

# KINGDOM LIVING PART 2 Following The Perspectives And Practices 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.

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# KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

**M**any heated discussions end in the verbal standoff, “Well, let’s face it, we just have a different point of view.” How is it that one person can see fishing as the most boring pastime in the world and shopping as the most thrilling event of a weekend? It’s beyond most men’s comprehension. It’s a matter of perspective. It affects everything. How we look at life, music, fashion, and friends is determined by our point of view.

Followers of Christ in tune with their inner world not only realize that they have changed places and embraced a new set of principles but that they also have an entirely new perspective on life—a point of view that revolutionizes

their way of thinking and acting. Those of us who are committed to expressing the virtues of Christ’s kingdom within (see *Kingdom Living: Embracing The Virtues Of The King* HP091) must move toward an eager understanding and adoption of the perspectives and resultant practices of the kingdom experience.

I grew up as a pastor’s kid, sometimes unaffectionately called a “P.K.” I wish I had \$5 for every time someone said, “Young man”—and I always knew I was in trouble when they started like that—“you’re the pastor’s son. You should set the example for the other children.” Quite frankly, although I was happy to accept all the advantages and privileges of being the pastor’s son, I had little or no interest in modifying my behavior to be consistent with my identity. To “be

good” was not what I wanted to be. I was full of fun and mischief like every other kid, and conformity was a burden.

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*When we get a grip on the reality of eternity and the superiority of the kingdom, . . . living from a kingdom point of view becomes a privilege, not a problem.*

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As kingdom travelers, if we are not properly focused we will share a lot in common with the plight of the P.K. We revel in the perks of the kingdom—significance, security, freedom from ultimate despair—but often struggle with allegiance

and conformity to the perspectives and practices of the kingdom. But unlike burdened pastoral offspring, when we get a grip on the reality of eternity and the superiority of the kingdom, particularly in contrast to the consequences of life according to this present world, living from a kingdom point of view becomes a privilege, not a problem.

## **THE KING'S DECLARATION**

The coming of Christ brought the culture of the kingdom into clear focus, particularly in terms of how it is lived out in this present world. Nowhere is it clearer than in the book of Matthew, which, more than the other Gospels, features the theme of Christ as King. And nowhere are the details of kingdom perspectives and practices more specific than in Christ's Sermon on

the Mount (Mt. 5–7).

The Sermon on the Mount was, as some have termed it, the ordination sermon for the disciples, charting for them the distinctive nature of kingdom behavior. From an earth-side point of view, this Sermon is a radical expression of the kingdom in contrast to the normal patterns of life in this dark domain. One scholar has called the Sermon on the Mount the “Magna Carta of the Kingdom.”

Unfortunately, many have felt that the Sermon on the Mount was Christ’s prophetic statement about what life will be like in the literal millennial kingdom when He comes to reign on this earth. And while that is certainly true, it ignores the fact that the perspectives and practices portrayed in this Sermon are eternal qualities that emanate from the very nature of the King

Himself. It would be a gross distortion of the eternal nature of righteousness to say that we can ignore this kingdom point of view and wait to express these practices until He reigns as King on the earth. He reigns as King within our hearts now. We, as His subjects, live presently under His authority and gladly submit all we are and have to Him.

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***The Sermon on the Mount forms our attitude and action in every area of life and expresses an accurate reflection of the King who reigns within.***

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To be specific, the Sermon on the Mount delineates 10 life perspectives that translate

into clear kingdom practices in our lives. These 10 perspectives form our attitude and action in every area of life and express an accurate reflection of the King who reigns within. The 10 categories deal with a radically different perspective on people, a new sense of purpose, and unique perspectives on personal relationships, personal piety, prosperity, inner peace, personal accountability, prayer, spiritual perception, and the authority of Christ's proclamation.

Not unlike the Ten Commandments, these 10 perspectives of the kingdom become a means of managing our inner world and also measure how far we have come in terms of kingdom behavior. They create, as well, a point of accountability by which we can ultimately give a good report to the King.

