

KINGDOM LIVING PART I

Embracing The Virtues Of The King

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Two mistakes can be made when we consider the kingdom of God. We can think of Christ's rule on earth only in future terms. Or we can look for the influence of His power and authority only in the present.

Joe Stowell, in the following excerpt of his book *Eternity: Reclaiming A Passion For What Endures*, shows the importance of embracing both perspectives. He reasons that, according to the wisdom of the Bible, radical personal change requires that we honor the rule of Christ not only in the world to come, but presently in the world within.

Mart De Haan

Managing Editor: David Sper

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ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

Paul Azinger was at the height of his professional golf career when the doctor told him that he had life-threatening cancer. Up to that moment he had not given much thought to dying. Life was too all consuming for him to stop and consider the reality of the grave and all that is beyond. But that encounter with the inevitability of eternity was an abrupt reality check. His life would never again be the same. Even the \$1.46 million he had made as a professional golfer that year paled to insignificance. All he could think about was what the chaplain of the tour had said: “We think that we are in the land of the living going to the land of the dying when in reality we are in the land of the dying

headed for the land of the living.”

Embracing the reality of the world to come radically alters everything in this world. Our values are prioritized and purified. Money, things, time, friends, enemies, family, and life itself are all adjusted and given their appropriate worth and place.

If anyone should express the reality of eternity, it's those of us who have been guaranteed safe passage to the other side through Christ, our divine passport. Yet interestingly, we who are marked with heaven in our hearts usually live as though it were real but irrelevant. We are consumed with the tyranny of the temporal, and we trade both the character and power of a life with an eternal focus for the ordinary.

We are not unlike the

average person on the street who lives out an existence in the limited confines of a one-world point of view. Blinded to the reality of the world beyond, this earthbound person's all-consuming expectation is to experience maximum pleasure and prosperity here. Quality of life is measured in terms of accumulating stacks of stuff and ascending to platforms of power and position. Life is defined by eating this world's best food and drinking its best wines. Leisure and large doses of comfort shape the pursuit. Finding maximum peace and the thrill of maximum pleasure become an illusive quest—illusive because ultimately this world is, at best, a hollow experience and, at worst, leaves us disillusioned and in despair. When eternity is off the screen, all of life is compressed into

the distorted assumption that this is all we have. And, frankly, it's never quite enough.

Why? Because we are built for eternity. We are built for an eternal, unhindered relationship with God, who created us to know the deep pleasure of His companionship. But sin

We are built for eternity—an eternal, unhindered relationship with God, who created us to know the deep pleasure of His companionship.

altered the landscape and forced these innate longings to search this fallen planet for satisfaction instead. Our best experiences are only feeble, futile attempts to regain paradise lost.

Thankfully, redemption has put us back in touch with the eternal world beyond and has placed eternity in our hearts. Saving grace has blown down the walls that obscured our view of eternity and has given us a present relationship with Christ, the King of eternity, who now lives within us.

If you sense that you are missing something—that you had expected more—then perhaps you have neglected the pressing preeminence of the world to come and its first-wave expression in the person of the King who dwells in the world that is in our hearts. It is only when we actively embrace the world beyond and the world within in their proper perspectives that we become capable of finally coping with and conquering our fleeting experience in this present world.

THE KINGDOM LOOK

George Sweeting served as the sixth president of Moody Bible Institute for 16 distinguished years. Needless to say, it was a challenge for me to follow his season of service at Moody. Not only had he been an outstanding leader, but he also looked like the quintessential president. With his wavy, white hair, his soft eyes, and his sensitive, yet determined, countenance, he looked like the consummate president. His pulpit mannerisms were impeccable, his representation of Moody without stain. One of the broadcasting people at Moody told me that Dr. Sweeting never gave them any reason to be ashamed. Simply put, he not only had the look, he also had the character to support and

advance the cause to which Christ had called him.

It's like that for those of us who are called to manage the world within in such a way that we express to a watching world an accurate statement of both the look and the character of the kingdom of Christ that we belong to. As we think of reflecting the righteousness that is the core of the kingdom, we need to know what this righteousness specifically looks like as it is lived out. On what actual biblical targets can we focus? What mirrors can we hang in the closet of our souls to check the kingdom look that God has designed?

Obviously, a righteous life will reflect the compelling qualities of the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the kingdom fashions that adorn a pilgrim who is committed to righteousness. We can't

miss the fact that the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are fruits. They are the result of a process that involves our walking in (submitting to) the Spirit of the King, who always leads us to righteous behavior, the centerpiece of kingdom protocol.

