. We stay out of trouble as long as we fear our parent more than we do anyone or anything else.

The fear of the Lord is about what you fear most. Many Christians believe that the world is what is most dangerous and that we need God to rescue us from it. This makes the devil the ultimate tough guy and us, victims. This is terribly unhealthy and nothing like what the Bible teaches. This is because you cannot have victory over what you fear.

So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man's house."

Mark 3:23-27 (NIV)

In the Parable of the Strongman, Jesus explains that as long as the strongman is free, he cannot be beaten. First, we must have authority over him. As long as we are afraid of Satan we cannot plunder his house. His house represents a kingdom given

to us by God. Everything under his domain is stolen from God's people.

Like any good parent, God will rescue you. However, His goal for you is that you no longer need rescuing. He wants you to stand on your own two feet. His will is for you to face your fears and conquer them.

Satan is a bully on borrowed time and it is time for the church to realize it. Satan is powerful, but he has no authority over the weapons and "ropes" God has given you. The purpose of this Kingdom Journey is to train you and strengthen you to defeat him. He wants you to cast out your fear of the world.

How do we beat him?

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

1 John 4:18 (NASB)

We beat our strongman by understanding God as the ultimate tough guy. He is the One with all the power and authority. However strong our strongman is, his strength is mere piffle in comparison to God's.

Since God is on our side, we realize He is only a threat to our pride. We love Him, but we understand He does not need our love. So, we gain strength through selflessly loving others to the point of serving them.

The fear of the Lord is not about having a healthy respect, it

is about having a healthy fear. It's about knowing that God is active in our lives and He disciplines us because He loves us and wants us to grow in our faith.

And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said,

“My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.”
Hebrews 12:5-6 (NLT)

Growing up, my father was an intimidating figure. I was afraid of him and that fear kept me in line. I was not afraid I was going to be punished for something I did not do. I was not afraid because I thought he would do something improperly. I was afraid because of his capacity to inflict punishments and his history of doing so.

Without the fear of the Lord, we become complacent. We grow lax. We forget about Him and His rules and do what we wish. This is a grave mistake.

In many of Jesus parables the fear of the Lord or lack thereof is fiercely punished. For example in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant ends as follows.

Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent

the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

Matthew 18:32-35 (NLT)

Though the unmerciful servant had himself received mercy, it did not change him. This is the motif behind discipline. It is not to pay for what we have done. Jesus paid for our sins.³⁶ Discipline is designed to keep us from hurting ourselves or others in the future and to mature us into being a help.

There is a hierarchy to God correction. The first step in the Lord’s discipline is found in how each person disciplines himself or herself.

Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives’ tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly.

1 Timothy 4:7 (NLT)

To understand examining or judging ourselves, we are going to take a small step backward and lay a proper foundation.

The words disciple and disciplines come from the same Latin root “disiplina.” “Disciplina” means instruction or knowledge. Jesus’ followers are called disciples.

A disciple is a person who follows the disciplines of another. The word “follows” is important in that last sentence. A disciple

³⁶ Galatians 3:13-14.

is not a person who knows the same thing as her master. A disciple is not a person who agrees with her master about certain truths. A disciple is not a person who agrees that her master is really the Master.

A disciple is a person who applies the knowledge of her master in the same way that the master does. A disciple copies the practices of the master to achieve the similar results. The disciple follows the way of life of the master. The way of life is designed to move what is in our head to our hearts and hands and feet.

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.
Philippians 2:12 (NLT)

How do we “Work hard to show the results” of our salvation? The Christian faith has many practices that we call “disciplines.”³⁷ Disciplines take us from “trying” to “doing.”

- **Withdrawing:** Jesus would remove himself from the crowd to be alone with God or to be with just a few close friends (Luke 6:12-13).
- **Prayer with or without Fasting:** Prayer should be practiced privately and publicly (but not to make a

³⁷ An excellent work on this subject is Dallas Willard’s book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

show). Fasting adds to the intensity of the prayer (Mark 1:12-13).

- Sabbath Practice: Jesus respected the idea of setting a day aside for God in doing little or no work and for attending a public worship event. We should respect the house of God, the other worshippers, the elders and our pastors³⁸ (Luke 4:16).
- Secrecy: Doing good deeds for credit in Heaven rather than to be lauded on Earth (Matthew 6:1-4).
- Submission and Service: Taking a lower position of authority than you could assert. Jesus submitted to the cross. This is done through regularly serving others without pay (Philippians 2:8; Ephesians 5:21).
- Bible Reading and Meditation: Jesus was an expert in the Scriptures from a young age. We should develop that same expertise. You cannot apply it if you do not know it (Luke 2:41-52).
- Worship: Private and public displays of worship are equally important. Public displays are meant to be a testimony to others of God's goodness (Matthew 26:30).
- Faith Friendship: Jesus developed a small group of disciples for fellowship, learning, growth, and

³⁸ This can be done on any day of the week. Christians use Sunday because the Bible calls it the Lord's Day. It is the day Jesus rose from the dead. It is the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10).

encouragement. Every Christian should have a small circle of friends (Luke 6:12-16).

- Evangelism: This is joining Jesus in the active pursuit of souls for the Kingdom. We seek and save the lost just like Jesus did (Matthew 18:11; Luke 19:10).

These are called disciplines because their practice may not come naturally to you. Like exercise, sometimes you may have to push yourself into the ones that are more of a stretch.

This is about overcoming fear and beating the strongman. Developing the ones that are the hardest for you is the quickest way to growth. Why are Christians so immature in their faith? They ignore the items on the list they do not like. This is like a runner who refuses to develop both legs. Will she ever win a race?

The disciplines are meant to work together.

People sometimes complain because they are not being “fed” in their church. This can be a legitimate complaint. However, the church is not designed to stand alone in the growth of your faith any more than a school can be responsible for the education of your child. The school and the parent must compliment one another. Sometimes when people complain of not being fed, the real issue is that they are not feeding themselves.

If we will not discipline ourselves then we will fail to grow and will have to be disciplined by the Lord.

But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 (NLT)

The first level of discipline is to discipline yourself. The second level is to be disciplined by others.

American Christians do not like the idea that anyone would tell them anything about anything, but especially the practice of their faith. As I write this I am pushing on 30 years of pastoral experience. This history tells me to make one tiny suggestion to someone can end up with a nuclear meltdown.

They do not respect the voice of their fellow believers nor respect spiritually delegated authority. They do not respect the pastor of their church. They do not respect the authority of the church elders. This too is a discipline designed to avoid the discipline of the Lord.

Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.

Hebrews 13:17 (NLT)

Christians that do not let others speak into their lives invite the discipline of the Lord. We are often in situations where we cannot see clearly and need other's vision to help us see the "forest for the trees." This is the equivalent of your sister

whispering, “You better stop that. Dad’s coming!” Better a warning from your sibling, than a spanking from your parent.

This lack of respect for others is often manifested when people leave the church. They rarely sit down and explain what is really bothering them before they get to the leaving stage. They let things build up and by then they have made up their minds. Why cannot we talk before then?

People try to blame God for this. “We just feel like the Lord is leading us on.” That is being silly. It is fine to find another church home. That is not the problem. The problem is that we need to be mature enough to catch the reason early where it could be handled.

People justify their behavior by saying that they do not want to cause trouble. They either make up an excuse or disappear. This is not practicing honor.

Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord’s work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NLT)

If we will not respect the advice of our Christian friends, elders, and pastors, we invite the discipline of the Lord. This is the third final level.

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God

by worshipping him with holy fear and awe. For
our God is a devouring fire.
Hebrews 12:28-29 (NLT)

Love Without Co-Dependency

One Sunday morning at a church where I served on staff, a man walked in with a small, black, rubber spider suctioned to his forehead. This information came to me because other folks thought this was creepy and the presence of the spider was scaring children. I caught up with this Christian man who was a regular at our church and pulled him off into the usher's room.

In that private meeting the conversation went along these lines: I think you know why I brought you in here. You can stay, but the spider has to go.

But, God told me to put this spider on my head. You are scaring children and people think you are creepy. But, God told me to put the spider on my head. Maybe, but He didn't inform me that you were going to look like this so take it off.

If I take it off then you will be responsible to God for what happens. I'm good with that. At this, he removed the spider and walked out of the room and attended service that day. Later in the week, I asked him to come into the office for a private meeting where we would have more time to discuss the issue. After a few minutes of discussion, he admitted that he was not sure if God had wanted him to put the spider on his head. He was

looking for attention. He was lonely. We prayed together and that was that.

As wild as that story is, it would not have surprised me if some people questioned my decision to force him to remove the spider. They probably did.

What if God did tell him to wear the spider? Maybe you should have waited longer. Some probably thought I was not “nice” enough and may have embarrassed him.

Nonsense. To have left him alone would have meant many more people would have seen him and that would have destroyed whatever respect remained.

“Love” does not mean “like.” I can love someone without liking what they are doing. I love my wife, but I can go periods without liking her. She can feel the same way towards me. When she does feel this way I usually agree with her because I do not like myself either.

I often get the idea that people think Jesus requires his disciples to be naive doormats. It is a shame that Christians have picked up this moniker because nothing could be further from the truth. Think about Jesus. Was he the kind of person that let people walk all over him? No. Generally, I find this perception is rooted in the misapplication of a couple of well-known passages and word confusion.

The passage that seems to cause most of the difficulty is a

part of what is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. You will recognize it immediately.

But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also.
Matthew 5:39 (NLT)

The larger context of this passage is the elevation of the Law's "eye for an eye" retaliation code to a non-vengeance response to agitation. In the case of turning the cheek, we do not have to wonder about the application because Jesus faced this exact circumstance.

Then one of the Temple guards standing nearby slapped Jesus across the face. "Is that the way to answer the high priest?" he demanded. Jesus replied, "If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I'm speaking the truth, why are you beating me?"
John 18:22-23 (NLT)

What a temptation it must have been for Jesus to call down the Father's legions of angels to bust up the monkey show that was masquerading as His priests. Yet, Jesus did not. This then is love. It is not a matter of weakness, but a matter of control.

The love of God is not sloppy like the love we experience from a puppy. The puppy licks and licks and licks us. Instead, God's love is purposed and considerate. It does not allow itself to be manipulated.

Jesus' admonition then to turn the other cheek, should not be

interpreted as passive. It is anything but that. It is absolutely engaged. Examine Jesus' remark to the Temple guards and priests. He is saying, "Your authority does not allow you to do what you are doing. If I deserve to be beaten 'you must prove it.'" Other English versions use phrases like "testify"³⁹ or "bear witness"⁴⁰ to what is "wrong."

Notice that Jesus did not sit there in silence. He was not intimidated. He spoke in strength and reason.

"Turning the cheek" is a metaphor against personal retaliation in favor of what would serve to best display the love of God. This is what will most likely change the behavior of the striker. We are not sitting there defiantly biting our lip. Instead, we are offering love that is tough. This kind of love appears consistently in the New Testament. To save time, let us review a passage we studied previously.

Even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "Those unwilling to work will not get to eat."
2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NLT)

That is not ooshy-gooshy puppy love. That is a proactive, tough love.

Is not this what Jesus was doing when he called the

³⁹ English Bible Translations: NIV, BSB, NASB, NHEB, YTL.

⁴⁰ English Bible Translations: ESV, BLB, KJV, NAS1977, JB2000, ASV.

Pharisees “unmarked graves” and “blind guides”?⁴¹ Or when he cried his “woes” predicting the destruction of the unrepentant cities around the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee?

I think part of the confusion comes in the difference between the words “nice” and “love.” Love can often only be shown as the result of pain. When a child is born no mother would describe the experience as “nice.” It is love, though.

Jesus died for us, not to be nice or to create nice people. It was for love. “Love” takes us to a lot of places “nice” would be reticent to go.

- Love corrects, rebukes and calls people to stop what they are doing. (2 Timothy 3:16; 4:1)
- Love tells each person to bear his or her own load. (Galatians 6:5)
- Love tells us to reject a divisive person after just two warnings. (Titus 3:10)
- Love strengthens us through dealing with wrongs done to us as well as wrongs we do to others. (Luke 17:3-4)
- Love turns obstinate church-goers over to Satan. (1 Corinthians 5:5)

True love cares enough to not sweep something under the rug or to let something slide. If it bothers you, love without

⁴¹ Luke 11:44 and Matthew 23:16.

codependency compels you to say or do something in the proper manner.

