

Walking Daily in the Kingdom

Kevin Kinghorn

1 - What IS the 'Kingdom of God'?!

Simple answer: where Jesus is reigning as Lord

Any sphere/ realm operates according to certain principles: bank, school, KoG...

Two Principles by which the Kingdom of God Operates:

A. Success

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." (Mark 9:33-35)

The 'last' are those who prioritize their personal agendas last: behind God's agenda and the needs of others.

Success in the KoG is measured, singularly, in terms of obedience to the will of God.

*"My soul is overwhelmed, even unto death; but yet, your will be done, father, not mine."
(Matt. 25:39)*

"Well done, my good and faithful servant." (Matt. 25:21)

Whenever I think of my success in any other terms, I begin to walk out of rhythm with the Kingdom.

B. Power

Jesus's re-definition seen clearly in the events of Palm Sunday

'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' (Matt. 21:5)

From the very beginning, true power revealed as *creative* power, in contrast to the world's understanding of *coerce* power.

The creation account in Genesis is an exercise in creative power ("*Let there be light*"), and an invitation from God to use our own creative power ("*Be fruitful and multiply*"), in contrast to all the other creation accounts of the ANE (e.g., Babylonian creation story of Marduk and Tiamat).

When sin/brokenness arise in our world, creative power takes the form of *redemptive* power.

Whenever we think of *coercive* power as the 'real' power, we begin to walk out of rhythm with the Kingdom.

Coercive power operates by *restricting*, and is ultimately always limited. Creative power encourages the *release* of more power, and is ultimately without limit.

The possibilities of creative power are always so much more than we realize. The things built with coercive power will never last, as the KoG comes in fullness.

Some questions for groups:

1. What is one step I can take to release the creative power God has given me?
2. What is one step to walk more wholeheartedly in the principles of the Kingdom regarding success and power?

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2 - Participating Daily in the Ongoing Life of the Trinity

Starting point for the Christian picture of God: God is a Trinity. Three persons in loving, interdependent, inseparable relationships – so that they comprise one Being with one set of essential attributes.



When we pray/serve, we offer them to the Father, through the Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Quite literally, we get caught up in the very life of God. We are invited to participate within the ongoing relationships of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What Difference does it make to day-to-day life that our prayers and works of service are done...

A. To the Father?

Difficult people in our lives? Well, our work is directed “*unto the Lord*” (Col. 3:23)
When *we* have been difficult? God forgives us as a father forgives.

B. In the power of the Spirit?

We have a constant companion, comforter, encourager, guide. And we don’t have to figure out solutions for ourselves.

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27)

C. Through the Son?

1. Significance of the Ascension

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” (Acts 1: 8-9)

“[B]ecause Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵ Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” (Heb. 7: 24-25)

Jesus continually intercedes *for* us and *as* one of us.

2. No breakthrough after continuing to pray/work?

A reminder that it was never *our* prayer/work. It was always *Christ's* prayer/work, which we joined him in offering to the Father.

Some questions for groups:

1. Which implications of God being Father, God being Son, and God being Holy Spirit do I tend most easily to lose sight of?
2. What step would be helpful for me to take each day, as a way of not losing sight of the fact that God is inviting us into his ongoing life?

Why are active steps so important?

“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.” (Matt. 12: 43-45)

The strategy of ‘trying to avoid sinning’: we may win some battles, but we’ll eventually lose the war. The alternative is to fill the house, leaving no room for anything else.

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3 - The Great Paradox of the Kingdom of God

Paradox in Relation to three other concepts:

1. Mystery: beyond our ability fully to explain
 - black holes, dark matter, God's necessary existence
2. Tension: the truth of one affirmation coming at the expense of the truth of another affirmation
 - David being a "man of blood" *and* a "man after God's heart"
3. Contradiction: violation of logical rules; incoherent statement
 - "John is a married bachelor"
4. Paradox: an apparent contradiction, but which is ultimately resolvable.
 - God is three and one.

Jesus's Paradox about Walking in the Kingdom:

"Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it".
(Luke 9:24)

Some Implications:

1. An irony: the path to our own well-being is only achieved by focusing on things *other than* our well-being (serving God & others).
2. The call to be last, or least.
 - "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, the servant of all."* (Mark 9:35)
 - Seemingly, "last" in terms of the agendas we choose to prioritize
3. Re-thinking our picture of heaven
 - External rewards have no impact on our ultimate well-being, which alone is achieved through perfected relationships of love.
 - "Better to have a dry piece of bread in a peaceful house, than a feast in a house full of strife."* (Prov. 17:1)
4. Godly pleasures vs. the pleasures of sin
 - Sinful pleasures (quests of money, sex, power) always have *diminishing* returns, leading ultimately to self-destruction.
 - "A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.' He gave them permission, and the*

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4 - The Kingdom and Our Call to Work

Is the ideal life one of “glorious inactivity”?