Interestingly, in Galatians Paul contrasts these kingdom marks with the domain of darkness from which we have been delivered. The fashions of a fading, past, conquered, degenerating kingdom are: "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (5:19-21). Even if there were no world beyond and no kingdom within,

there would hardly be any contest between which qualities of life would be more desirable.

What then are the elements of righteousness that cultivate and produce these kingdom fruits in our lives? Since *righteousness* is such a huge word covering the full spectrum of all that is right before God according to His standards, we can categorize it into three segments: *righteous principles* and *righteous perspectives* that lead to *righteous practices*.

In this booklet, we will concentrate on the principles. In a companion booklet, we will look at the perspectives and practices (*Kingdom Living: Following The Perspectives And Practices Of The King* HP092).

PRINCIPLES OF THE KINGDOM

Let's explore the compelling principles of the kingdom. When we are driven by these principles, they inevitably produce the kingdom image in our lives. In fact, these principles are in reality more than just "values." They constitute God's moral authority in our lives. They are the *virtues* that define and dictate kingdom living.

We hear little about virtue in this present world. All of our talk about principles that determine behavior is in terms of *values*. There is a reason. Since this present culture rejects the thought of absolutes, there is no longer a supreme, single moral authority. Earthbound persons are free to structure their own set of values. One person's set of values is as valid as

another's. Therefore, nothing is really virtuous since virtue smacks of that which is best, that which is morally superior. In a very real sense, this present world has lost its virtue because it has rejected Christ the King as absolute and final moral authority.

In his book *First Things First*, Stephen Covey says of the weakness of values:

To value something is to esteem it to be of worth. And values are critically important. Our values drive our choices and actions. But we can value many different things—love, security, a big house, money in the bank, status, recognition, fame. Just because we value something does not necessarily mean it will create quality-of-life results. When what we value is in opposition to the natural laws that govern peace of mind

and quality of life, we base our lives on illusion and set ourselves up for failure. We cannot be a law unto ourselves (p.26).

Speaking of the importance of principled virtues, he concludes, “Values will not bring quality-of-life results . . . unless we value principles” (p.52).

William Bennett, former US Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, compiled *The Book Of Virtues* in an effort to re-inculcate the notion of virtue into our society. In this bestseller, he noted the difference between values and virtues. He wrote, “Today we speak about values, and how important it is for us to ‘have them’ as if they were beads on a string or marbles in a pouch.” He goes on to say, in contrast, that virtues are not something to be possessed but “something

to be, the most important thing to be” (p.14).

Historian Gertrude Himmelfarb adds that “the shift from ‘virtue’ to ‘values’ has had other unfortunate consequences,” including confining virtue to the idea of “chastity and marital fidelity” while forgetting to emphasize “the classical virtues of wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage, or the Christian ones of faith, hope, and charity” (*The De-Moralization Of Society*, 1994, p.15).

When Bennett’s book on virtues came out, I went to my local bookstore to buy a copy. After leafing through it, I took it to the counter where a trendy, bookish-type clerk took my money. As he did I naively said, “This looks like it could be a bestseller”—to which he replied rather caustically, “I hope not.” I was puzzled until I realized that the thought of virtues (moral

absolutes that define character and behavior) is not only foreign in the present world but unwelcome as well.

As kingdom transients, we commit ourselves to the moral absolutes of the King and strive to emulate these virtues in the midst of varying and often conflicting values in the world around us. The kingdom mind-set elevates eternal virtues as the highest point of success, admiration, and personal affirmation. Significantly, kingdom virtues feature character above credentials. In the community of belief, respectability and honor are grounded in character rather than position, power, or wealth. The poorest, least credentialed of us who is a virtuous kingdom traveler will find honor in our midst.

Unfortunately, many of us have opted for honor in

the earth-side values of fame, fortune, and wealth. For some of us, power is assumed to be in position rather than purity. Performance eclipses piety. Yet embracing the principles, the virtues, of the kingdom as the noblest element of our pilgrimage focuses our passion on kingdom character rather than earthbound stature.

What, then, are the virtues that produce kingdom righteousness? Since it is the righteousness of Christ that shapes the codes and conduct of the kingdom, we need to look to the principles, the virtues, that Christ embraced in the defining moments of His life. In fact, the incarnation, God in human form in the person of Christ, demonstrated for us what the King would do if He were on earth. That, in turn, demonstrates for us the essence of kingdom

behavior. Christ is the visible link to the character and quality of eternity in human earth-side dynamics. The moral authority that He imposed on His own person and relationships casts a clear vision of the virtues to which we must aspire as kingdom travelers.