- Timing is always an important consideration in dealing with a matter, but do not let that turn into procrastination.⁴²
- The place is equally important. Always begin with a private meeting.
- Be sure you are not coming from a place of vengeance but from the desire to help the other person not repeat the injury. To be Jesus disciples we have to be brave enough to “speak the truth in love.”⁴³ Jesus’ love for us was great enough to expose our shortcomings and then to provide the remedy.

Let us aspire to real love and leave “nice” in the dust.

Intelligence With Courage

Believe it or not, a couple of the parables of Jesus seem to advocate behavior that is considered unChristian.⁴⁴ Because of this, they are either ignored or dissected to the point that their meaning is lost. We are uncomfortable with the picture they

⁴² Sunday morning before church is probably the worst time to say anything to anyone, but especially a minister.

⁴³ Ephesians 4:15 (NLT).

⁴⁴ I understand that this is not possible.

paint of Jesus, so we pretend they do not exist.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.
Matthew 13:44 (NLT)

The problem with this parable is that we think the Christian thing to do would have been to disclose the existence of the treasure to the owner before we offered to buy the land. The man seems too opportunistic to be doing the right thing. Maybe the word we would use would be shrewd.

Jesus told this story to his disciples: “There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer’s money. So the employer called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.’

“The manager thought to himself, ‘Now what? My boss has fired me. I don’t have the strength to dig ditches, and I’m too proud to beg. Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’

“So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe him?’ The man replied, ‘I owe him 800 gallons of olive oil.’ So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill

and quickly change it to 400 gallons.’

“‘And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’

The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light. Luke 16:1-8 (NLT)

In this parable, the “dishonest rascal” is commended and that does not sound like a story Jesus should teach as a positive role model.

“Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.”
Matthew 10:16 (NLT)

This statement is also challenging. We tend to think of snakes as evil. Why are we being told to be anything like a snake? In fact, when we say, “He is a snake in the grass” it is not a compliment. What gives?

In the first parable, Jesus did not complement the man who bought the field with the treasure, only that he was smart enough to recognize the value of it and to take advantage of the opportunity.

In the second parable, Jesus was not suggesting we rip off our employers when we figure out that we are about to be fired. He is telling us to plan for negative circumstances. Bad things happen.

Finally, snakes are not evil and are not universally depicted as such in the Bible. God is served by fiery snake-like servants that are generally thought of as the highest order of angelic being.⁴⁵ Moses healed people with a staff with a snake on it.⁴⁶ Get over that.

Snakes blend into their environment. They are covert. They have taken the disadvantage of having neither arms or legs and turned that into an advantage. They are patient and know when to strike.

Each of these teachings provides us with vital lessons that are shared through many of the words of Christ. Below is the common sense application.

The world has been conquered by the Light but not fully occupied by the Children of Light. It's tough. It's dangerous. Despite this, I want you out there in it, not hold up singing Kumbaya and complaining about it. You cannot reach people unless your life is better than theirs.

Be smart. Be prepared. Use your head. Do not use "I am

⁴⁵ See Isaiah 6:2-6. "Seraphim" is translated as a flying serpent.

⁴⁶ See Numbers 21:8-9 and John 3:13-15.

leaning on the Lord” as an excuse not to act. People of the world do not use that crutch, neither should you. Look and look and look. Try different things. Eventually, you will find some good opportunities and some bad. Know the difference. Since you know this is coming have a plan to deal with each eventuality. Do not let the people of the world outmaneuver you.

People of God often act surprised by the smallest calamity. Do not let this happen to you.

Opportunities appear to those who are looking for them and know what to do with them when they find them. If opportunities are not appearing and we are not growing that indicates an attitude adjustment is needed.

Intelligence with courage is a rare attitude, but vital to the Kingdom.

Innovation With Excellence

My brother-in-law once shared a humorous story with me. As an engineer, he had been asked to consult on an automated plant that manufactured frozen burritos. The idea was to use a conveyor belt to connect the various processes together. One machine layed out the shell. Another, the meat. Another, the beans, and another, the sour cream until finally it was folded and placed into a wrapper.

He was asked to get involved because evidently the first time they turned on everything the machines threw meat, beans and sour cream all over the plant. It took a week to clean it all up.

This illustrates an important well-established idea. All organizations are perfectly designed to get the results they get!⁴⁷

According to insights developed by Dr. W. Edwards Deming,⁴⁸ this is true of not only organizations, but also systems, and as illustrated, machines. It's not much of a leap to believe that output is the result of the input in any given circumstance. Any other conclusion seems unreasonable.

If we wrote its importance as a formula it might look something like this:

Skilled, Well-Planned, Hard Work
+ The Right Attitudes
= Positive Results

This is what God blesses. I do not think we like this. We want the formula to be nonsensical.

Trying

⁴⁷ HI Multimedia Team (2015). *Like Magic?* (“Every system is perfectly designed...”). Ihi.org. Available at: <http://www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/origin-of-every-system-is-perfectly-designed-quote> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2018].

⁴⁸ See <https://deming.org/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._Edwards_Deming for an introduction to Dr. Deming.

+ More Of What Is Essentially The Same
= Different, Positive Results (Because God Blessed It)

If this were true every church in America would be bursting at the seams. The fact that this is not happening should tell us something.

As I studied the Kingdom of God I realized this was something I had wrong as well. The revelation was so obvious I could not believe how I missed it for so long. If there were such a thing as a billboard that could advertise to churches I would put on it, **“God blesses what would have worked anyway.”**

I hope you underlined that. We do not want it to be true, but it is. Hold on to this thought as you read through this chapter. I think you will see that every single teaching on the Kingdom of God leads you to this conclusion. “Blessing” is an add-on to what is already good. It is like the “Good Housekeeping” seal of approval. It is not the magical pixie juice that is going to turn average or mediocre into awesome.

We want God to bless our sincerity. He can do this. He can do anything. He just generally does not unless we were already going in the right direction. We say things like, “God sees my heart.” There is no doubt that He does. It is questionable that it will move Him, though.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Consider that there were many hospitals and leper colonies in Jesus’ day. There is no record that he visited any of them. God does not

One of the best teachings on this subject is contained in a study called *Experiencing God*.⁵⁰ In it author Henry T. Blackaby explains that we should not be asking God to bless what we are doing, but rather see what God is blessing, and join Him in that work. I was first turned on to *Experiencing God* in 1994 and it remains as one of the most influential works for my life.

Go back to the idea of being born again and the illustration of an infant. Every baby I have ever observed innately understands what I am saying. Though they are still developing motor skills, they will employ every move in their restricted arsenal looking for a combination that will achieve their goal. Upon failure to turn over, they will slightly drop a shoulder, tuck a hand, or rotate wider to get more momentum. It is amazing to watch.

It is written into our DNA to understand that “Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.”⁵¹

So, why are we so attached to what gives us subpar outcome? Most church members and preachers are all too happy

generally insert Himself into our story unless asked in a way that leads Him to believe we are willing to help ourselves.

⁵⁰ King, C. Blackaby, H (1990). *Experiencing God*. Workbook ed. Nashville, Tenn.: LifeWay Press.

⁵¹ According to Quote Investigator this saying should not be attributed to Albert Einstein. “The earliest strong match known to QI appeared in a pamphlet printed by the Narcotics Anonymous organization in 1981.” <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/03/23/same/> accessed July 26, 2018.

to use the blunt force trauma approach to getting ministry results. They just keep throwing the same activity against the wall of culture to see if anything breaks through to the other side. It reminds me of the scene in “I am Legend” where Robert Neville (played by Will Smith) has retreated to his glass safe room and we see vampires running head first into his wall. They do break through eventually only to be incinerated.⁵²

So many people and pastors are sitting around thinking if I just keep plugging along God is going to do something great. Actually, God is eagerly hoping you will figure out what you do well so He can bless you and make you even better.

When businesses use the 10-pound maul approach to their industry it is a sure sign that the future has left the building. We are now riding on the bankroll of past goodwill and profit. The only real decision left is which chapter of bankruptcy to file.

To be fair, churches are not businesses,⁵³ but we must be business-like⁵⁴ because Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to businesses a lot. Parables of The Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29), The Two Debtors (Luke 7:41-43), The Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), The Sower (Matthew 13:3-9), The Tares (Matthew 13:24-

⁵² *I am Legend*. Dir. Francis Lawrence. Warner Bros. 2007.

⁵³ Churches are usually treated as commercial entities even though they are non-profit. It is most proper to refer to them as business-like instead of as a business.

⁵⁴ An excellent resource is Hesselbein, Frances, Foreword by Jim Collins, *Hesselbein on Leadership*, 2002

30), The Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9), The Pearl (Matthew 13:45-46), The Net (Matthew 13:47-50), The Hidden Treasure (Matthew 13:44), and The Lost Sheep (Matthew 18:10-14) are just a sample.

There are many more parables where Jesus says “the Kingdom of God is like” and what follows is a business-related theme. This list contains parables only. It does not contain teachings like “counting the cost” which has for-profit and political metaphors (Luke 14:28-33).

People think they are being clever when they say things like “The church is not an organization it’s an organism.” This too is nonsensical. Jesus repeatedly compared his Kingdom to an organization. Furthermore, any business might describe itself as an “organism.” Goofy sayings like this confuse and therefore hinder us from developing the right attitudes that will let God’s “Kingdom come.”

If we want to make a difference in the world we cannot afford to live in a lackadaisical, haphazard manner that has to have the blessing of God to work. We have to see “tradition” as a means to an end, not the purpose we gather. We need to separate the message from the method⁵⁵ and start measuring outputs rather than only inputs.

We have got to stop wearing our feelings on our sleeves so

⁵⁵ Niewhof, C. (2015). *Lasting Impact: 7 Powerful Conversations That Will Help Your Church Grow*. Orange Books.

we can try something and then innovate and go at again until the perfect burrito comes out of the correctly tweaked machine.

Generosity With Thanksgiving

Everyone loves a good sermon on money, right? No. Absolutely, not. Why? Even people who give generously never think, “I hope the preacher talks about tithing today!” Instead, every time I do a sermon on giving or tithing we brace ourselves for the radioactive fallout. It is nuts.

Biblically, there is no reason why people go mad. I understand there are 800 scriptures on finances, 2000 or so on money and possessions and 3000 on God’s people’s responsibility toward the poor.⁵⁶ Even if these numbers are way off, the subject of money and what it can buy is covered extensively in the Bible. If it is covered in the Bible, it is open-season for preaching. In fact, when I was saved I was in college and pursuing a degree in accounting. As I read through the Bible I was amazed at how many passages in the Old and New Testaments were about money and the things it can buy.

I think the number one issue in the US is greed. We are obsessed with upgrades to the point that we are now \$1 trillion dollars in the hole for credit card debt. We live beyond our

⁵⁶ Please do not hold me to these numbers. I see these numbers a lot in reference to the subjects, but I have never personally counted them!

means and we have nothing left to give.

Then, we feel guilty for not giving and mask that shame in anger. Under the Old Testament Law, offerings could be broken down into two categories. First, were the required tithes and offerings. Secondly, were freewill and thanksgiving offerings that were voluntary in nature.

Giving in the New Testament is the combination of these two ideas. Tithing, or the giving 10% of your wages to your local church, is a high number. I believe God set it so high because this is the level at which we can know that He is more important to us than our money and it becomes a true offering of thanksgiving.

We tend to associate the giving of thanks as the offering of words in a prayer while we enjoy a meal. Thanksgiving (the holiday) takes this concept to a delicious extreme. However, this is not the meaning of the term in the Bible. If you remember your history you know the first Thanksgiving holiday was not celebrated until 1621.

In the Bible “thanks giving” makes a little more sense than the way we typically use it. A thanksgiving offering was not a prayer. A thanksgiving offering was the offering of thanks to God through giving something physical to God. That is the true thanks giving.