In truth, God is always at work.

*"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."
(John 5: 17)*

God has always invited us to join him in his work.

"Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground." (Gen. 2:5)

1. St. Paul's perspective on his work.

"You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears..." (Acts 20:18)

His emphasis not on what he *did*, but on the *attitude* with which he did it.

He won't be distracted by his successes or by his failures.

2. The link between our work and our friendship with God.

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

In calling us to work, God shows us who he is and what his plans are, the hallmarks of friendship.

3. God's invitation to be co-workers comes at an enormous cost to him.

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."
(John 17:20-21)*

Yes, the invitation allows us to fellowship with him and others, allowing us to form a communion of saints. But the enormous cost of *misrepresentation* is seen throughout history (and seemingly attested to in the 3rd Commandment).

4. Our work should be a ministry of *teaching*.

The primary knowledge we give others is “over-the-shoulder” knowledge, following Jesus’s model of teaching (“Follow me.”)

5. The priesthood of all believer.

Within the new covenant Jesus established, there are no ‘first tier’ and ‘second tier’ Christian ministries.

6. Work outside the Church fulfills our mandate to be incarnational.

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” (Matt. 16:18)

7. Every object we touch can be sacramental.

Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,³¹ and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs...and to engage in all kinds of artistic crafts. And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work... (Exodus 35: 30-35)

“On the Day of the Lord every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD.” (Hez. 14:21)

Important to develop skill with our hands? Consider: Without technique (cashier, mechanic, data entry, home organization, cooking, etc.), personal piety never gets translated into using the things of God’s creation to bless others for the glory of God.

8. Our work is our way to make the Church *provocative*.

Our Christian ‘answers’ for others presuppose that they’re first asking questions!

We gain an audience with others when we: (1) achieve excellence in our work (including working hard); (2) demonstrate integrity at work; and (3) demonstrate a genuine concern for the other person.

Some questions for groups:

1. In all honesty, do I think of the work I do each week as an avenue of Christian ministry, in which I’m called to impart over-the-shoulder knowledge to others, and in which I can meet God in the sacramental objects I touch?
2. What are the main challenges of the work I’m doing each week?
3. What specifically might I commit to doing, as a way of fulfilling some aspect of the 3-pronged approach (excellence; integrity; demonstrated concern) to gaining a hearing from non-Christians with whom I come into contact regularly?

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5 - The Kingdom and Our Moral Imagination



Blaise Pascal

1623 - 1662

Mathematician, scientist, inventor...and after the 'Night of Fire' a Christian apologist

Our approach as Christ's ambassadors:

"Make good [people] wish it were true, and then show that it is."

(Pascal, *Pensées*)

1. The condition that others be "good"

-Not in the sense of pretending that others are "good people" and don't need a savior, but rather in the sense of helping others become *oriented toward* the good.

-If the convert *isn't* oriented toward the good, then, if one accepts Jesus (who *is* personified goodness/life), one will merely be accepting a distorted picture of who one imagines Jesus to be.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt. 7: 21-23)

-How to help orient others toward the good? Largely by helping others develop a healthy *moral imagination*.

Five practices in developing a healthy moral imagination:

- A. Regular acts directed toward God and others.
(songs to God, prayer walks with God, follow-up questions in conversations)
- B. Read good stories.
- C. Detox.
- D. Explore beauty (and it's connection to the good).
- E. Practice silence.

2. Making good people "wish it were true"

- A. By stoking others' desires for a larger story
(Encouraging others to dream bigger; and casting a vision for just how big and all-encompassing God's redemptive story is.)
- B. By being there for people when their smaller stories get shipwrecked.

3. "Showing that it is" true

- People don't typically accept invitations to a personal relationship by reviewing a list of facts.
- Instead, people use their *imagination* and imagine what their lives would look like if they were folded in with the other person's life.
- One key task of the Church is to give others an experience of the reality of God: a taste of the real life available as one's story is folded into God's larger story.

Some questions for groups:

1. With respect to some person(s) I want to help lead to Christ, which of Pascal's three stages represents the person's need at present?
2. What actions could I take to help lead this person through this stage?