## **SIX KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE KING'S SERMON**

Before we can hope to apply our King's point of view, there are six keys that enable us both to understand the meaning of the Sermon and the effective implementation of the perspectives.

First, Christ intended that eternity be kept in clear view. If there is no world beyond, then little in the Sermon makes sense. For instance, you can give away a coat if the possessions that truly count are already reserved for you in heaven (Mt. 5:40; 6:19-20). If there is a better, safer, longer life beyond, then the Sermon's demands on our lives are reasonable and applicable.

Second, since righteousness is the centerpiece of Christ's rule, it becomes the highest law in every deliberation of life. If we are to err in any

direction, we should lean toward that which advances righteousness rather than that which would give ground to unrighteousness in our lives or the lives of others. According to the Sermon, it would be better to be personally taken advantage of than to give cause for another to act unrighteously.

Third, throughout this kingdom proclamation, Christ views life from the priority of that which is internal. In contrast to the religious environment of His day, He moves beyond the outward scenery to the inner landscape. With the King, people are like fruit. It's not how good they look on the outside; it's the inside that validates the quality.

Fourth, it's clear that the Sermon values that which is spiritual over that which is material and temporal. Given a choice, the kingdom

perspective always defers to the former. The soul is of greater priority.

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Fifth, we must understand and welcome the tension that is inherent in Christ's teaching. Christ is imposing the standards of a perfectly pure kingdom culture onto a fallen and treacherous world. If at times the Sermon seems to contradict this present world's sense of what is reasonable, it's because this world's point of view is inevitably in conflict with the kingdom culture of

Christ. The fault is not with the Sermon but with the imperfect world. True wisdom belongs to the King.

The sixth and final key in applying the perspectives and practices that are taught in the Sermon is that we should not expect God to treat us in ways that we are unwilling to treat others. If we are ruthless, unforgiving, and evil with others, then it is presumptuous for us to plead with God to be patient, tolerant, kind, and forgiving with us.

These, then, are the six grids through which the Sermon must be filtered as we seek to understand and implement its teaching.

## **PRACTICING WHAT HE PREACHED**

The Sermon is, in effect, the manual for managing the world within. The chart “Kingdom Perspectives And Practices” on pages 30-31

summarizes the 10 perspectives and their resultant practices. These guidelines are the essence of what it means to express eternity through the daily management of our lives. No one will be able to ignore the reality of a righteous, conquering King when our redeemed world within is governed by these practices.

### **I. Getting People In Perspective (Mt. 5:1-12).**

The first and most famous section of the Sermon on the Mount gives us a clear kingdom perspective on people. This section, commonly known as the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:1-12), creates a dramatically different picture of who the truly blessed people are in this present world.

The world to which Christ came was not much different from the world through which we travel. Blessedness, or happiness,

in this present world is defined by wealth, power, comfort, good health, and the capacity to define and realize our own dreams. Those who achieve these goals are marked as the best and the blessed in this present world. Those who never quite make it are the unimportant, weak, and unfortunate.

But Christ dramatically reorients our point of view. He declares that those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness are the ones who are truly blessed.

There's an interesting twist to the word Christ uses for *blessed*. It's the Greek word that means "happy." The Isle of Cyprus, which was an island with a

great climate, bountiful flowers and fruits, rich minerals, and abundant natural resources, was known as "the happy Isle"—no doubt the Caribbean of that day. The word used here about the blessedness of life is the word that the Greeks used when they spoke of Cyprus. The wealthy had elaborate homes on the island, and the poor and estranged flocked there to provide their services as servants. These underclass people seemed anything but blessed in contrast to the wealthy island residents.

That would not only be true in Cyprus but throughout the land of Israel, where blessedness was measured by material and physical prosperity. Those who did not prosper would reflect a lack of blessing.