If you present your peace offering as an expression of thanksgiving, the usual animal

sacrifice must be accompanied by various kinds of bread made without yeast—thin cakes mixed with olive oil, wafers spread with oil, and cakes made of choice flour mixed with olive oil.
Leviticus 7:12 (NLT)

So, a “thanksgiving” offering under the Law has a physical substance to it. How can we combine that with tithing to find the New Testament standard?

To begin, we need to accept that tithing is a New Testament concept. We can confirm this because Jesus affirmed it (Luke 11:42; Matthew 23:23), and also because of Hebrews 7.

In Hebrews 7, we learn that:

- Abraham⁵⁷ (the father of our faith) tithed to Melchizedek 700 years before the Law was given;
- Abraham brought the tithe to a priest to honor God as an act of faith not the Law;
- Abraham represents all who believe in Jesus through faith. Melchizedek represents Jesus as our High Priest;
- We don’t tithe because of the Law. We tithe because we love Jesus and want to bless him as our High Priest. The church is his body⁵⁸ and therefore should receive the

⁵⁷ His name had not been changed from Abram to Abraham, yet. I use Abraham for clarity.

⁵⁸ See Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 3:6, 5:23; Colossians 1:18 and Colossians 1:24.

tithe.

- Tithing sets me up to receive God's involvement in my finances (verse 7).

Anyway you consider it, generosity, even radical generosity⁵⁹ is complemented in the Bible. It is seen as a mark of maturity and love. The church, like any other organization, needs resources to do its job well. Unlike other non-for-profits that can get funding from a variety of sources including the government, the church is restricted to its parishioners.

Many years ago an elderly woman got my attention after a midweek teaching. "I am a little concerned about all of the money that is being spent at the church," she quibbled. "I feel like there is some waste." I responded, "Let me assure you there is some waste." The look of shock on her face let me know she was not expecting that level of honesty. Then, I followed with "And, no one is more troubled by it than me." Then, I explained a little more.

We buy something and use it once. We buy something and lose it. We buy the wrong thing and cannot return it. We buy three brooms and only use two. It is unfortunate, but it is going to happen. At some point that can become a problem, but in our situation only one of three trustees sign checks so we have the perfect balance of powers. Everything purchased goes through

⁵⁹ Think of the widow giving her last two mites (Luke 21:1-4) and Mary pouring her perfume (John 12:1-7).

them.

You may look around at the waste or nice things in your church and think they do not need any money. My guess is that is not true. There is a direct connection between the quality of ministry of a church and its resources.

Giving is made possible because of work. We are paid for our work. When we tithe from our work, this is a way in which we are putting God first in our jobs.

When I graduated from college I starting working for the State of Texas. I was not a pastor back then but open with my colleagues about my faith and gave them opportunities to challenge me. One of them, a man name Joel cornered me. With Joel beginning, our conversation went like this

You don't tithe.

Yes. Yes, I do.

No, you don't.

Yes, I do.

With a new car and a new baby and a new house, on our salary, you tithe?

Yes.

Wow. Why?

Because I believe if I give enough to involve God in my finances He will make the 90% I keep go much

further than the 100% I started with.

How?

It doesn't matter 'How.' I don't care 'how' He does it.

Give me an example.

Okay. When I graduated from college there were four accounting jobs in the entire area. I interviewed for exactly one of those. You know I got the job, but you don't know that after that interview I went home and prayed. It was the only job I wanted and I thought I had blown the interview. I asked God for help. I was working some odd jobs, but every day when I went home I walked out to the mailbox and checked it for a letter saying I got the job. Finally, the letter arrived.

I know this part. It said you got the job.

Actually, no it didn't. It read that they were sorry to let me know that I did not get the job.

But, you work here.

True.

How did that happen?

I don't know or care. I know I kept praying even after the rejection letter and one day our boss called out of the blue and offered me the job.

Wow. Give me another example.

You commented on the house. Before I graduated from college I worked at a law firm. My wife was pregnant and I wanted to move her into a home, but I was making just above minimum wage and she was about to quit to stay home with the baby. I prayed and God led me to a certain course. We had a judge as an ‘Of Counsel’ at the law firm where we worked and he was on the board of a local bank. I asked him about foreclosures and he put me in one for \$500 down and no credit check. It was a three bedroom home with a two car garage and studio apartment. It sits on two acres and we can easily afford it.

I can’t believe it.

Those were his last words. He just walked away. I am unsure if he changed anything about his life or not. Probably not.

Money is a powerful narcotic. It is interesting to me that generous people never complain about sermons on giving. I think people get offended when we talk about money because they think preachers want something from them.

That might be true, but I was not a pastor in those days and I had nothing to gain. I did not want anything from him, just something for him.

It is the same way, right now with you. Increased finances

will help the church, but it will change your life.

“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”
Luke 6:38 (NLT)

This principle works for everything in the Kingdom. If you want to generate something you have to be generous.

There are certain things that only being generous with money can do for you. If you want to move the Kingdom forward in your life or in the lives of others, money is going to be a part of that.

Remember that we do not tithe because of the law. There is no fear, guilt or shame if you do not give. Giving will not make God love you more than He loves you now. The difference is in the blessing not the loving.

The right reason to give is that you want to express your thanks to God correctly in a tangible way.

If you cannot give please do not stop going to church. Giving on any level is not the same thing as dues. Whether you are present or not has nothing to do with generosity.

If you cannot tithe start where you can. Offer your thanks to God in a tangible way by giving a percentage of your income you can afford. Work up from there. Luke 6:38 is trying to tell us that if we want God to bless us in a certain area, we need to give

Him something to bless. That comes from the sacrifice of one thing to receive more of another by faith.

Here is a final word on all of this. Giving is not like a slot machine. You cannot approach God that way. Establish your intention by what you regularly give and share your heart with God. God will meet you there.

Priority With Focus

In Arlington, Texas I was on staff at a church with a member named Jennifer.⁶⁰ Jennifer was a smart and successful businesswoman with a solid future. We had asked her to volunteer to teach a certain age of children and she agreed.

She was supposed to arrive 15 minutes prior to the start of Sunday School. Instead, she materialized about 5 minutes into the Sunday School hour. Children had already come into her room with no one to watch them. Parents seeing this decided not to leave their children.

The next week the volunteer leader of the entire children's department decided it would be best to place herself near Jennifer's room just in case she was late again. Jennifer did not

⁶⁰ Jennifer is her real name. This Jennifer was from a church I was on staff at 20 years ago and has nothing to do with the wonderful women named Jennifer that are in my life today. See the section on Tough Love if you need a reminder.

disappoint. This time she was roughly 25 minutes late. She was also in disarray.

When our volunteer leader asked to speak with her about the situation Jennifer's response was defensive and angry. That is when I got involved. I sat down with Jennifer and first established that she actually was late. When I asked her what had happened she seemed confused. "What is the big deal?" she asked. "I am trying to do the church a favor."

I said: Are you ever late to work?

Jennifer: No, of course not.

Me: Then why would be late here?

Jennifer: Because this is not 'work.'

Me: So, work is more important than church?

Jennifer: I don't get what you are saying.

Me: Okay, think about it like this. If you could type 100 words per minute, but only typed 40 words per minute, would you feel like you were giving that task your all?

Jennifer: No.

Me: So why are you giving the church 40 words per minute when you have so much more to offer? We selected you because you are good at what you do and we believe the children deserve something excellent.

Jennifer: But, I am doing the church a favor. I don't have

to volunteer at all. You should be happy with my 40 words a minute.

Me: I disagree. You are not doing me a favor. You are not doing the church a favor. You are not doing God a favor. This is an opportunity to serve others. It is a privilege to serve in the house of the Lord. He deserves the best we can offer Him.

Jennifer: But, I am better than nothing aren't I? Forty words a minute is better than nothing, right?

Me: No, it's not. By coming in late and being ill-prepared you discourage others. You drag down the quality of ministry of the whole church. You tell the children that they were not worth it. Why should anyone come on time if you don't? You are smarter than this, Jennifer. Whatever gifts and talents you have were given to you by God. To give Him less than your best is unbecoming.

Jennifer: Well, I guess I won't volunteer anymore.

Me: Okay.

In parable after parable and teaching after teaching Jesus explains to us the importance of seeking the Kingdom of God as

our number one priority and focus.⁶¹ How far from that we have fallen. Now, to be responsible for the smallest activity is “doing God a favor.” Is it any wonder we feel stuck? Is it any wonder we feel distant from God?

Distraction comes to us through many forms. In the case of the Kingdom the enemy is usually the pursuit of money without proper priority and focus placed on God.

Then he told them a story: “A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, ‘What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.’ Then he said, ‘I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, “My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!”’

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’

Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”
Luke 12:16-21 (NLT)

Notice the problem is not that the man is good at making money. The problem is financial wealth without a wealthy relationship with God. As in the case of Jennifer, above, it is

⁶¹ Matthew 6:33. “The Parable of the Hidden Treasure” (Matthew 13:44); “The Pearl of Great Price” (Matthew 13:45-46); “Parable of the Lost Coin” (Luke 15:8-10), etc.

offering our priority of time and talent to work and offering much less to God. This shows us where our real effort and energy is going.

Jesus clearly wants to warn us of this kind of behavior and gave us vivid mental pictures to dissuade us from the temptation.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I’ll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”

Matthew 19:23-24 (NLT)⁶²

This image of something large passing through the eye of a needle was fairly common during the time of Jesus. The Babylonian Talmud, for example, uses an elephant instead of a camel, but the message is the same.⁶³ People who are building wealth face a much harder way into Heaven than the poor because of the distraction of money.

Money distracts us because it tends to make us aloof and self-reliant. We no longer need God for food, shelter or other basic necessities. We also tend to work more hours and have less

⁶² It is fairly common for people to think that “the eye of a needle” is a gate in Jerusalem that was very narrow. I can find no good evidence for the existence of this supposed gate at the time of Christ. Others think that “camel” is a poor translation from an Aramaic text and that the correct translation should be “rope.” That is doubtful, and it does not matter. The meaning is the same.

⁶³ Babylonian Talmud, *Berakoth*, 55b and *Baba Mezi'a*, 38b.

time for God, the church and serving others. It is hard to turn down overtime. The pursuit of money is the number one distraction from God in the Bible.

When most Americans read the Bible about the added responsibility placed on the rich by New Testament writers they essentially ignore the teaching. “I’m not rich,” they think.

According to the Pew Research Center, the global standard for the middle-class is established when a family of four has \$10 per day for living expenses.⁶⁴ Being that the US minimum hourly wage is \$7.25 we are a lot better off than we think. The Pew Research Center goes on to say, “The U.S. stands head and shoulders above the rest of the world.”⁶⁵ We are so blessed we take it for granted and want more.

By the standards of Jesus’ day, do you think you would be considered rich?

How can we know if we are distracted by money?

- Do you have a regular and vibrant devotional life?
- Are you more interested in building your kingdom or God’s?
- Which gets your best: Work or church?

⁶⁴ Kochhar, R. *How Americans compare with the global middle class*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/09/how-americans-compare-with-the-global-middle-class/> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2018].

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

- Are you a faithful volunteer at your church? Do you give it your all?
- Are you a generous person? Do you share with others who are less fortunate in a way that helps them?

Faithfulness With The Spirit

Faithfulness with the Spirit was an incredibly important attitude to have to Jesus. He was not the kind of person that tolerated a come and go philosophy. You could not hang out for a while and then leave and come back. You were either all in or all out. In Luke 9 a would-be disciple asked for permission to say goodbye to his family. Jesus' answer was intolerant.

But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God."
Luke 9:62 (NLT)

The Kingdom cannot "come" unless a consistent witness is presented. That requires a steadfast devotion and knowing what to do when "all Hell breaks loose" in your life. It is easy to be faithful when things are going well. It is something different when the pressure increases or when an injury is present.

In the context of marriage, faithfulness does not come into play until a handsome guy has all the time in the world to listen to how your husband is not there for you. Unfaithfulness

happens in the heart long before it happens in a bedroom. This is why the Bible most often connects faithfulness to love.⁶⁶

The key to remaining faithful is attached to understanding one thought: Difficulty is a part of walking in the Spirit.