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6 - The Kingdom and Divine Hiddenness

A big puzzle about walking daily in the Kingdom:
Why doesn't God make himself more obvious to us as we seek him?

"My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent." (Ps. 22:2)

3 Reasons God Might Have for Remaining Hidden:

1. Typically, clarity of *mind* is only helpful after purity of *heart* is achieved.

"God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will. Humble their pride." (Pascal, Pensées)

Intellectual clarity typically leads humans toward pride and self-sufficiency.

2. Consistent with God – not us – taking responsibility for guiding us into his plans.

"For God does speak—now one way, now another—though no one perceives it."

(Job 33:14)

God takes responsibility for making sure we don't miss his plans for our lives.

Our responsibility is to obey what we already know about God's will.

"The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand." (Psalm 37:24-25)

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me..., and I too will love them and show myself to them." (John 14:21)

Instead of thinking about God's will in terms of "right or left", instead think in terms of "right or wrong." If we do what we know is right, we'll know the right way to go.

3. Allows us as Christ's followers to form *community*.

Our relationships should come to reflect the relationships within the Trinity of *loving interdependence*. One thing we can provide for one another is shared learning about God.

3 Positive Steps Toward Walking in the Not-Yet Aspect of the Kingdom:

1. Read the Psalms

A theology in the Psalms of *personal encounter*. They give us words to pray at times when we cannot find our own words.

The Psalms cover every aspect of human disappointment and disillusionment: death of a loved one (Ps. 27); constant conflict (Ps. 90); the world ganging up on us (Ps. 118); unanswered prayer (Ps. 13); shame and guilt (Ps. 51); fear of the future (Ps. 37).

The Psalms were the Church's hymnbook for its first 1500 years.

Want to prayer the prayers that Jesus himself prayed? The Psalms were Jesus's own personal prayer book!

2. Continue to walk toward the perfection of God the Father

"Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Mark 5:28)

The cycle of pledging faithfulness...falling short...having to ask forgiveness:
A recipe for fullness of life, or a recipe for neurosis?!

Another way of looking at Christ's command: the Father's perfection gives us a *fixed point* toward which we can walk, a clear direction even in times of greatest uncertainty.

3. Follow Jesus's advice for overcoming worry

Matthew 6: 25-34

- A. My life is more than _____. (whatever the issue is).
- B. I am more valuable than crows.
- C. I cannot control the uncontrollable
- D. I should look and listen to nature
- E. I am not a pagan
- F. I need to seek first the Kingdom
- G. I need to live day by day

Some questions for groups:

1. In what area of my life right now does God seem 'hidden'?
2. What do I know God is already wanting me to do in this area?
3. As I wait on God, what steps can I commit to repeating, as a way of overcoming worry?

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7 - The Kingdom and the Reality of Suffering

Put simply, why would God allow evil in our world?

What 'greater good' could God be seeking to preserve?

4 Historic, Intellectual Appeals:

1. To free will

-both to *misused* freedom and to the natural adversities needed to make free will *possible* in the first place.

2. To character formation

"It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings."
(Heb. 2: 10)

3. To how we can appreciate the Good

-both in *understanding* the Good and being *motivated* to pursue it.

4. To the inscrutability of God

-Given that God's ways/thoughts are "higher" than ours, we're simply not in a position to see what God's good reasons might be.

6 Pastoral Considerations in the face of suffering:

1. We will be called, as followers of Jesus, to absorb costs.

On the cross, Jesus was absorbing the costs of gossip, jealousy, false accusation, scapegoating, cruelty, injustice, cowardice in not standing up to injustice—in short, all the things that put Jesus on the cross and that threaten relationships in general.

2. Standing with God may be the most we (or anyone) can do.

“But Naboth replied, ‘The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors.’” (1 Kings 21: 3)

The sequence in the Gospels: Jesus’s baptism → Jesus’s temptation in the wilderness → Jesus’s ministry with the disciples

Suffering will come our way. The question is whether we’re going to undergo it *as* a declared/baptized follower of God.

3. Our promise is union with Christ.

Consider our experiences with others of “sweet sorrow.”

4. Our promise is that our hurts will not only be *outweighed*; they will be *transformed*.

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”
(1 Peter 5: 10)

For some event to be “transformed” involves it being set in a *new context*, being *framed* in a new way, so that it comes to take on *new meaning* for us.

5. The prayers of those who are suffering have special significance.

“My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly.” (Job 42: 8)

6. God continues to love us unconditionally

So difficult to walk in this truth, since everything else in our world communicates that love/acceptance are conditional.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...” (Eph. 3: 17-19)