DEFINING THE KINGDOM VIRTUES

There are at least seven kingdom virtues reflected in Christ's life. They are best understood in contrast to the earthbound value with which they compete. They are *truth*, as opposed to tolerance; *grace*, rather than greed; *love*, rather than self-centeredness; *servanthood*, in contrast to significance; *self-control*, as opposed to sensualism; *justice*, instead of oppression; *humility*, as opposed to haughtiness. These seven virtues, when we embrace them, forge kingdom character that

gives our lives a compelling uniqueness. Let's school ourselves in Christ's kingdom responses in this present world.

I. Truth. There is little doubt that the ruling value of this present, passing world is tolerance. Since society has no moral authority that dictates the absolutes to which it should strive, everything is legitimate as long as it doesn't harm or hinder another person. Because earthbound philosophers in their enlightenment have come to believe that there is no real right and wrong, to be truly modern we must tolerate everything. This is why gay liberation, abortion, sexual expression without limits, and other sinful activities are fully tolerated. This is why varieties of secular philosophies can be hailed as valid even in the face of their debilitating outcomes.

And this is why we are told to seek the truth but are persecuted when we say we have found it.

Yet kingdom persons find their lives formed by the virtue of truth. This inevitably puts us in conflict with the domain from which we have been delivered. Truth by its very nature is intolerant. If there is truth, then there is error. If there is right, then there is wrong. A kingdom person who is committed to truth will always tolerate those who are in error but will never tolerate error itself. Yet of all the principles of righteousness, truth must reign supreme. It is not that we arrogantly and arbitrarily claim to know truth; it is rather that we are people of the King who by His very nature is true. In fact, the penetrating impression that Christ made while on earth was that He was full of truth (Jn. 1:14)

and that His truth was the reflected glory of His Father.

As kingdom people we both embrace and express truth. The source of truth is the authoritative Word of God, which gives us solid life-related conclusions that are true regardless of the state of denial our present culture is in. We are people who speak the truth in love and confidence. We are true to our word and commitments. We are true to who we say we are and what we claim to be. We refuse to lie, deceive, cheat, or in any way erode what is true by either action or attitude. The character we develop as people of the truth is marked by integrity, reliability, and transparency. As people of the truth we are committed to what is truly fair and just, and we become champions for the oppressed and helpers of those who are genuine

victims. Most of all, we are true to God in word, deed, thought, and attitude.

God is true. All that He says and does is true. You can count on that. He is true to Himself, His Word, His people, His promises, and the entirety of His character. In His rule there is no error, no hypocrisy, no unfaithfulness, no injustice, no deceit. His kingdom is characterized by truth—a virtue toward which kingdom persons strive.

2. Grace. Standing alongside this certain and immovable virtue of truth is the second virtue that is clearly evident in the King: grace. When the apostle John remembered his life with the King, he remarked that Christ was full of grace (Jn. 1:14). Truth is final and firm, while grace enables and encourages the struggler to come to his or her full potential in the truth. It enables us to

recover when we fall. The domain of Satan celebrates those who have the power to personally advance themselves regardless of how ruthless they are with others. Grace focuses our power on empowering and enabling others to overcome and succeed. Grace is the perfect complement to truth. It paves the way to living by the standard of truth.

In this present world, the weak are victimized, discarded, and marginalized. In the kingdom, grace encourages and enables the weak in our midst. It is even extended to our enemies. Grace forgives, enabling restoration. Grace shares resources to meet needs. Grace patiently mentors. Grace listens, understands, and loves. Grace goes into danger first. Grace sees potential rather than problems.

Where would we be today if our lives had not been sustained by the grace of the King, who shares His power and resources with us for our eternal benefit? His amazing grace is a kingdom virtue, an eternal fashion that will benefit all who come within its reach.

The Pharisees had obviously framed the adulterous woman they brought to Jesus and set up a situation in which they hoped to discredit Him publicly. Christ said nothing to the Pharisees; He simply wrote something twice in the sand. Probably when He wrote with His finger in the sand, He was reflecting the God of Israel, who wrote the tablets of the law twice because of His grace toward a people who had sinned against Him. To the Pharisees, it was a reminder of the God of grace. And to the woman, He extended both grace and truth:

“Go, and sin no more”
(Jn. 8:11 KJV).