Persecution comes. Illness comes. Difficulty comes. Marriages go through rough patches. For that matter relationships of all kinds do. Prepare yourself for this truth and you will remain loyal when difficulty arrives at your door.

You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra— but the Lord rescued me from all of it. Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.
2 Timothy 3:11-12 (NLT)

We do people a great disservice when we present Christianity as a walk through a rose garden. Jesus said “You can enter God’s Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. 14 But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.”⁶⁷

This is where walking in the Spirit comes into play.

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives.
Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature

⁶⁶ For examples see: Deuteronomy 7:9; Psalm 36:5; Proverbs 3:1-4.

⁶⁷ Matthew 7:13-14 (NLT).

craves.
Galatians 5:16 (NLT)

It is hard for us to hear, but the Bible presents the idea that there are two natures co-existing within each Christian. One pulls us toward God and the other toward sin. The one who ultimately wins will be the one that is fed the most. To allow the Spirit to guide us there are a few things that are helpful to keep in mind.

1. There is nothing good in your flesh. The Apostle Paul assured us that there is “nothing good” in us.⁶⁸ Without Jesus, we can do nothing well.⁶⁹ Swallow your pride.
2. God’s counsel is available and superior. Either through God’s written Word⁷⁰ or through trusted counselors⁷¹ we can understand God’s will by asking for it.⁷²
3. There is always a way out and forgiveness is available. God never allows His children to be tempted beyond what we are able to handle. He always provides a way of escape if we trust Him.⁷³

⁶⁸ Romans 7:18 (NLT).

⁶⁹ John 15:5 (NLT).

⁷⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT).

⁷¹ Proverbs 24:6.

⁷² James 4:2.

⁷³ 1 Corinthians 10:13.

4. We don't have to be slaves to our flesh. We can walk in victory because God understands how tempting sin can be for mortals.⁷⁴

Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?"
Matthew 26:40 (NKJV)

Our loyalty means a great deal to our faith. It is important to our witness to the world and the production of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Thank God He sent the Holy Spirit to give us the strength to overcome!

Urgency With Preparation

A vital attitude in the Kingdom of God is a sense of anticipation for the return of the Master on a date unknown. In parables, servants are applauded when they remain vigilant and disappointed when they are not.

This is illustrated well in the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. Five have prepared for the possibility of a long wait for the groom and the other five are only partially prepared. When the five who are less prepared leave to get additional supplies, they

⁷⁴ Hebrews 2:18; Hebrews 4:14-16; 1 Corinthians 15:57.

find they have become uninvited and disowned.⁷⁵

So important was this attitude that Jesus did not leave this concept to chance. In several point-blank teachings, he leaves the disciples with clear instruction.

“You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

“A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.

“But what if the servant is evil and thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’ and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 24:44-50 (NLT)

Our response to this teaching is to attempt to figure out the date of his return⁷⁶ rather than to be prepared. Look at verse 44 again, “the Son of Man will come when least expected.” At this time Jesus did not even know the date of his return. Consider the fact that he had a perfect understanding of all of the Old

⁷⁵ Matthew 25:1-13.

⁷⁶ Mark 13:32.

Testament prophecies, yet did not have a firm grasp on the date. If Jesus did not understand this, on what basis would we attempt to understand it?

Recent false predictions highlight the folly of wasting time on this endeavor.

“The Four Blood Moons” teaching is an example of this.⁷⁷ The teaching predicted either a significant event or the return of Christ in 2015. John Hagee’s book was subtitled “Something Is About to Change.” Nothing did. Well, that is not completely true. A lot of money was made on books and DVDs with worthless content.

It is fun to come up with a prediction for the return of Christ,⁷⁸ but to claim to know the date is impossible. This is not how we are supposed to stay ready for his return. There are some things we should do instead.

1. Remember that you are a servant. There is an old saying, “When the cat’s away, the mice will play.” At

⁷⁷ Bliltz, M (2014). *Blood Moons: Decoding the Imminent Heavenly Signs*. Washington, DC: WND Books. Hagee, J. (2013). *Four Blood Moons: Something Is About to Change*. Brentwood, Tenn.: Worthy Pub.

⁷⁸ I like the date of 2029 for Christ’s return. It is 2000 years after the arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ correcting the date for Christ’s birth to 4 BC. Most people like to measure from his birth, but I think a date from the completion of his work makes more sense.

Jesus' physical absence we can forget that we are managers and not owners. We can forget that any claim we might stake in this world is temporary. What we think of as "our business" actually belongs to God. He is the one who gives us all things.⁷⁹

2. Treat the other servants well. If we have authority over others at church, work, school or home, we should not exploit that position to subjugate them. They are also God's children. Live a life that forgives and is forgiven. Check your life to be sure the fruit coming from it is life-giving and pleasing to others. Owe no man anything but love.⁸⁰

3. Watch for his return because you love him. We anticipate what excites us. We lose sleep over what we love. Do not avoid his return. Do not get distracted by the world. What shines here will be turned to rust. Wait with anticipation.⁸¹

4. Know it will all be worth it. A great reward comes to those who are faithful in their work of serving the Lord. Though our minds cannot comprehend what these rewards will be, we trust God to get through the loss, difficulty and suffering of this present age. One day all

⁷⁹ Philippians 2:3.

⁸⁰ Romans 13:8.

⁸¹ Mark 13:37.

will be explained and all will be rewarded.⁸²

But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

1 Corinthians 3:13 (NLT)

“Urgency with Preparation” is an attitude that leads us to the next element in the Kingdom Journey: Results.

A Needed Change to Make a Change

Knowing these attitudes is 5% of the battle. The major issue is in how we adopt them into our lives. One of the best ways to do this is through ancient art of meditation.

Unfortunately, Christians have turned their backs on this scientifically proven method of improving your physical health and mental outlook. This is no doubt to combat the Eastern religious influences of Buddhism and Hinduism that are creeping into society.

This behavior defines the proverbial idea of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

It is important to understand that no religion owns meditation. The fact that other religions practice doing good, baptism, fasting and prayer does not cause us to be nervous

⁸² Hebrews 11:6.

about those. We do not worry about others getting the wrong idea.

Oh and P.S. Christianity is also an Eastern religion. Meditation is listed many times in the Bible as a positive, spiritual practice. It is represented by five Hebrew words and two Greek words. It is prescribed as a means of gaining perspective, peace, wisdom and of deepening our understanding of God's word. It is also, perhaps, the best way to set your mood and to find emotional stability.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.
Philippians 4:8 (NLT)

The Greek word for think in Philippians 4:8 is *logizomai* and according to Thayer's Greek Lexicon it means to meditate.⁸³

Meditation has been a part of Christianity from the beginning and practiced through the ages. For example, Hesychasm is a Christian mystical tradition of repeating the Lord's Prayer in a closet. This is done to dampen the senses so the meditator can experience God. It is based on Jesus' words in Matthew 6:6 when he told the crowd to go into a closet to pray.

⁸³ THAYER'S GREEK LEXICON, Electronic Database. Accessed August 8, 2018. [www. blueletterbible.com](http://www.blueletterbible.com).

There have been many other examples of meditation as part of the faith of Christianity. I do not think there is a wrong and right way to meditate. I think you should try different methods until you find something that works well for you.

This beginner suggested method is a combination of meditation and journaling.

1. Have a notebook and piece of paper handy. This is for making quick short notes. Get into a comfortable position. I like sitting on the floor with the couch to the back. You can also lay down, if you do not think you will fall asleep.
2. Cover or close your eyes or stare at a blank wall.
3. Breathe naturally. Listen to your breath, but do not try to control it.
4. For five to twenty minutes either pause at each of the below or rotate the following:
 - a. Clear your mind. When a thought comes into your head let it stay briefly and write it down. Clear your mind and begin again.
 - b. Let your mind wander. Pay attention to thoughts entering and leaving your mind, but do not judge them. Any lingering thoughts should be written down.
 - c. Then, set your mind on a scripture and let the

words move in and out of your brain. Write down any thoughts from the scripture.

d. Then, visualize in your mind what problem you have to solve, or which attitude you want to change.

5. Look at what you have written. These things need to be dealt with so your mind can come to peace. These things need to be handled so your attitude can change.

Try this technique. It quietens your mind so you can hear from God.

Discussion Questions on the Attitude of Fear With Discipline

1. When you were growing up do you remember being afraid of the Boogeyman? Did you check under the bed?
2. Have you ever been afraid after seeing a scary movie or reading a frightening book?
3. Did you have an intimidating father or mother?
4. Do you think Christians tend to fear the devil more than they do God?
5. Do you agree with the author that we have gone too far in downgrading the fear of God to respect?
6. What is the danger of seeing the devil as the ultimate bad guy and God as the leveling force?
7. We beat the strongman in our lives by loving others. How does this work?
8. Talk about your practice of each of the disciplines

(Withdrawing, Prayer with or Without Fasting, Sabbath Practice, Secrecy, Submission and Service, Bible Reading and Meditation, Worship, Faith Friendship and Evangelism) listed. Which are your strengths and which are weaknesses?

9. Why is it important to develop all of the disciplines? What happens if we do not?

Discussion Questions on Love Without Co-Dependency

1. What did you think of the spider on the head story? Did the author do the right thing? What could he have done better?
2. What is the difference between “love” and “like”?
3. How do you explain “turn the other cheek”, now?
4. What is tough love? How is it different from puppy love?
5. What do you think of 2 Thessalonians 3:10?
6. The author thinks love deals with problems instead of sweeping them “under the rug.” Why is this true? What does this kind of love do for others?
7. There is a right way to speak to others about difficult matters. What is it?
8. What are the circumstances under which you would

need to criticize someone on a Sunday morning?

Discussion Questions on Intelligence With Courage

1. Have you ever known someone you would refer to as “shrewd”? Did you mean this as a compliment or a criticism?
2. Jesus taught us to be shrewd. What did he mean by that?
3. Do you think Christians have allowed themselves to use God as a crutch in excusing poor results?
4. How could we be more alert for opportunities?
5. What do we mean when we say to be “Intelligent With Courage”?
6. What can you do differently to be more shrewd?

Discussion Questions on Innovation With Excellence

1. Do you like burritos? What is your favorite Tex-Mex food?
2. What did you think of the formulas presented in the chapter?
3. Are all organizations perfectly designed to get the results they get?
4. The author says “God blesses what would have worked anyway.” If it would have worked anyway, then why do we need God’s blessing?
5. What do you think about the idea of “finding where God is working and joining Him there”? How would that work?
6. How does “Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results” apply to Christians?

What about churches?

7. What do you think about Jesus' use of business analogies to describe the church? Is that important?

Discussion Questions on Generosity With Thanksgiving

1. What do you think about sermons on money?
2. Why do you think the Bible deals with money and the things it can buy so much?
3. How much of the anger surrounding discussions on money is due to guilt and shame?
4. What do you think about the idea of a thanksgiving offering being tangible?
5. Hebrews 7 is a powerful argument for New Testament tithing. What do you think about the concept?
6. The church leaders must be responsible to members for how the offering is spent. How can the church do a better job of this?
7. Do you have a testimony of tithing you would like to share?

8. Jesus said in Luke 6:38, “The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.” What does this mean?
9. If we are not supposed to tithe because of the law, why should we?
10. Why is giving not like a slot machine?

Discussion Questions on Priority With Focus

1. What did you think about Jennifer's story? Why is it a big deal?
2. Have you ever given God less than your best? Why?
3. Have you ever felt like volunteering at the church was doing someone a favor? Why is that not true?
4. How does making God's Kingdom our priority and excellence go together?
5. Why is money our number one distraction? How can we combat that?
6. By the standards of Jesus' day, do you think you would be considered rich? What does this mean?

Discussion Questions on Faithfulness With God's Spirit

1. Have you ever had a disloyal friend? How did that affect you?
2. Name some values of loyalty.
3. Why was Jesus so “all in or all out” with his disciples?
4. Can you understand why someone might think Christianity should be without rough spots? Why do we get so disillusioned when things go wrong?
5. What does it mean to “walk in the Spirit”?
6. Why am I not supposed to follow my heart?
7. How can we understand God's will for our lives?
8. What are we supposed to do when tempted? Is God trying to make us fail?