Christ, however, claims that from a kingdom point

of view, those who seem to be anything but blessed are in reality the blessed ones. Christ specifically notes why. Earth-side blessedness

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***Earth-side  
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July, it becomes  
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smoke in the sky.***

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is but a fleeting ecstasy. Then, like fireworks on the Fourth of July, it becomes merely a trace of smoke in the sky—a prelude to significant loss on the other side if we are not found in Jesus Christ. But those who suffer loss and disempowerment in this present world have a clearer hope for eternity, where

blessedness is secured for them. In fact, they can more easily believe in the value of what is to come since there is so little for them here.

*“The poor in spirit”* are those whose hearts are fixed on the prosperity that the King provides eternally. Since they have confidence in Christ and Him alone, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*“Those who mourn”* are confident that throughout eternity they will know the comfort of God. That is certainly superior to a griefless life here and an eternity of mourning.

*“The gentle”* here are those who respond in grace and forgiveness to their offenders. They are those who do not use their power for revenge against their enemies. They are vulnerable and suffer measures of loss. Yet they will inherit possessions that

cannot be taken from them. As Christ said, “They shall inherit the earth” (v.5).

In a world where people hunger and thirst to satisfy their lusts with evil, Christ says it is those who passionately pursue righteousness who will ultimately find satisfaction.

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“*The merciful*” will find mercy with God.

In a world that

celebrates the capacity to manipulate life in sinful ways, Christ elevates those who by contrast are “*pure in heart*” (motives), for, as He points out, they shall know intimacy with God.

In contrast to those who use intimidation and disruption to gain selfish ends, Christ said that those who live to make peace (“*the peacemakers*”) are known throughout eternity as sons of God, since God Himself is the ultimate peacemaker.

Those who have defined their lives by the virtues of the kingdom and suffered persecution from a world that hates the principles of paradise will remain unshaken because heaven will be eternally theirs.

As Christ concludes this section, He reminds us that “*those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness*” (v.10) will have a “reward in heaven” that is “great” (v.12).

The practices that grow out of this unique eternal perspective on people are many. But let's look at two.

First, this perspective radically alters how I look at others. It changes me in terms of who I admire and seek to emulate. In this world it's easy to admire the powerful and to follow in their way. But a kingdom person looks at people differently. The people I admire around me are those who have honor in kingdom terms. They become objects of my respect and affirmation. Those who are truly blessed become an object of my embrace, not an embarrassment.

Second, this perspective drives me to value above all else righteousness, mercy, purity, peace, and perseverance.

I am now aware that focusing my passions on righteousness will prepare my heart to know the

satisfaction of the righteousness that will characterize and dominate all of eternity. I will develop patterns of righteous living here. And, in fact, I will avoid the regret that comes from unrighteousness, which actually erodes fulfillment.

Knowing that God is determined to show mercy toward those who are merciful encourages me to practice mercy in all my relationships.

Understanding this perspective on life should motivate me to be pure in heart, which means that as a kingdom person I measure my motives by the righteous standards of the kingdom.

As a kingdom person, my view of life will be to pursue peace and promote peace in my relationships so that I might reflect that character of my King, peacemaking Jesus.

And if I am misunderstood, maligned, or marginalized—physically or mentally persecuted because I am fully committed to the virtues and practices of righteousness that accurately reflect my place in the kingdom—then I will not be shaken. I have the confidence that though they may take everything from me here, the kingdom of heaven will ultimately be mine.

These perspectives on life obviously make a dramatic difference in the practice of my life.

**2. Purpose In Life (Mt. 5:13-20).** The second perspective that radically alters our practice in life as a kingdom traveler deals with a revised definition of the purpose of life. Christ goes on in His Sermon (vv.13-16) to relate that we are to live as salt and light in this world. Salt

functions as a flavoring agent. It seems evident that Christ is saying that our practice in this present world needs to deepen and bring richer, truer taste to life. From the context, we are to do this by living out the principles of the kingdom. In a sense, living out the uniqueness of kingdom virtues and perspectives enhances an otherwise tasteless world.