The Nations Ford Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, found just the right place to plant their church where they could develop a ministry for God’s glory. It was a vacant church building on the edge of what had been a long-standing blue-collar, white area of town. In fact, the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan lived down the street, as did many adherents of his sect. Needless to say, the prospect of this church settling into this neighborhood met stiff resistance in the community, given the fact that at the time the Nations Ford Community Church was a body of African-American believers.

The pastor, Phil Davis, could have led his church down the road of political

conquest by using the ACLU to guarantee their place there. He could have opted to call the editor of the *Charlotte Observer* to bring to bear the power of the media to publicly intimidate the neighborhood resistance. If the Nations Ford Church wanted a still stronger power play, Davis and the church members could have called the Advocacy Hotline at the US Justice Department and retained a federal civil rights lawyer to protect their rights. Or they could have decided that this was simply another case of the racism that historically subjugated our nation and retreated into a cocoon of deepening self-pity and bitterness toward their enemies who surrounded them in the neighborhood.

Instead, Nations Ford Community Church did something far more

dramatic and effective. They demonstrated their commitment to the lordship of Christ.

Members of the Nations Ford Community Church understood that there was another option available to them, one grounded in God's plan for penetrating hostile environments with the good news of Jesus Christ. Realizing that the neighborhood around their new property was struggling with encroaching poverty and unemployment and that creditors were litigating many of the residents, the church focused its attention on a ministry of compassion to the needs of the neighborhood. Since some of the members of the congregation were legal, financial, and medical professionals, they opened an office outside the community (to avoid causing embarrassment to those community members

who made use of these services) and began to give legal, medical, and financial counsel and service to their new neighbors. The businesspersons in the church offered employment opportunities to the unemployed. Over a brief period of time, these acts of grace toward their enemies melted the resistance and opened the doors of that community, not only to the Nations Ford Community Church but also to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since 1987, the church has grown from 11 to 3,000 members. The church offers over 30 different ministries of service to members and the community. Nations Ford Church also has started three other congregations. It was the power of grace in the midst of a hostile neighborhood that melted the resistance and opened

hearts to the power of redemption.

Phil Davis and his church are clearly kingdom travelers. When they extended marvelous grace to the community, they forecast the dawning of a new day, of an eternity where grace abounds.

3. Love. Among the virtues displayed most clearly in the everyday activities of Christ was the obvious expression of His unconditional love toward all. His love transcended ethnic, gender, moral, and socio-economic barriers. Jesus loved tax collectors and sinners, wealthy and poor, Pharisees and prostitutes. And He loved not by choice or random decision. He is love. He can't help but love. It's an essential aspect of His character. What then is the definition of this kingdom virtue?

The kingdom principle

of love requires that we choose (whether we feel good about it, whether we like the person who is to be loved, whether that person deserves it) to reach out and yield ourselves and our resources to the needs of others. As Christ commanded, we are first to love Him (yield completely to Him) and then, because we are yielded to Him, love our neighbor as ourselves. In fact, in following this sequence we can tell how much we love God by the way we treat those around us (Mt. 22:34-40).

The competing cultural value is not hate but self-centeredness. In this look-out-for-number-one world, where self-interest and the disregard of others' needs are encouraged, the authentic pilgrim denies the earthly grip of self and seeks to be a blessing to others.

The pressure to claim and cling to our rights may

be the greatest challenge of all to transcend because the world expects us to demand privileges and personal attention. But kingdom protocol elevates love as a distinct virtue. And in a world where self-centeredness has isolated us into ghettos of one, where our self-centeredness has left us lonely and unfulfilled, and where hearts are starved for true love and concern with no strings attached, the impact of love flowing from a kingdom life will cut like a laser beam through the darkness in this present world and enter lives that are looking for the light of Christ the King.

Love as a kingdom virtue is to be focused toward God and neighbor (Lk. 10:27), toward fellow followers of Christ (Jn. 13:34-35), toward wives from husbands (Eph. 5:25), toward the flock in feeding and caring ministries (Jn.

21:15-17), and even toward our enemies (Mt. 5:43-48).

Buster Soaries, pastor of First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, New Jersey, has a clear commitment to express kingdom love, even to his enemies. Several years before he became a Christian, he was kidnapped by five drug dealers who planned to take his life. With a shotgun in his face, a .45 at the back of his head, and a rifle jammed in his side, Buster was chauffeured to a vacant lot and dragged out of the car early one morning. Just before his kidnappers fired their guns, the driver noticed a police car parked on a nearby highway. Fearing that the police would hear the shots, they threw Buster back into the car. Nearly 5 hours later, their plans foiled, the kidnappers were instructed by their gang lord to let Buster go. They made

it clear to him that they would get him later.