Discussion Questions on Urgency With Preparation

1. Have you ever given a presentation and felt unprepared or nervous? What did that feel like?
2. What do you make of the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids?
3. How does keeping an urgency about Christ's return help us? Why is it important?
4. Do you have a guess as to the date of Jesus' return? Explain it.
5. The author recommends four things we should do to keep our hearts ready.
6. What does it mean to "Remember that you are a servant"?
7. How can we know if we are treating others well?
8. Why does love compel us to longingly long for his

return? How can we do that?

9. What do you imagine Heaven to be like? Will we be sitting around all day with harps or doing something different?

Next Steps for You

1. Review the bulleted list of Kingdom attitudes at the beginning of this chapter. Pray and ask God for guidance to lead you to the attitude you need to work on next. Focus on this attitude for the rest of these steps.
2. Read Ephesians 4:23. Meditate on this scripture. Let the Spirit of God speak to you regarding your chosen attitude.
3. In a place of prayer, imagine the three words that were used to describe the attitude of your choosing. If you were doing that perfectly, what would it look like?
4. What step can you now take to exhibit what you saw? Even a small step can be significant.

Chapter 9



Results

*Become the person who would attract the results
you seek.*

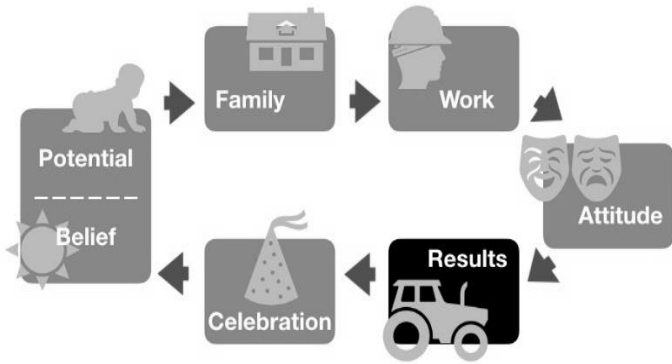
Jim Cathcart

*Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will
stand before kings; he will not stand before
obscure men.*

Proverbs 22:29 (ESV)

The Kingdom Journey

Step 5: Results



Many years back my wife and I took a vacation to Manzanillo, Mexico. We went there with friends for fun and to try a new sport, surfing. The waves were averaging about five feet and that is perfect for a newbie. We rented a couple of boards and paddled a good distance from the shore.

My friend explained. Pick a wave that you like. Then, paddle as fast as you can to match the speed of the wave. Then jump up on the board and try not to wipe out.

So that is what I did. I followed his steps. I was on the board for a whole three seconds when I slipped off and fell into the water. As the wave was going over me I started churning doing underwater cartwheels. I felt like I was in a human-sized washing machine.

As though by miracle, I felt the surfboard pulling me back up to the top of the water. I swam to the shore stumbling out of the water like a drunken sailor. When my wife motioned to me, I responded and walked over to her. She asked me if I was okay and I told her that I had enough sand and salt in my nose to fill a Mason jar. Then, I changed my mind and told her it was all the way into my brain cavity.

My friend, then triumphantly appeared having ridden his wave all the way to shore. He ran up to me and asked, “Ready to go again?” I went to say, “Absolutely not” but instead I heard myself say “Of course.” It must have been a lethal dosage of sand and salt talking. Like a lamb to the slaughter, I followed him back into the water.

After many more tries that lead to more wipeouts and more salt and sand being pushed into my brain, I was happy when my friend became hungry and we left for a restaurant.

This story illustrates the confusion many churches and Christians have between the ideas of work and results. I was doing a lot of work and not getting the results I wanted. We previously looked at this formula.

Skilled, Well-Planned, Hard Work
+ The Right Attitudes
= Positive Results

What was I missing? Skill for one. So, for my attempts at surfing, I used this formula instead.

Trying
+ More of What Is Essentially The Same
= Same Results (Salt And Sand Shoved Into Brain)

Churches sometimes try to justify this behavior with Bible verses they interpret as saying that it is our job to do our best and then leave the results to God. This is convenient because it offers us the perfect excuse when things do not go well. The only

problem is that the Bible teaches us that we are accountable for the results.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”
Matthew 7:15-20 (NIV)

Fruit is a result, not a labor. If the results belong exclusively to God, then why would Jesus tell us to watch for the results flowing from a person’s life. Likewise, the fruit of the Spirit is a result.⁸⁴ Certainly, God gives the increase,⁸⁵ but He gives it to the skilled, well-planned, hard worker who is in His will with the right attitudes.

In the parables of Jesus, this is the case as well. For example, in the Parables of the Talents and Minas, the master is concerned with one thing, results. This is the basis for the servants to be commended or fired.⁸⁶ This Kingdom is about getting things done and seeing the results. There are results for this life and the

⁸⁴ The nine-part fruit of the Spirit is: Love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. See Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV).

⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:6.

⁸⁶ Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27.

life to come.⁸⁷

The parables represent the bulk of Jesus' teaching on what God's worker can expect. Having this knowledge was designed to spare us from the heartbreak of surprise and disappointment and to help us discern God's plan for us.

1. I can expect an enemy's presence. Some of the results will be lost to the actions of the Thief. Thus, in the Parable of the Sower, some seed is stolen by the enemy and therefore does not produce.⁸⁸ In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, an enemy sows bad seed among the good.⁸⁹ In the Parable of the Tenants, the renters try to steal the vineyard.⁹⁰ I cannot expect a return from every seed I plant. There will be a well-organized resistance. This is not a sign that God is not with me. It is a fact of life on this planet.

2. I can expect some of the people I thought were friends to be flakes. The Parables of the Lost Sheep and Unmerciful Servant are good examples of this.⁹¹ Sometimes people in authority do the wrong thing. In this sense, the Kingdom is not unlike other organizations. The church is made up of humans. As is

⁸⁷ Luke 18:29.

⁸⁸ Luke 8:5, 12.

⁸⁹ Matthew 13:24-30.

⁹⁰ Mark 12:1-9.

⁹¹ Matthew 18:12-14; Matthew 18:23-35.

said, “To err is human.”⁹² So, we should not be surprised when Christians do the wrong thing. This is not a proper not a reason to abandon God’s work. The Parable of the Net shows that our results will be a mixed bag.⁹³ The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard teaches that some people will think we are unfair when we were not.⁹⁴

3. I can expect big results from small beginnings. In the parables of the Mustard Seed, Leaven, and Budding Tree⁹⁵ I learn that small things can be a sign of something much bigger coming.

4. I can expect to do a lot of searching before I find out what God has for me. Good examples of this are the Parable of the Hidden Treasure⁹⁶ and The Pearl⁹⁷ and the Lost Coin.⁹⁸ We should try things and see how that goes. We should evaluate and come at it again. Rather than being stuck in a tradition we should seek new ways.

5. I can expect unusually positive results when I have joined God in the work He has for me as a skilled, well-

⁹² Pope, Alexander. Essay on Criticism.

⁹³ Matthew 13:47-50.

⁹⁴ Matthew 20:1-16.

⁹⁵ Luke 13:18-19; Matthew 13:33; Luke 21:29-33.

⁹⁶ Matthew 13:44.

⁹⁷ Matthew 13:45-46.

⁹⁸ Luke 15:8-10.

planned, hard worker. God has designed the spiritual laws of the Universe to cause me to be blessed. To be blessed is to have a result beyond that of a normal expectation. The Parable of the Growing Seed is an example of this.⁹⁹ Abundance comes to us beyond measure.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

1 Corinthians 13:11 (NIV)

When a child draws stick figures and hands it to us we “oo” and “ah.” We put it up on the refrigerator. We have no expectation that it belongs in the Smithsonian Museum of Art. The results match the level of maturity and development of the child. So, we celebrate it. This is God’s design.

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

John 10:10 (NLT)

God intends for each of us to have a rich and satisfying life. A full life.¹⁰⁰ To live abundantly.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Mark 4:26-29.

¹⁰⁰ John 10:10 (NIV).

Is that the life you are living? It would be nice if we could grow up a little and realize that we have been placed on this planet not to languish, but to do something important with the lives God has given us? He is trying to help understand how the world works. Why are we refusing to learn the lessons?

We can complete our formula like this:

Skilled, Well-Planned, Hard Work
+ The Right Attitudes
+ The Will of God
= Positive, Over the Top Results (Despite Resistance)

Some time ago I had the thought that most people had probably never spent \$1000 toward their dream occupation. So, I asked my wife, “If you had \$1000 to explore a new career, what would that be?”

I guessed three times and got it wrong every time. Keep in mind we have been married for over 30 years. I asked her children what it would be and her daughter finally got it. I have repeated this question to many people now and have found some interesting results. About one-half have an idea of a dream career and had never pursued it with even \$1000 dollars.

To be fair, if we tried our dream we might fail. That might happen, but it might also lead us to something else that we do not even know exists. The parables and teachings of Jesus tell us to

¹⁰¹ John 10:10 (NASB and ISV).

keep on looking. We should covet feedback even if it is unpleasant at the time. This is the only way we can grow. It is like washing your hair: wet, wash, repeat. Only in this scenario, we plan, try, get feedback, improve and try again.¹⁰²

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”
Matthew 7:7-8 (NLT)

This is not the cold reality of a corporate decision making. This is an adventure that God is inviting you to enjoy; To find His will and to join Him in His work. The results that follow provide us the validation we so long for in life.

Have you ever been to a park and seen a child on the swings alone? No parent is anywhere to be seen. “Hey mister!” the child yells out to a total stranger, “Watch this!” We all need positive results from our efforts. We all have an internal buzzer that nags us until we see something good happen from our efforts. This is written into us before we are born.

Unfortunately, we want to hack life and move from element one “Potential” to element five “Results” without taking the time to go through the other steps. This will result in continued

¹⁰² Commonly referred to as the Shewhart cycle, plan–do–study–adjust (PDSA).

disappointment. Stay on the Kingdom Journey.

God has better things in mind for you!¹⁰³ Reach for them.

¹⁰³ Hebrews 11:40.

Discussion Questions

1. Name an activity you tried and did not do so well. Are you good at surfing?
2. The Bible talks about good or bad fruit coming from our lives. What does this mean?
3. The author listed five things we can expect when we try. Which of these meant the most to you?
4. How can we use the presented formulas as a guide to good results?
5. If you had a \$1000 to spend exploring a dream occupation, what would that be?
6. Jesus says that we should keep on asking, seeking and knocking. When have you done this well? Do you think Christians do this?
7. God is serious about our success. Why do you think so?
8. Why have we been taught so consistently that God does not care about results when he so obviously does?

Next Steps for You

1. Think about our first parents. They were placed in a garden. Imagine them working in that garden. Are they enjoying themselves?
2. Now, imagine them seeing fruit beginning to form on the plants. Does this make them happy?
3. Now imagine a celebration at their harvest. Why are they so happy?
4. Now see that it is true that God designed us to work, but not just to keep us busy. He designed us to work because of the results and the celebration that follows.
5. What results do you get from your work? Are these results the cause for celebration?
6. Imagine yourself being happy at work. What are you doing?
7. God wants you to take pleasure from your work. If you are not, ask God if a change is needed. Life is too short to labor at something you hate.
8. Thank God that He cares enough about you to want you to enjoy your work.

Chapter 10



Celebration

The more you praise and celebrate your life, the more there is in life to celebrate.

Oprah Winfrey

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live.

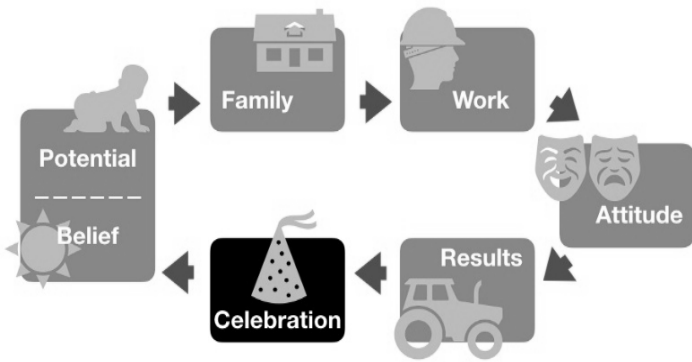
That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil

—this is the gift of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 (NIV)

The Kingdom Journey

Step 6: Celebration



When I was a small child my mother would bring me with her to our grocery store. It was called “Woods.” As is common to see today, various groups would stake a spot outside the door and ask for donations to the Girl Scouts, Little League Baseball or Little Dribblers. Of course, religious groups were represented as well. For a long period, a certain church group sold peanut brittle to raise funds for their new building.