Salt has a preserving element as well. During Jesus' day, many of the soldiers received part of their pay in salt, a valuable commodity that would preserve their food from spoiling. As salt preserved meat, so kingdom people are to preserve truth by promoting the principles of righteousness.

When we manage our world within in a way that expresses the kingdom practices of righteousness, we function as a preservative

in this present world. Through a righteous presence in both proclamation and practice, we help to preserve the sanity and safety that only comes when a society lives righteously. The salt of our righteousness preserves an otherwise decaying world through parents who rear godly children, employers who apply biblical ethics toward their employees, voters who support righteous causes, and citizens who cry out against violence and injustice.

Kingdom subjects live out this kingdom purpose as lights in the darkness. Our “light” is the impact that our good works (v.16) have on this dark domain. Good works are not just nice Boy Scout types of things. While good works may at times be nice, and while they may involve helping an elderly person across the street, they are

deeper and more significant than that. In Scripture, good works are the result of a non-negotiated commitment to righteousness. They are the outcomes of a life fully submitted to the authority of the King.

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dark domain.***

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Since Christ the King is unquestionably good and can be nothing but good, when I submit myself to Him, only that which is good emanates from my heart and life.

Christ indicates that our good works cut like beams of light through the darkness of the world in which we live. Like cities set on a hill, we cannot

help but be noticed. And as people see us, even though they may not want to listen to us, these good works become so compelling in contrast to the despairing results of their unrighteousness that they will at the least admit that there is something unique about our lives. As verse 16 notes, in many cases they too will come to seek and know the King and glorify Him with us.

In his book *Improving Your Serve*, pastor and author Chuck Swindoll tells the following story:

Shortly after World War II came to a close, Europe began picking up the pieces. Much of the Old Country had been ravaged by war and was in ruins. Perhaps the saddest sight of all was that of little orphaned children starving in the streets of those war-torn cities.

Early one chilly morning, an American soldier was making his way back to the barracks in London. As he turned the corner in his Jeep, he spotted a little lad with his nose pressed to the window of a pastry shop. Inside, the cook was kneading dough for a fresh batch of doughnuts. The hungry boy stared in silence, watching every move. The soldier pulled his Jeep to the curb, stopped, got out, and walked quietly over to where the little fellow was standing. Through the steamed-up window he could see the mouth-watering morsels as they were being pulled from the oven, piping hot. The boy salivated and released a slight groan as he watched the cook place them onto the glass-enclosed counter

ever so carefully.

The soldier's heart went out to the nameless orphan as he stood beside him.

"Son, would you like some of those?"

The boy was startled.

"Oh, yeah . . . I would!"

The American stepped inside and bought a dozen, put them in a bag, and walked back to where the lad was standing in the foggy cold of the London morning. He smiled, held out the bag, and said simply, "Here you are."

As he turned to walk away, he felt a tug on his coat. He looked back and heard the child ask quietly, "Mister, are you God?" (pp.52-53).

Like that GI, we're never more like Jesus than when we submit to righteous impulses and do what is

good and right. That's what light in darkness means. When we are fully devoted to the King, our light and good works ultimately will conquer the darkness.

### **3. Personal Relationships**

**(Mt. 5:21-48).** The third aspect of a kingdom perspective deals with personal relationships—particularly those difficult and challenging ones. Initially, since it must govern all our relational initiatives, righteousness is at the very heart of the kingdom. We avoid anything that elicits actions or responses that are unrighteous, even when that choice causes us to suffer loss and violates what we think are our rights and privileges. Avoiding all appearances of unrighteousness is what is truly right for the kingdom person.

It's important to note

as well that this intriguing segment of the Sermon is clearly focused on that which is eternal. Christ notes that we can be conformed to righteousness in our actions while destructive attitudes remain within us. Because of these destructive attitudes, we are guilty.

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***We can be conformed to righteousness in our actions while destructive attitudes remain within us.***

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The Jews in Christ's day had so structured their system of religious ethics that measurements for righteousness were merely external. This enabled a person to appear upright on the outside but remain

relationally corrupt on the inside.