Talk about enemies! Buster had every reason to both fear and hate those men. As he was not yet a believer, he had resolved to take revenge the next time he saw them. It was an understandable response—that is, until he later encountered Christ and began learning what it meant to live by the unique principles of the kingdom.

Some time later, at a gathering of more than 20,000 at Madison Square Garden, to Buster's surprise the man who had once held a .45 to the back of his head was standing in front of him. Immediately a surge of hatred and retaliation flowed within him—alongside the Spirit's clear reminder that he needed to demonstrate the principles of the kingdom by loving his enemy. Would he seek to protect himself

and shy away out of fear? Would he seek to remedy the injustice of the past and use this as an opportunity to even the score? Or would he discard those earth-side responses in order to use the moment to model the love of Christ?

Buster approached his “enemy” and, much to the kidnapper's shock, hugged him, told him he loved him, and said that if he needed anything to let him know and that he would be happy to help him in any way. Buster says, “That man almost dropped dead right then and there.”

And the King rejoiced that through the faithfulness of His servant, His love had cut like a laser beam from the stretches of eternity into the darkness of that man's heart.

4. Servanthood. The fourth virtue that shapes our conduct as kingdom travelers is servanthood. It

is a fascinating twist to note that when Christ the King arrived on our planet, having the highest position in the universe, He used His position to serve. In fact, He took on the identity of a servant. Then the King instructed His disciples to take on the perspective of servants, which stood in great contrast to the domain's obsession with significance.

The disciples were more inclined to sit around discussing who would hold the highest office of significance and power in the kingdom. So in a dramatic and instructive moment, the King put on a towel and washed their feet to demonstrate the importance of servanthood. In fact, when the mother of James and John asked if her sons could sit on His right and left in the kingdom, Jesus answered, "You know that the rulers of the

Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:25-28).

Paul pointed to the King as our example when He commanded that we . . .

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not

regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:3-8).

Success in the kingdom is measured by our service to others. The final divine compliment will be reserved only for those travelers who are “good and faithful [servants]” as they travel toward home (Mt. 25:21).

The Promise Keepers movement, mass gatherings of men who worship and commit themselves to basic biblical principles, has been so successful that it has drawn the attention of the secular press. It is clear that the kingdom commitments of Promise Keepers to loving God and growing strong

families fly in the face of the values of this present world. One television documentary covered the Promise Keepers movement. At the close of the documentary was an interview with an avowed Promise Keeper. He said at the close of his comments that while he was a leader in his family, he was a servant to his wife.

The news anchors, in their wrap-up discussion of the documentary, commented on that statement. One of them said, “I thought that was very interesting that he said he was the servant of his wife. Isn’t it an anomaly that one could be a leader and a servant?”

Well, it is—if all you have is the mind-set of this present world. But if you know Christ, then you know that that’s exactly who He was. And it’s what He calls us to be as well. The Promise Keeper in that

interview adorned his life with the likeness of His King.

5. Self-Control. As we will note later, this world's most powerful urges flow from the passions of our souls: "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1 Jn. 2:16). All of these have to do with the seductive power of our senses. We are built to be sensual in the right sense. In fact, if we didn't have these sensual capacities, we wouldn't want to eat, procreate, succeed in our work, or relate well to others. A life without these impulses would be a life of vegetation.

The problem with our senses is not that we have them, but that this world's system encourages us to use them solely for our own pleasure and gain, regardless of the righteous context in which they are

intended to be enjoyed. Kingdom people are not controlled by their sensual urges but bring them under the control of the King, who guides them to productive ends for His glory and the gain of the kingdom. And as a bonus, we find fulfillment and joy in our sensual experiences without the guilt and destructive erosion that takes place in our world when we spend our passions on ourselves.

Nowhere did the King more dramatically demonstrate this kingdom virtue of self-control than when He came face-to-face with the prince of the domain of darkness in the wilderness when His basic instincts were most vulnerable (Mt. 4:1-11). After Jesus had fasted for 40 days, Satan lured Him to satisfy Himself by following the adversary's promptings. Satan tempted Him with food, self-authentication,

power, fame, and position. Yet Christ put Himself under a higher moral authority than Satan, used the power of the Word of God to direct His responses, and, as a result, said no to His impulses so that He could say yes to the honor and glory of His Father.