I recognized this group because for years they had rented a billboard along the freeway that was black with orange and red flames. The text read, “Hell hath enlarged herself... Isaiah 5:14” along with the name of the church. As a young boy, the billboard itself frightened me.

Each time I saw the women from this church selling their confectionary, I would think how appropriate their wares were in comparison to how brittle their faces looked. Their downturned mouths obviously reflecting their religious beliefs. I imagined that they were really witches luring unwise children to sample their poisonous treat as in one of Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Pointed black hats and brooms were stowed under their table to allow for a quick getaway in the case of their true identities being

discovered.

Yes, I had an active imagination, but as much as I wanted a piece of their candy, I never asked. Instead, I gave their table a wide berth.

When you pick up your Bible and start reading through the stories in there, the whole gamut of human emotion is included. It makes an interesting study to consider the one we select as representative. So, for this small, spirit-filled church on the edge of town, what were they communicating? From the billboard it must have been, “Unless you attend church with us you are a witless sinner cascading into the infinitely hot, fiery flames of hell.”

Looking back, that billboard on the freeway must have taken much of their budget. No doubt they carefully considered the message they wanted to send. How startling!

In the New Testament, we do not see Jesus being criticised for being a Stoic, but rather because he is enjoying himself a little too much.

And the Lord said, “To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying:

‘We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not weep.’

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread

nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'"

Luke 7:31-34 (NKJV)

Here Jesus is clearly contrasting his ministry to that of John's. John was the "dirge"¹⁰⁴ singer trying to make you cry and Jesus is the happy flautist trying to get us to dance. He was essentially saying, "Nothing satisfies you people. You can fault with anything!"

Also, we should not underestimate the significance of Jesus' first miracle. After all, it was his rescue of a party by turning water into wine at a wedding.

Throughout the passage, the Greek word translated "wine" is *oinos*, which was the common Greek word for normal wine, wine that was fermented/alcoholic. The Greek word for the wine Jesus created is the same word for the wine the wedding feast ran out of. The Greek word for the wine Jesus created is also the same word that is used in Ephesians 5:18, "...do not get drunk on wine..."

Obviously, getting drunk from drinking wine requires the presence of alcohol. Everything, from the context of a wedding feast, to the usage of *oinos* in 1st century Greek literature (in the New Testament and outside the New Testament), argues for the

¹⁰⁴ NIV.

wine that Jesus created to be normal, ordinary wine, containing alcohol. There is simply no solid historical, cultural, exegetical, contextual, or lexical reason to understand it to have been grape juice.^{105 106 107}

Whether the wine was alcoholic or not, he definitely kept the party alive!

There is nothing better than to be happy and celebrate the results of your work.¹⁰⁸ Of course, we have to have something to celebrate, but then again, perhaps we should celebrate even the smallest victories.

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of
God in Christ Jesus for you.
1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)

“Celebration” is so important because it leads to momentum and changes what we believe is possible. Unfortunately, many Christians have no idea how to celebrate. Churches avoid fun because it is too emotional or silly or not cost-effective. Why do

¹⁰⁵ GotQuestions.org. (n.d.). *Did Jesus change the water into wine or grape juice?*. Available at: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jesus-water-wine.html> [Accessed 31 July 2018].

¹⁰⁶ It is not necessary to believe the wine he made was alcoholic. We cannot know because we were not there. The point may be that the Bible leaves this open to interpretation. You decide.

¹⁰⁷ The argument that Jesus would not make alcoholic wine because it might influence people to become drunk is no more valid than to say that Jesus may have tempted people to gluttony because there was so much food left over after his multiplication of the fish and bread.

¹⁰⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:12-13.

we need to be so serious all the time?

There is a time to be serious, but there is also a time to have fun!

Jesus bucked the idea of the imperturbable, aloof teacher of the law and the crowd loved him for it.¹⁰⁹ Like David, he did not mind being undignified when the moment called for it.¹¹⁰ At a similar dressing down by his wife for his exuberant twirling, David rebutted, “I will celebrate before the Lord.”¹¹¹

How we have missed the essential element of celebration is beyond me.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you
your heart's desires.
Psalm 37:4 (NLT)

At the end of each parable that ends on a positive note, a celebration takes place. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the wayward child is not punished upon return from a life of debauchery, but thrown an extravagant shindig!¹¹² Likewise, there are parties at the ends of many other parables including the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin.¹¹³ In the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, the entire atmosphere of the Kingdom is a party!¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Mark 12:37.

¹¹⁰ 2 Samuel 6:14-23.

¹¹¹ 2 Samuel 6:21 (NIV).

¹¹² Luke 15:22-24.

¹¹³ Luke 15:3-10.

¹¹⁴ Matthew 22:1-14.

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy
may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
John 15:11 (ESV)

Here Jesus summarizes his purpose in coming to us. Is your joy full? Does it regularly bubble over the top of your glass? When people think of you do they describe you as a happy person or do they think of you more as a sad candy peddler with a secret agenda?

Joy attracts people a lot more than screaming voices on megaphones. People are attracted to what makes sense of life. What is on your billboard? What signal are you broadcasting? What does your witness say about serving God? What enjoyment do you get from God?

We must take time to celebrate as this is an essential element on the Kingdom Journey. However, as important as it is, even celebration is not the end.

Discussion Questions

1. There are many passages in the Bible that talk about joy. Name a favorite or two of yours and explain why they are special to you.
2. How can being a joyful or happy person be a positive witness?
3. Have you ever known of any Christians who never seemed happy? How did that make you feel?
4. What is the connection between joy and results?
5. How do the results from your life influence your happiness?
6. Philippians 4:4 in the CEV says “Always be glad because of the Lord! I will say it again: Be glad.” Where are you on the “glad” meter? Do you think people think of you as a generally happy person or a something else?
7. How is it possible to be serious and happy? 8. What do you think about being silly? Do you ever practice silliness like David did when he danced before the Lord

half naked?

9. What steps can you take to increase your happiness?

10. What do the words, “Well done good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21) mean to you?

Next Steps for You

1. Read Jeremiah 29:11.
2. Imagine a celebration in your honor for something you just accomplished. This is your ideal setting. How many people are present? What kind of food is being served? What are we celebrating?
3. Imagine now that Jesus walks in the room. He is so happy to see you! He is so proud of you! What does he say to you?
4. One day in this scene will be played out before your eyes. God is so proud of you. He loves you so much! He does not tolerate you, He celebrates you. Be thankful to God that He loves you so much.
5. Read John 3:16-17 and Romans 8:1. Let your heart soar that God is not trying to drag you down, but to lift you up!
6. Sing your favorite song of praise to God. Celebrate His goodness, since He celebrates you.

7. Go back for a moment to what was being celebrated. How can that be accomplished? Pray and ask God if this is something you should do now. God loves a party. What step could be taken so this celebration can happen?

Chapter 11



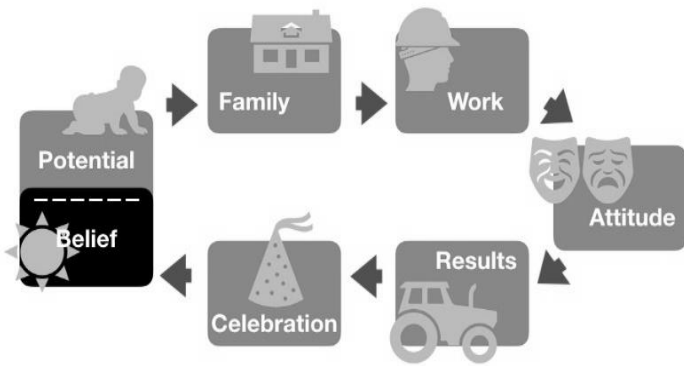
Belief

*It's what you choose to believe that makes you
the person you are.*

Karen Marie Moning

The Kingdom Journey

Step 7: Belief



In 2018, I went to Mexico with a small group for some missionary work. We were going to get an update on a church that had come to be called “The Dirt Church.” We were going to feed and minister to the homeless downtown. We were going to improve an orphanage and speak several times at a Bible college. I was also set to preach at two churches. It was an aggressive itinerary.

Somewhere along the trip, I contracted what is commonly referred to as Montezuma’s Revenge. I did not know Montezuma or why he was so angry with me. I did, however, feel the wrath of his vengeance. This was ironic since I did not come there to hurt Montezuma’s people or his land. I was really there to help.

Though we had all been eating the same food and drinking the same water, somehow I was the lucky one. I started out feeling like I had a rock in my stomach which got progressively worse. I quickly went from hoping I would not throw up to hoping I would. I was not disappointed. Suddenly I was having diarrhea and projectile vomiting at the same time. Montezuma evidently entered me in competitions for both frequency and distance.

After some time of this, I went back to wishing I would stop

throwing up. The dry heaves were incredibly painful and I was due to speak at the Bible school. I wanted to get better. I wanted the pain to end. Eventually, it did.

Here we have finally come to the end. Hopefully you were not wishing this cycle to end as much as I was hoping Montezuma's Revenge to stop.

This is the last element in the Kingdom Journey and the point of it all: Belief.

“Belief” is an interesting concept. I think it is often confused with “ideals.” In fact, I think most people have switched definitions. “Belief” is what we rely on to be true. “Ideals” are standards of perfection. “Ideals” come into to play “in a perfect world.” “Belief” is what we do when the pressure is on in the real world. Because of this, even firmly held “ideals” may never change behavior. Whereas, even loosely held beliefs always influence behavior.

For example, an atheist claims he does not believe in God. In reality, there are things he cannot explain so it is more like he is 90% sure there is no God. This still leaves a small window of belief in some higher power. Then, when his wife is very ill, he goes into a private room and appeals to God to save her.

He does this not as an “ideal,” but as a “belief” that there is a God who may choose to intervene in the lives of humans. In another example, there is a Christian. She agrees with the belief that Christians should serve others. Yet, she reserves the

application of this belief to a “perfect world” where her husband and children are less demanding and she, therefore, has more free time.

This “belief” that she holds at a distance is an “ideal” rather than a locked-in personal truth. It may influence her thoughts, but does not radically influence her behavior. It is a standard of perfection for which she does not have time in her present circumstances. She says, “God sees my heart” and goes about her life.

The problem is that “ideals” do not generate faith that can save us, heal us, or help us in any way. A belief that is not practical to our daily lives is not faith at all.

What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?
James 2:14 (NASB)

The answer as James will go on to tell us is, “No.” The Kingdom of God drives us to examine what we believe about God and our response to Him. In this scenario, we generally refuse to hear what the Spirit says, and go about our lives.

Nothing influences what we believe to be true like the results and the following celebration observed from our history. We are what we believe.

For example, the boss tells me if we accomplish a certain goal, I will receive a certain bonus. Upon meeting this goal if I

do receive my bonus it will encourage me to try hard in the future. If not, my belief system will adapt to the observed result. The next time she makes a promise, I will fail to be motivated.

Religion tells me what I should believe. I may agree with the statement of faith, but they may actually be “ideals” rather than genuine “belief.”

If we believe that sin has no greater impact in the world than to ask forgiveness, we reason that the punishment does not match the crime. There is then no problem with “white lies” and small sins as long as we are still a “good person.” As long as we control our sin, we have no worries. This person is conscious of a “sin line,” often treading along its border.

This is a person filled with “ideals” rather than belief. “Faith” is not faith at all. Rather, it represents high standards that are impossible for anyone to reach. Therefore, trying must be the only thing that is required. We are all human, after all. As this person examines the results of their life, he sees no drastic difference between his results and the results of many others. He concludes his reasoning to be correct.