This, in fact, is exactly why Jesus accused the religious leaders of being "whitewashed tombs" (Mt. 23:27). To the Jews of that day, anything having to do with death was defiled. Touching a grave during the feast days, when Jews were required to be ceremonially pure, would be one disqualifying defilement, for example. So the Pharisees would whitewash the tombs around Jerusalem, causing them to stand out so that people could avoid even the slightest unintentional contact with the defiling influence. This background adds tremendous weight to Christ's accusation of the Pharisees' externally clean posture. In reality they were deeply defiled and disqualified because of what was on the inside.

Keeping that in mind, Christ compels us to avoid

any relational action that encourages unrighteousness and to make sure our attitude on the inside is right in every personal relationship. Christ clearly delineates several scenarios that lead us to kingdom expressions in our personal relationships.

Everyone knows that if you hate your brother to the extent that you kill him, you are guilty of murder. What we rarely admit, however, is that if we hate to that extent, we are guilty as well. Christ goes on to say that if this anger leads us to speak words that kill another's reputation and murder that person's sense of worth, then that too makes us liable for judgment (vv.21-22).

Kingdom behavior deals with our anger by letting God deal with our enemies. Instead of harboring anger and seeking revenge with spiteful words, we pursue

righteousness in our relationships, even with those who have offended us and caused us to feel angry.

*The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci is one of the great Renaissance masterpieces. During the time da Vinci was painting his masterwork, he reportedly became incensed with a certain man. His temper flared, and he lashed out with bitter words.

Returning to his work, he attempted to brush some delicate lines on the face of Jesus. But he was so distraught that he couldn't regain his composure. Unable to continue, he finally left his tools and went to look for the man and ask his forgiveness. Only after his apology was accepted and he felt right with God could the artist go back and complete the face of Christ.

While we don't know if

that story is true, we do know it makes a valid point: Our relationship with other people affects our relationship with God.

Christ goes on to say that people who are truly committed to the kingdom do not worship the King while they are offending others. If we have done something offensive, He calls us to go immediately to the one we have offended and humbly seek to reconcile (vv.23-24). Once that has happened, we can resume our worship of the King.

If we have so deeply offended someone that we are taken to court, and if we are guilty, we are to restore what is rightly that person's before going to court and try to reestablish a righteous relationship with him or her. As Christ said, "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law" (v.25).

For husbands and wives,

Jesus gave specific commands about proper relationships (vv.27-32). It was clear to the Jewish people that if you committed adultery, you were morally guilty before God. Christ now deepened the accountability by stating that if you permit adulterous thoughts to reside in your heart, then you are already guilty of adultery (v.28). If we are consumed with lust, and the only things that keep us from committing adultery are the lack of opportunity or the fear of getting caught, we are adulterous (v.28). A person who fantasizes about immorality, even though he or she never finds an opportunity, is neither righteous nor guiltless.

In regard to moral compromise in relationships, Christ stresses the importance of righteousness when He states that if our eyes or hands cause us to

sin, then we would be better off if we blinded ourselves or cut off our hands so that our souls would be safe (vv.29-30). Christ could not have made a stronger statement about the value of righteous living. Kingdom people are to value righteousness and spiritual well-being more than sight, dexterity, or anything else in this world.

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In relating to our spouses, Christ calls us to faithfulness and loyalty. Jewish law permitted the men to indiscriminately divorce their wives. This placed women in great

jeopardy. To support themselves in that society, most women who were expelled from marriage had two options: remarriage or sexual promiscuity. When a man divorced his wife, he placed her in jeopardy of remarriage, which in God's eyes was adulterous, since the divorce was invalid in the first place. In extreme cases, women were driven to the streets as prostitutes. The only permission that Christ granted for putting away a wife was her continual unchaste behavior. Other than that, Christ called righteous men to protect, patiently live with, and love their wives.