The issue for those of us who occupy His kingdom is: Under whose moral authority do we live? And to whom will we be loyal, regardless of our inner impulses? Will it be the prince of this planet, our own inner urges, or the clear Word of God, which directs and protects us as we travel toward home?

The virtue of self-control stands as a clear mark of the kingdom in the face of the phenomenal pressure of the sensualism of our day. Our senses are seduced to be self-directed at every turn. Yet kingdom

travelers place their senses under the Spirit's control through the moral authority of the righteous directives of the Word of God. As Christ resisted the seductive impulses of His senses, He became our High Priest, able to understand and empathize with us as we are tempted. As One who can identify with us, He readily gives us grace (His power and enablement) to guarantee our success as well (Heb. 4:14-16). When we yield our urgings to His control, our character assumes an obvious purity, both internally and externally, that is a unique display of kingdom righteousness.

Control is the key concept. This present world encourages us to stay personally in control of relationships, destiny, wealth, power, and passion. But if we are concerned with

virtue, the issue is not what we control but who or what controls us. If it is our senses and environment, then we are earthlings at heart. If it is the Word and His Spirit, then we are authentic kingdom adherents.

6. Justice. Justice is the sixth kingdom virtue. Kingdom justice stands in sharp contrast to the blatant and prevalent oppression and treachery toward which permanent residents on this planet are so prone. If all that we have is this world and what we can get and gain here, then we'll do whatever we can to advance and empower ourselves, even if it is at the expense of others. As a result, the weaker, less fortunate elements of society become pawns to be used and discarded for personal gain.

These oppressive tendencies are denounced

throughout Scripture. In fact, God distanced Himself from Israel who, though faithful in terms of their ritual practices, had failed to justly deal with oppressive behavior. In Isaiah chapter 58, Israel pled for a greater sense of God's presence and power, and He responded:

If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom will become like midday. And the Lord will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail (vv.9-11).

It's interesting how quiet we are, as kingdom believers, about oppression and the oppressive systems of this present world. Few voices are raised against racist structures that intentionally deny empowerment, worth, and dignity to gifted and precious persons because of passport or pigment. Slavery was a blatant expression of injustice to people of worth and dignity. Apartheid was an injustice in recent times. Ethnic cleansing is a violation of the just rights of humanity.

In 1955, an African-American Christian woman in her forties refused to surrender her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Many now call Rosa Parks the mother of the civil rights movement and consider her act one of courage. But Rosa called her action one of faith.

“I felt the Lord would give me strength to endure whatever I had to face,” Rosa said. “It was time for someone to stand up—or, in my case, to sit down. I refused to move.”

Kingdom people must be willing to stand, or sit, for what is right and just. We will not oppress, control, or prey on the weaker ones around us for our own gain. In fact, kingdom grace seeks to protect and empower them. Not only are we just in all our dealings with others, we cry out against injustice and seek to loosen the bonds of wickedness and let the oppressed go free and divide our bread with the hungry.

While Christ our King often raised the standard of justice against oppression, nowhere is this virtue more dramatically depicted than when He cleansed the temple (Mk. 11:15-17).

Many have thought that the offense was selling things in the temple (and as a result some have concluded we should never sell things at church, certainly not on Sunday). The actual problem has to do with the selling of animals and the changing of currency that was carried on as a service to pilgrims who had come from far countries. Because they had traveled a distance, they were not able to bring sacrificial animals with them to the temple. The offense was that the moneychangers and those who sold animals were charging exorbitant rates to helpless pilgrims who had no choice but to buy their sacrifices. These merchants were running an oppressive economic enterprise. In order to buy a dove, you had to change your money for temple currency at unjust rates and then pay several times the market

value for your sacrifice. And the text indicates that the religious leaders of the day were all part of the scheme. That's why Christ called the merchants thieves and robbers. They were unjustly charging helpless pilgrims for their own gain.

There is no scam more blatantly unjust than one that plays on a person's instincts to please and serve God. As Christ said, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den" (Mk. 11:17). Injustice in the name of a just God is a serious offense to the kingdom.

The King became our champion all the way to the cross when we were oppressed in sin and hopelessly doomed by the treachery of this present dark domain. The cross stands as a symbol of justice where the price

of sin was paid and the oppressed were set eternally free. Justice stands at the heart of the righteousness of His kingdom. It is guided by truth, empowered by grace, motivated by love, activated by a servant's heart, and governed by the control of the Spirit. It is the culmination of kingdom virtues. All of them come together at the cross.