As long as we ignore the elements of the Kingdom, we are destined to this end. Our “beliefs” become tethered to the world’s ideas of reasonableness. We will miss the glorious spiritual experience of growth in God’s Kingdom. This is why results and celebration are so important.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you

wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.”

Matthew 16:24-25 (NLT)

In the God’s Kingdom, we will learn in exactly the same way as we do in our own kingdoms. Results will cause celebration which will influence belief. The difference then is in our approach to life. The only way to the Kingdom is through a radical departure from our old path and our old understanding of life.

“Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn’t plant and gathering crops you didn’t cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.’

“But the master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn’t plant and gathered crops I didn’t cultivate, why didn’t you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it.’ “

Matthew 25:24-27 (NLT)

In the Kingdom, sincerity is not enough. To go where God wants us to go and to do what God wants us to do we have to open ourselves to a completely new and radical approach to who we are and whose we are. To be God’s child is not an adjustment to our old ways, it is to be born again and to become as a child.

Let us go back to the illustration of the infant, again. As the child enjoys its success and celebration this influences what it believes to be true regarding itself and its world. This is not an “ideal” but a practical real world “belief.”

The child that takes its first step hears the wild praise of his mother and longs to hear it again. The lesson is, “It makes me happy when mom is happy. So, I will walk better and better to please mom. This, in turn, will make me happy again.”

Before long it is no surprise that the child is running through the house at dangerous speeds.

This is why God’s word says this regarding His Kingdom.

“This is the new covenant I will make with my people on that day, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

Hebrews 10:16 (NLT)

This process is written into our very being. It is only a matter if whether we will access it to bring our kingdom or God’s. What we all long for is the voice of our heavenly Father. We try everything on earth as a substitute and sometimes they work for a season, but ultimately we are frustrated again.

“So don’t be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom.”

Luke 12:32 (NLT)

This is very good news. The Kingdom is a gift to those who

would seek it. It is like an Easter Egg Hunt. The eggs are not hidden from you, but for you. The process is a lot more fun than if a parent places the eggs in the basket for you. It's all about value.

When my kids were getting a little older I could tell their enthusiasm for hunting Easter eggs started to wane. The next year, wanting to keep the tradition alive I proactively placed one dollar and five dollar bills in plastic eggs throughout the yard. When their protest came as predicted, I told them what I had done. Once they believed that what I was telling them was true, they were ready once more to race to find the eggs.

What value do you place on the Kingdom of God coming to Earth, right here, today? Is it worth giving up your own plans in favor of God's? Can you trust Him to know more about what would please you that you do?

Sometimes I like to ask people if they play a musical instrument. If the person says, "No" I ask if they like music. If they say, "Yes," I ask why they don't try to play. They will generally respond by saying they tried the guitar or piano and they were not very good at it.

I will then respond by saying that according to the modern convention there are about 300 sub-categories of instruments and thousands of individual instruments.¹¹⁵ Having tried only 2 or 3

¹¹⁵ Referring to the Hornbostel–Sachs system.

how could they know anything? Further, how could they know that there is not an instrument out there for which they could potentially be the best in the world?

- We do not know what we do not know.
- There is much more that we do not know than what we do know.
- We must, therefore, need a lot of advice to come to any true conclusions about our lives.

The Person who made you is the only person who can answer those questions. He answers those questions through the Kingdom Journey. Because we do not engage with God and His Kingdom we often settle for “good” rather than “great” and our belief system adapts to our experience rather than the truth.

Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.
Psalm 119:73 (NIV)

I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for.
Jeremiah 29:11 (GNT)

These passages and many like them tell us that we are unique before God. He made us one of a kind. He desires to lead us to the best possible result, the happiest celebration and a stronger more accurate faith. This, in turn, increases our potential

and the Kingdom Journey can begin again.

We can find value in the Kingdom by realizing God has the answers to the questions for which we are searching.

Why do any of us become Christians? Is it not the value we place in the sacrifice of our Lord? It is sad that so many miss all of the other incredible value God has hidden in obvious places for us to discover.

Parables like the Pearl of Great Price and the Hidden Treasure¹¹⁶ explain to us the great value of Kingdom. See the value. See the difference it can make in your life. See the difference that could make in the lives of others and live the destiny God has for you.

Everyone's belief system can be broken down into two parts. First are our "Ideals" and second are our "Truths." "Ideals" represent the things you are told to believe or believe on some level, but do not represent your life in a crisis. They are not real world. "Truths" represent the "Ideals" that have moved from your head to your heart. They represent what you do when there is pressure.

Jesus was the only person to ever have those perfectly blended. If you are going to get close, then you have to understand that the Kingdom element of "Celebration" is the door that crosses "Ideals" into core "Truths."

When God looks at your "Belief" He does not see what you

¹¹⁶ Matthew 13:44-45.

recite from a belief statement. Instead, He sees our core “Truths.” He meets you there and encourages you to believe deeper.

We are smart when we strive to come to the place where we see the importance of this. Like the man with his son we can have the honesty to say, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!”¹¹⁷

Now, that is an honest and positive confession.

¹¹⁷ Mark 9:24 (NLT)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you play a musical instrument? Are you ready to try something else?
2. How do our values change when we are sick? What becomes important?
3. Have you ever met an atheist or doubter who asked you to pray for them?
4. How would you separate the difference between “beliefs” and “ideals”?
5. What do you make of James 2:14? 6. Have you ever heard someone describe a sin as “not that bad”?
7. Why do we hunt for what we value?
8. How can we take up our cross and follow Christ when we have families and jobs?
9. If we truly believed God had the answers to questions that would lead us to a “rich and satisfying life” (John

10:10) why would we not seek His Kingdom more than we do?

10. How can we change our beliefs?

Next Steps for You

1. Take two pieces of paper. On one write in large letter, “IDEALS” and on the other “TRUTHS.”
2. Read 1 John 1:8. Consider the sins that you tend to repeat in your life. Write those items on the sheet marked “IDEALS.” For example, you might write, “Telling lies” or “Being selfish” or “Pride” or “Impatience.”
3. On your “TRUTHS” page write out the truth in which you would have to be convinced in order to stop doing the items on your “IDEALS” page. For example, in the case of lying you might write, “The consequences of telling the truth are more important than telling a lie for convenience.”
4. Now ask yourself how you can stop celebrating your sin. In other words, going back to the example of lying, answer the question, “How can I celebrate truth and stop

celebrating my lies?”

5. Take the sheet that says “TRUTHS” and place it over the sheet that says “IDEALS.”

6. Now, decide on a course of action. Suppose you do not like something, but you have been lying to say that you do like it. You are celebrating this lie because it is getting you out of an awkward or longer conversation. So, here you have two choices. You could change your mind and find something that you like or you could be honest and lovingly explain why you do not like it.

7. Celebrate this victory. It may seem silly, but really celebrate it. You told the truth. You corrected your attitude. You quit cheating at school or at work. You stopped getting drunk. This shows true repentance. Ask God to forgive you. Ask others to forgive you and celebrate!

8. Repeat these steps until the “IDEALS” completely moves onto the “TRUTHS” sheet.

Part 3



The Outro

Chapter 12



Let the Gyro Turn

*It's not magic! It's physics. The speed of the turn
is what keeps you upright.*

It's like a spinning top.

Deborah Bull

I am the youngest of five children. Three of the five are boys. Suffice it to say, I was the king of hand-me-downs. This was a title that usually did not bother me, but occasionally an egregious situation would present itself and upon my complaint, my parents refused to address it. One such circumstance dealt with my first bicycle.

My next oldest sibling was a girl five years my senior and hers was the only bicycle available for me to ride. In case you have not noticed, boy's bicycles do not look like girl's bicycles. I could remove the basket and handlebar fringe, but what was I going to do about the top tube being lowered?

Especially because bike manufacturers lower the bar to accommodate a person wearing a skirt. As in a girl or woman.

My friends loved my hand-me-down crown when it came to this. I took a lot of ribbing because I was riding my sister's blue and white, banana-seat cruiser. It was unbearable so I determined to buy a bicycle. I saved my money and before I knew it I had a brand new ten speed English racer. It was yellow and black. Gorgeous. The only problem was, I could not get on it. It was too tall for me and I kept falling over on my side. I never had this

problem with my sister's bike.

Now, what was I going to do? My brother explained it to me. It is hard to sit upright on a bicycle that is not moving. You need the wheels to turn to stabilize the craft. I needed to run and push the bicycle to build up a little speed before I climbed aboard. This worked perfectly and I went from being the hand-me-down king to having the coolest bike in the neighborhood.

Later, I found out the rotation of the wheels creates a gyroscopic precession and that is what stabilizes the bicycle.

This force is fascinating to demonstrate. Take a bicycle wheel and attach one side of its axle to a rope. Attach that rope to a fixed point above the wheel and let it hang on its side. Spin the wheel rapidly while it is hanging. Leaving the rope taut, raise the side of the wheel not attached to the rope (the side closest to the ground), so that the wheel itself is parallel to the rope holding the other side of the axle. When you let go, the wheel will not go back to its previous position, but seemingly defy gravity and stay upright.¹¹⁸ If you have never seen this follow the link in my footnote (it is worth it!).

The point of this explanation is to understand that God so created the universe that the spinning cycle of the wheel creates stability and even, seemingly, defies gravity. The Kingdom Journey is a cycle that needs to be repeated again and again in

¹¹⁸ Mittechtv. "MIT Physics Demo -- Bicycle Wheel Gyroscope" Online video clip. Youtube, November 4, 2008. Web. August 1, 2018.

your life to get the full benefit of what it can do for you!

If you generate speed, moving through the elements, then what is now clumsy and awkward can become defiantly stable. Immature Christians cannot handle the smallest criticism because they are trying to deal with problems without any momentum. It's just like trying to sit on a bicycle that is not moving. Impossible.

If you will continue to work through the elements of the Kingdom Journey, then you will grow and mature. You will expand God's Kingdom here on earth. Starting off is always slow and difficult, but as you practice you will find it easier and easier.

When a person becomes Christian we should inform him or her of the next steps to take. This will generally look like baptism, Bible reading, prayer, giving, serving, inviting friends and the like. There is nothing wrong with this except that we generally do not help them to understand how these things fit within the Kingdom of God.

If we can instead think of the elements of the Kingdom Journey as those next steps, then suddenly you can see the next steps never end. They continue to grow in intensity and strength. After each cycle, we become more familiar with them and increase our knowledge and application.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. There are many things about the Kingdom for which we will not have access

until we are ready.

Even though we begin this journey as born again child, God did not intend for us to stay as an infant in His Kingdom. We need to grow and mature to be what He has called us to be.

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever fallen while attempting to ride a bicycle or motorcycle? Were you injured?
2. Why is it so hard to sit on a stationary bicycle?
3. When you became a Christian did anyone help you with the next steps? What did they tell you to do?
4. Could you have used some additional advice?
5. Have you ever felt stuck in your Christian faith? If so, what did you do to jar yourself free?
6. How could seeing next steps as a cycle help a Christian continue to grow and strengthen?
7. Looking at the elements of the Kingdom Journey, where do you need to begin? Why did you pick that element?
8. Which elements would you consider to be your strongest or weakest?

9. Why is it so important for us to keep moving in our faith?

10. Do you know of anyone else who is stuck and could use a push? What advice would you give him or her?

Next Steps for You

1. Prayerfully read 2 Corinthians 4:16.
2. Imagine a person getting on a bicycle. The bicycle represents the inner man. The person represents the outer man. At first it is hard to get started, but now the person is picking up speed and the pedalling is getting easier. Now, the speed is sufficient that the person can even glide. The person moves forward with little effort. Now the person comes to a hill. Effort will be required. The person pedals harder and is climbing the hill.
3. Now, imagine yourself as the person. You are climbing the hill. You know eventually the hill will end and you will coast down. Then, another hill will come.
4. For your inner person or spirit person to move forward the outer person has to cooperate. Pray and ask God what that means to you.
5. Pray and ask God which element of the Kingdom

Journey you need to ascend.

6. If you have stopped pedaling and feel stuck, in which Kingdom area do you need to take responsibility so you can get moving again?