Christ also addressed the believer's behavior in contractual arrangements (vv.33-37). The Jews of Christ's day had a custom of sealing agreements by making an oath against heaven, Jerusalem, or even, as strange as it seems,

swearing by their own head (v.36). Christ calls us to be true to our word without appealing to authorities beyond ourselves. Kingdom people are to speak their word and then be faithful to it, regardless of the implications. To a kingdom person, a promise is a critical thing and carries the integrity of the one who has spoken it.

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In relating to those who set themselves against us, Christ speaks about the importance of defusing evil in the midst of unrighteous

circumstances (vv.39-48). He notes that while our normal response when we are wronged is revenge, a kingdom person would rather be slapped twice than to return evil by slapping the person back. And if someone sues us for our shirt in court, then we should offer that person our coat. If someone forces us to go a mile, then we should offer to go an additional mile.

While each of these responses seems to be an unreasonable reaction, the alternative would be grist for deepening hostilities. Kingdom people are to value peace more than fighting back. They value a relationship more than a shirt. And they are willing to go out of their way to benefit another person. This is revolutionary kingdom behavior.

Soon after the doors opened to the former Soviet

Union, the educational leaders in Russia invited US Christian organizations to come and show the *Jesus* film to teachers and train them in values and ethics curriculums based on the Word of God. A massive group of Christian organizations pooled their resources under the name of CoMission in order to accept this invitation. This gave them opportunities to evangelize teachers, place them in Bible studies, and plant churches.

For 2½ years, more than a thousand believers from the US gave a year of their lives to participate in this project until the Russian Orthodox Church began to pressure the government to keep these “evangelists”—who had come, in their words, “under the guise of education”—out of the schools.

In a gesture of goodwill, CoMission had supplied the

educational ministry with duplicating machines, since upgraded equipment was so scarce during that time. When the edict came from the Ministry of Education that the schools would no longer be open to the work of CoMission, the very machines CoMission had donated were used to duplicate that edict. Halfway through the process, the ministry ran out of paper. Since CoMission had often supplied them not only with the equipment but with reams of paper as well, the ministry asked if they could get more paper.

The earthbound response for the people in charge of that aspect of CoMission’s ministry would have been to laugh in their faces, since the Ministry of Education had so ungraciously pulled up the welcome mat. But, like good kingdom people, these

CoMission kingdom travelers in Moscow asked how much paper they wanted and then supplied sufficient paper to finish the project.

It won the hearts of those Russians who by no choice of their own were serving notice to the schools of their land. Had CoMission denied them the paper, they would have been just like everyone else in this present world. Going the extra mile defused the tension in a hostile environment and kept Russian hearts open to the much more significant issue of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps the most challenging earth-side relational responses come in verses 43-48. Christ says that while the common consensus is “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy” (which was street talk in their day for

“I don’t get mad, I just get even”), we are instead to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, because in that way we become like our Father in heaven.

These perspectives on kingdom relational behavior come into clear view when we recall that the centerpiece of the kingdom is righteousness that is in conflict with a fallen environment. In other words, the kingdom is measured by what’s going on inside us, and what is spiritually right is of greater value than what may seem to us to be personally or physically right.

**4. Personal Piety (Mt. 6:1-18).** After speaking about kingdom ways to relate to fellow humans, Christ goes on to lay out how we are to relate to our Father in heaven. This is the fourth kingdom perspective, personal piety (6:1-18). This perspective

stands in contrast to the public religious abuse that was practiced in that day. This was noted in the fact that people carried out religious practices for their own gain.

The three areas that Christ particularly speaks to are giving, praying, and fasting. It's interesting that Christ's label for people who give, pray, and fast in order to be noticed and publicly affirmed is *hypocrite* (vv.2,5,16). Hypocrites are people whose lives contradict the very essence of what they say they believe.

Religious practice by nature has its focus outside of and beyond ourselves. We practice faith activities on behalf of God. When we say we are serving God, but our intent is to serve ourselves, we qualify as hypocrites. Doing God's work for our advantage robs God of the glory due Him.