Few have exemplified justice in action on behalf of God more than William Wilberforce. As a young man he rose in British politics and became one of the youngest people ever to hold a seat in Parliament. Though slight of build and somewhat anemic in appearance, his oratory and rhetoric powerfully moved the British populace. He became a dear friend of William Pitt, the prime minister. In fact, word on the street was that Wilberforce would himself

someday be prime minister of Britain.

His heart, however, was troubled by the fact that Britain had become one of the leading slave-trading nations in the world. The slave trade was a great economic boon to powerful and wealthy businessmen in England. They held much sway in politics, and Wilberforce knew that it would be political suicide to fight for the abolition of the slave trade in England. But as a true kingdom citizen, he put kingdom virtues over personal gain and dedicated his life to eliminating slave trade from the British marketplace. After long years of concentrated effort, he succeeded. He never became prime minister of England, but his name stands larger today than all the prime ministers of his day. And more than that, he demonstrated for the entire world to see that there are

virtues that transcend power, fame, wealth, and earthly acclaim. He was an admirable kingdom representative.

7. Humility. The seventh principle of kingdom living that becomes a virtuous expression of our allegiance to the King is humility instead of haughty self-exaltation. Again the King dramatically demonstrated this kingdom virtue for us, since if anyone didn't need to be humble, it was He. Yet the King of glory, the Creator of the universe, humbled Himself to maximize His effectiveness in fulfilling His Father's plan.

The first thing to note about this particular kingdom virtue is that it is a choice, not a state of being. So often we envision true humility as a temperament or a particular persona that we carry around with us. If

we are quiet, unassuming, undemanding, frail, and easily victimized, and we carry all of this with a kind and sweet spirit, then we are considered truly humble. In fact, some people who assume this type of humility are quite proud of how humble they have become. Yet it's actually possible for someone to be rather bold, courageous, clearly articulate, and highly effective, and at the same time manifest a true spirit of humility. In fact, isn't that an exact profile of our King?

True humility relates to two basic choices we make. The first is a choice to recognize that all we are and all we accomplish is due only to the fact that Someone else has made it possible for us to succeed. True humility gives credit to Someone who is above and beyond ourselves, without

whose assistance and provision we could do nothing. Second, true humility chooses to humble its will in submission to a higher moral authority. In simple terms, truly humble people obey not only in the realm of active choices but also in their acceptance of the places, positions, and lots in life that our Supreme Authority, in His sovereignty, assigns for His divine purposes.

Christ consistently spoke of doing all that He did for the glory of His Father in heaven. In John 9, as He was getting ready to heal the blind beggar, He proclaimed that the man had been born blind “that the works of God might be displayed in him” (v.3). Jesus could have been tempted to glorify Himself through the miracle, but instead He focused the attention on the power of God the Father through

His life. In fact, Christ gave up His own glory to come to this earth where He was misrepresented, marginalized, rejected, impoverished, and criminalized in order that His Father might be glorified through the redemptive rescue of those whom Satan had captured for his own domain. So evident to Christ was this loss of personal glory that He prayed in His high priestly prayer (Jn. 17) that the Father might eventually restore the glory that He had forfeited to come to earth.

Our King demonstrated true humility by not only giving His Father the glory and accepting God’s assignment for Him in His homeless circumstance on this planet, but He also was willing to obey His Father all the way to the cross. Paul underscored this aspect of true humility

when he wrote that Christ “humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).

What then do we make of our search for exaltation? The domain through which we are passing in a sense allows for exaltation to come when we demand it by haughtily promoting ourselves. In the world of the kingdom, exaltation comes in God’s time and in God’s way. After Paul, in Philippians 2, stated that Christ humbled Himself, he assured his readers that God the Father ultimately will exalt His Son. For those of us who are kingdom travelers, Peter admonished us to “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7). Interestingly,

this was written just before the famous verse about our adversary, the devil, who goes about seeking to devour us. Then the passage goes on to say that those to whom Peter was writing were suffering great persecution and that they were to be careful not to seek to remove themselves from their plight out of a desire for self-enhancement but must humbly continue to be used of God.

True humility, living for God’s glory and the gain of His kingdom in a spirit of unquestioned obedience, is a principle that affects our behavior and moves our attitudes and responses toward that which is truly righteous. We live for the glory of a righteous God and follow the directives of One who cannot tell us to do anything but that which is truly righteous.