Chapter 13



Finishing the Course

*God would not bring you through a Red Sea and
turn around and allow you to perish
in a fish pond.
Johnnie Dent Jr.*

If there would have been a big flat screen TV in first century Israel, then you can bet that the Apostle Paul would have been sitting in front of it at the end of the day. The channel? ESPN. The sport? Track and field with the occasional boxing match. Why do I say that? Paul saw to it that sports metaphors were included in the New Testament. You can find examples in passages such as Philippians 2:16, Galatians 2:2, Galatians 5:7 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-26.

Why in the world would Paul do something like that? What does sports have to do with the Kingdom of God on earth?

When I would run track in High School our coach used to warn us to pace ourselves in the long distance runs. Otherwise, he would shout, “Your gonna get a monkey on your back and not be able to finish.”

No one on the team thought a monkey would magically appear on our backs. We knew he was saying that we would run out of gas if we did not pace ourselves. We considered the one-quarter mile or one revolution of the track and shorter to be full-out sprints. The one-half mile and greater lengths were the ones where you had to watch for the monkey because you were going

around the track more than once.

Paul describes the Christian faith as a longer race. You are going around the course more than once and therefore, you have to pace yourself. You have to run at a pace you can maintain so you can finish the race well.

The one difference between the Kingdom Journey cycle and an actual athletic competition is that God has designed the race to make you stronger as you go. Instead of a “monkey on your back”, you can grow in your faith and be strengthened. Even as we age and our physical bodies lose vigor our spiritual race can pick up speed.

As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful.
2 Timothy 4:6-7 (NLT)

At the end of his life, Paul could not resist referring to this race one last time. There is an end to this cycle. For some of us, this will be at the end of the age. For others, it will be when we personally cross the finish line of life.

Recently, my mother-in-law passed. It was a sad occasion for us. She was a beautiful person inside and out. We will miss her company. As she rounded her last corner of life and crossed the finish line, she moved across as a winner. Her victory brought her to a complete understanding of the Kingdom such that we cannot understand while we remain in our race.

What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.
1 Corinthians 15:50 (NLT)

It is our Heavenly Father's pleasure to give us the Kingdom as we enter the race, but we cannot fully walk in it until death opens a new door of life for us. Death then is a part of new life. The Bible is encouraging us to keep running God's race while we are on this earth. It is telling us to keep going in the Kingdom Journey in a way that honors God.

One day, we will all run across the finish line of hope and slow our pace to walk the streets of gold. My mother-in-law has now joined a mighty cloud of witnesses. She has joined your family and friends, cheering you and I in our Kingdom Journey.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.
Hebrews 12:1 (NLT)

Think about all of these vivid images the Bible paints for you. Think of all of the stories, the parables, the illustrations. What is their purpose?

Why does the Book of Genesis tell us about a great boat and gives the exact dimensions? Why does Exodus describe the Red Sea parting or mountain in fire or every nut and bolt of the

Temple in the Wilderness?

Why does Jesus teach us with stories about brides and seeds and flowers of the field?

It is so you can imagine every word being said. So, you can put yourself there. It is so you can feel the waves breaking against the boat as Jonah is cast into the sea.

Our Bibles are full of types, shadows and symbols. All of this is done to awaken your imagination.

And when Paul writes to us about a race, it is to convince you that you are a winner. You have what it takes. You can do it! And, you have a whole crowd cheering you to victory.

Keep running the race set before you. You are going to win!

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have a favorite sport? What is it?
2. Does it surprise you that the Bible uses so many sports analogies?
3. How is running a race like serving God?
4. Is this life a sprint or a marathon?
5. What would a “monkey on the back” be in our spiritual races?
6. Why are we told to run with endurance? What kind of distractions can trip us?
7. It is easier to trip a runner than it is someone walking slowly and deliberately. Why then would the Bible tell us to run? What does running signify?
8. Why does the writer of Hebrews say “so easily” trips us? Why is it easy?
9. What race has God called you to run?

10. What is your plan to run it?

Next Steps for You

1. Imagine yourself in a great Roman Colosseum. You are in a race and not favored to win. But, there is Jesus in the stands cheering for you. You feel a burst of speed. You first pass this one and another. Now, you are making the final curve and nearing the end you lean forward to break the tape. You are victorious!
2. What were you passing as you ran? These are not people, but the sins in your own life. You can win over these things. What sins are holding you back? Make a short list and imagine the race again. See yourself passing each of these things until you win again.
3. Prayerfully read Ephesians 6:12. Understand people are not the problem. Answer aloud. What is the problem?
4. How can we defeat the real enemy if we are focused on the wrong one?

5. Read Romans 12:10. How does what it suggests defeat the real enemy?
6. Write down the name of the person or persons who are giving you the most grief. For each of their names declare aloud, "You are not my enemy."
7. Consider a way you could bless each one of these people.
8. Follow through with this blessing. Do it anonymously at first if you have to do it that way.
9. Pray and ask God to deliver you from evil.
10. Keep blessing them until the pressure is relieved.

Chapter 14



The Meaning of Life

*The meaning of life is to adventurously discover
our gift. The purpose of life is joyfully share our
gift with the world.*

Robert John Cook

What would you do if you made over one billion dollars per year? How would you live? In what cities would you place your mansions and villas? What kind of car would you drive? What kind of places would you see?

What kind of company would you keep? I read the real-life memoirs of a billionaire named Shlomo. To get a glimpse into the lifestyle of someone so wealthy was revealing.

His legacy began with his father, who was also a wealthy businessman and Shlomo did inherit a small fortune. However, Shlomo was highly intelligent, so when he took over his father's empire he truly brought it to another level.

In his book, he described the lifestyle his success allowed. It was outrageous: Insane parties; exotic vacations. He put absolutely no limitations on himself. He had whatever he wanted.

He described the places he saw. The clothes he wore. The magnificence of his homes and the large staff that catered to his every whim. He lived and dined in lap of luxury.

Shlomo was a well-known womanizer. He wrote about this openly. Every woman wanted to get near him and he let them. He drank the finest wines and enjoyed every pleasure they

offered him.

Then, one day Shlomo started to think about the meaning of life. He wondered about all the possessions he had acquired. Whose would they become when he died? He wondered about all of the women who were all starting to feel and look alike. Though he had no physical needs his life felt incomplete and empty.

Everyone loved him, yet he felt unloved. Everyone wanted to get near him, yet he felt alone.

I am glad that Shlomo's took the time to publish his story because most of us will never have the resources to duplicate his life. Many believe the answer to life can be summed up on a bumper sticker "The One Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins." Shlomo would sharply disagree.

Shlomo's journey led him to the conclusion that the meaning of life is not about possessions, either things or people. That is something for a bold, billionaire playboy to say! When I think about it, though, it does make perfect sense.

If possessions were what made us happy, then why are most of the purchases I made last year, the things I am trying to sell in a garage sale this year? The nice things that we thought we had to have five years ago are locked up in a storage facility today.

New cars get old. We know that. Shlomo's book is important because he says it does not matter if the car is a Toyota or a

Bentley.

If we think life is about who we are sleeping with, then Shlomo's life suggests we are wrong about that as well. Shlomo shares details about pleasures that would represent most men's fantasies. Yet in the end, he says he was doing it because he could, not because it made him feel alive.

In case you are wondering, Shlomo wrapped up his autobiography with some interesting conclusions. He said to find meaning in life do these things:

1. Work hard, but do not go overboard with it.¹¹⁹
2. Create income through multiple streams. It is really hard for even a billionaire to predict what will work every time so try various methods.¹²⁰
3. Enjoy the fruits of your labor and find happiness in that. Set something aside, but do not forget to have fun. Eat, drink and make merry. Fun is temporary, but it makes life worth living.¹²¹
4. In all you do, live for something beyond yourself and this world, because ultimately everything here is temporary. Shlomo decided he needed to honor God with the way he was living to find meaning in this life.

¹¹⁹ Ecclesiastes 9:10.

¹²⁰ Ecclesiastes 11:2 (NLT).

¹²¹ Ecclesiastes 2:24.

How do you answer the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Do you need to live your version of Shlomo’s life to draw your own conclusions or can you trust him?¹²²

Maybe the life experience you have now tells you he is right. Talking about the first three of Shlomo’s suggestions are beyond the scope of this book, so I am going to focus on #4.

Shlomo came to the conclusion that the God of the Bible was the God he wanted to serve and honor in everything he did.

Do you know Jesus? I’m not wondering if you go to church or if you are a good person or even if you believe in God. I’m asking, “Do you know Jesus?” In other words, what is your relationship with Jesus like?

That’s an important question because you will not find meaning in this life or get to heaven without Him.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”
John 14:6 (NKJV)

Some think there are many ways to God, but Jesus made it clear. He called Himself, “the way, the truth and the life.” Are you ready for a new life? Are you ready to start over, or as Jesus

¹²² If you would like to read Shlomo’s story for yourself you can find it in any Bible. Look for the book of Ecclesiastes. Shlomo is the Hebrew form of the more commonly known Aramaic-derived Solomon.

said, “be born again”?¹²³

Many are eager to go to heaven, but receiving Jesus is making Him Lord of your life on Earth. It is making Jesus your ruler. It means you will follow His way of life and practice His teachings.

In the process, Jesus becomes your friend, your hope, your peace and your joy.

We all sin against God every day. We are prideful. We lie. We have bad thoughts. We do not do what is right. You can think of those sins as the equivalent of breaking the law and being arrested. Shlomo came to the same conclusion as what is taught in the Bible. One day every person will stand before their Creator and give an account for their lives. A payment for our sins will be required.

To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus paid that debt for you. He died so that you could live free of that impending doom. That sounds really good to me.

If you are ready to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, it's as simple as A-B-C.

A- Admit that you have committed wrong and hurtful sins against God and others. Admit that you have failed to do the right things. Agree that you understand that the result of these actions is separation from God and condemnation.

¹²³ John 3:3.

B- Believe that Jesus paid for your sins by living a sinless life and offering his life to God when He died on the cross. Believe that His resurrection from the dead is proof of this fact. Believe that through his life is the promise of eternal life for you.

C- Confess your belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior, both in what you say and in what you do. Find the meaning of life by adopting the lifestyle of Christ and dedicating yourself to making God's Kingdom come on Earth as it is now in Heaven.

To start over in Jesus, simply pray this prayer or one similar.

Father, I come to you as a sinner. I have committed wrong and hurtful deeds against You and other people. I have ignored your voice and failed to do the good things you have asked me to do. I have been selfish, living for myself. I know I deserve punishment for this. I believe that Your only son Jesus paid my debt for my sins by dying on the cross and going to the grave in my place. I believe in his resurrection and that he is my Savior and the Savior of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Welcome to the family of God. The angels in heaven are rejoicing over your decision (Luke 15:10).

Discussion Questions

1. Did you know the book of Ecclesiastes is about Solomon's quest for the meaning of life?
2. Do you believe that Shlomo, or as he is better known, Solomon was right about the meaning of life?
3. Why is it important to understand Jesus as the only way to God rather than one of many ways?
4. Why is it important for us to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin?
5. Why is it important for us to believe that Jesus lived a sinless life?
6. How does Jesus forgive us of our sins?
7. Have you ever had a "conversion" experience?
8. Have you ever received Christ as your Savior?
9. What is the symbolism behind being water baptized?
10. Have you ever been water baptized? This is

something every believer should do?

The Next Step

1. Receive Christ as your Savior and be born again.
2. Be baptized in water.
3. Begin living on the Kingdom Journey!
4. Rehearse your faith. Remember what you believe about Jesus.
5. Offer thanks to God for sacrificing His son for you.
6. Share your faith with someone else.
7. Lead someone else to Jesus.

Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. Matthew 6:33 (NLT)

In this passage, Jesus is not telling us to make the Kingdom first on a list of ten things, but first in everything on the list! Only this level of commitment to the Kingdom will allow all that is lost to be restored. Christianity does not work as an add-on to our busy schedule. It should become the schedule.

In this book, readers will be able to discover the Kingdom of God in a fresh and more intimate light to apply its principles to their lives.

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