The result of serving ourselves while appearing to serve heaven is that we lose our eternal reward since we have rewarded ourselves here on earth.

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Giving is to be done in secret with no thought of personal gain (v.4). And we are to pray in secret, trusting that our Father will hear us and help us (v.6).

Christ then instructs His disciples in what we know as the Lord's Prayer (vv.9-13), which takes our focus beyond ourselves to the Father's glory and then to our fundamental needs of

bread, forgiveness, and safety from the treachery of the evil one. It's important here to note that the closing focus of this prayer affirms that the kingdom is God's, and that the power and glory are His as well.

And just in case we don't want to pray, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (v.12), Christ reminds us that if we are unwilling to forgive those who have offended us, how do we expect to ask Him to forgive us? (v.15).

When we fast, we're not to do it so that others will notice how spiritual we are by our gaunt and frail appearance. Because fasting is a personal thing between us and our Father, we are not to make it obvious to those around us that we are fasting. It's something that only God needs to know (vv.16-18).

Subjects of the kingdom value the

intimate relationship they have with their King and practice piety for His glory and not their own.

**5. Prosperity (Mt. 6:19-24).** Few things jeopardize the Christian life more than the promise of prosperity. Kingdom living gives us a new perspective on prosperity (6:19-24). It's impossible for us as kingdom adherents to dedicate ourselves to money and at the same time to dedicate ourselves to God.

Christ points out that the folly of dedicating ourselves to money is that earth-side treasure is susceptible to damage and demise. Radical changes in economy, personal crises, forays into speculative investments—all can create sudden loss. If we are not careful, we might build our security on the accumulation of these slippery assets.

On the other hand, Christ teaches that kingdom people use their prosperity to stack up treasures in heaven, where the gain is permanent and of greater value.

On this issue, Christ notes that if the perspectives of this fallen world dictate our view of prosperity, then the darkness within is deep—really deep indeed (v.23). Its ramifications touch every area of our lives. The pursuit of money for money's sake damages family relationships and creates pride when we succeed and despair when we fail.

**6. Peace (Mt. 6:25-34).** As we shift our focus on financial prosperity to eternal treasures, we may experience anxiety as we consider how best to provide for our needs. At this point in the Sermon, Christ turns kingdom hearts

toward His peace. He reminds us that our Father in heaven obviously cares that our needs are met. Christ points to the birds of the air and the flowers of the field that God wonderfully cares for, and then He calls us to seek first the things of eternity, assuring us that the Father knows our needs. He also encourages us to live each day focusing on the advance of the kingdom without worrying about the needs of tomorrow. Kingdom people know that today is ours to live for the kingdom, and tomorrow belongs to the King, who will provide and care for us when and if tomorrow comes.

The great preacher Charles H. Spurgeon once learned about such peace while trying to raise money for poor children in London. He came home to Bristol hoping to collect 300

pounds to support his work with London's homeless children. At the end of a week of meetings, many lives had been changed and his financial goal had been reached. That night as he bowed in prayer, Spurgeon seemed to hear a voice saying, "Give that money to George Mueller" (the founder of a great orphanage in England). "Oh, no, Lord," answered the preacher, "I need it for my own dear orphans."

Yet Spurgeon couldn't shake the idea that God wanted him to part with it. Only when he said, "Yes, Lord, I will," could he find rest.

With great peace he made his way the next morning to Mueller's orphanage and found that great man of prayer on his knees. The famous minister placed his hand on Mueller's shoulder and said, "George, God has told me

to give you these 300 pounds I've collected."

"Oh, my dear brother," said Mueller, "I've just been asking Him for exactly that amount."

The two servants of the Lord then wept and rejoiced together. When Spurgeon returned to London, he found a letter on his desk containing 300 guineas. "There," he cried with joy, "the Lord has returned my 300 pounds with 300 shillings' interest!"