A CONCERT OF VIRTUOUS LIVING

All seven of the kingdom virtues blend in a beautiful concert of character and impact for the King. Rarely do they stand independently and alone. Love will motivate grace, justice, and servanthood. Justice will need truth, grace, humility, and love to guard it from becoming cold, cruel, and misdirected. Self-control will need truth to guide it and humility to protect it from pride and judgmental attitudes. And while all of these produce the righteous style of the kingdom, they are rooted in an unwavering allegiance to Christ, who exemplifies their application in this present world.

These are the virtues by which kingdom travelers are measured. They create the

grid through which all our decisions are made. They are the essence of eternity in us expressed through us. They are the key to character and our

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insulation from the consequences of the earth-side values that constantly seek to erode and deteriorate personal stability, satisfaction, and meaningful relationships.

Note the contrast between the principles of the kingdom and the principles of this present world system by reviewing the chart “Kingdom Virtues vs. Earth-side Values” on the next two pages.

CHARACTER	KINGDOM VIRTUE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opposed to falsehood and sin • Committed to biblical absolutes • Open to conviction • Confident in what is true 	TRUTH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses power and resources to empower others to succeed • Generous • Merciful • Forgiving 	GRACE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring toward others • Compassionate • Shares goods and resources • Sacrificial and patient 	LOVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses position to enhance and advance others • Attentive to others' needs • Seeks to serve others • Views resources as means of helping others 	SERVANTHOOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discerning and disciplined • Determined • Peaceful, safe 	SELF-CONTROL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks to relieve the oppressed • Protects others • Promotes equality of mankind 	JUSTICE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives credit where due • Accepts assigned place • Obedient • Grateful 	HUMILITY

EARTH-SIDE VALUE**CONSEQUENCES**

TOLERANCE

- Tolerance of falsehood and sin
- Pragmatic
- Closed to conviction
- Vacillating

GREED

- Uses power and resources for personal gain at others' expense
- Ruthless
- Vengeful

SELF-CENTEREDNESS

- Preoccupied with self
- Compassionless
- Hoards goods and resources
- Resists sacrifice and suffering

SIGNIFICANCE

- Seeks noticeable and affirmed significance
- Insensitive to others' needs
- Expects others to serve self
- Materialistic

SENSUALISM

- Vulnerable to impulse/addiction
- Irresolute
- Victimized by results of sin

OPPRESSION

- Victimizes weak for personal gain
- Ruins others to enhance self
- Promotes racial/ethnic strife

HAUGHTINESS

- Takes credit to self
- Envious, jealous
- Arrogant, assertive
- Insubordinate, grumbling

The sign that we have indeed been delivered from the domain of darkness and deposited into the kingdom of His dear Son is the increasing evidence that we have embraced these virtues that are so clearly

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expressed by our King. Christlikeness is the result of an inner world managed by the King. The ultimate compliment we can receive in this life is for others to notice that we are like the King.

Though these virtues are principles that govern and direct all that we do, Christ our King extends their

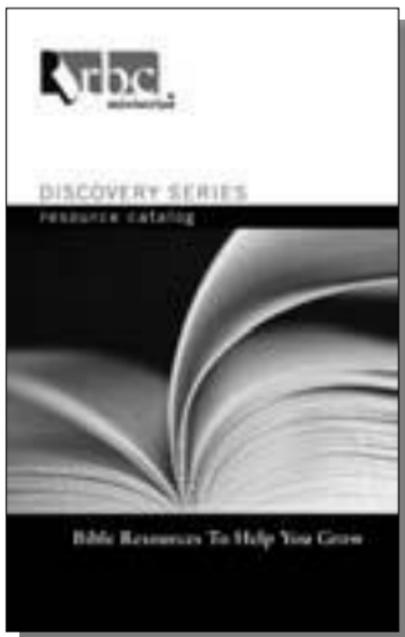
application to specific perspectives and practices that characterize a pilgrim whose heart is fixed on paradise. In the Sermon on the Mount, He answers the question, "What does my daily routine look like in attitude and action when I live by kingdom virtues?" We will look at this in a companion to this booklet: *Kingdom Living: Following The Perspectives And Practices Of The King* (HP092).



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If this booklet has been helpful to you, check out Joe's ministry online at www.getmorestrength.org for his weekly thought-provoking messages or his *Daily Strength* devotionals.

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