Spurgeon learned what another generous believer once said: "I shovel out, and God shovels in, and He has a bigger shovel than I do."

## **7. Taking It Personally (Mt. 7:1-6).**

The next perspective on kingdom living focuses on personal accountability. Christ calls those who focus on the faults of others (and by comparison feel good about themselves) to

manage their own responsibilities. Again, it's a form of hypocrisy when we stand in judgment of others when we ourselves need to be judged. Christ underscores that we have the right to deal with others' faults only when we have dealt with our own. And then He adds that we will be judged by the standard we set for others.

As I have noted, throughout the Sermon there is a sense of reciprocity—we will be treated in the same way that we treat others. We will receive mercy to the same degree that we are merciful. We will be rewarded from heaven when we reward heaven with our personal affections. We will be forgiven as we forgive. And here, we will be judged by the same standard that we judge others.

After warning us to make sure that we have judged

ourselves before we judge others, Christ cautions us to be careful about whom we seek to purify (vv.4-6). He states that some people are incorrigible and beyond remediation of their faults. Like dogs or swine, they devour the words we offer them about what is holy and right. If someone is evil to the core, then we should keep that which is holy and precious to ourselves and not seek to reprove that person with words of righteousness.

**8. Dependence (Mt. 7:7-12).** Kingdom people have a radically different perspective about who is in charge. They realize that they are not. In a world where independence is considered strength, as followers of the King we do not depend on our own plans, but God's (7:7-11). Our plans can fail, but God's plans never do.

Because God is in

charge, the kingdom follower consults Him often. Prayer is the primary expression of dependence on God. We come to Him regularly, as Jesus did, to find both counsel and comfort. When we make prayer a priority in our daily lives, we show our trust in God that He will answer and that His answers will result in our well-being.

With the confidence that our Father in heaven is even more gracious than our earthly father, we pray with clear requests, as Christ encourages us.

**9. Minority Living (Mt. 7:13-23).** Christ brings His kingdom teaching toward a conclusion by reminding us that our spiritual perception must accurately reflect the authentic kingdom way and those who represent it. The kingdom way is narrow, and the gate to the kingdom is small. In reality, the narrow

way leads to life, and few find it because they prefer the broad way. He warns us that many false prophets will seek to mislead and deter us from the narrow way. But their lack of spiritual wisdom is revealed by the outcome of their lives. In fact, false prophets should be evaluated by the kingdom principles of this Sermon. He goes on to warn us that not everyone who claims that Jesus is Lord is truly a part of the kingdom.

**10. Permanence Of The Proclamation (Mt. 7:24-29).** Last, King Jesus calls us to build our lives on the permanence of His proclamation. The authority of God's Word is absolute. We are called to obey consistently what He has taught us. He likens those who establish their lives on the perspectives of this Sermon to a man who builds his house on a firm foundation. But those who

hear Christ's words and refuse to obey are like a man who, having built his life on shifting sand, is in jeopardy when God's final judgment comes.



These, then, are the perspectives and practices of kingdom life. They are grounded in the reality of eternity, the priority of righteousness, the primacy of the internal, the distinct tension of kingdom life in a fallen world, the supremacy of the spiritual over the material, and the reality that we can only expect God to treat us as we treat others.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount is the manual for managing the kingdom world within. It is the quintessential expression of what it means to live in light of the world to come under the authority of the King. It is eternity

expressed in our window of history.

Use the "Kingdom Perspectives And Practices" chart on pages 30-31 as a mirror. See your life as it is now through the flow of this chart. How well do you perceive and practice life from the King's point of view? Then, to apply your specific life situations to the listed perspectives, answer the following questions:

1. How do you score in kingdom attitudes and actions? (Consider your specific attitudes and actions at home and work.)
2. Is your life characterized more by the earth-side perspectives?
3. Which areas of your life need to be transitioned from the domain of darkness to reflect the kingdom of God's Son?
4. What can you do to begin the transition?

## KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

*(from Matthew 5-7)*

Earth-Side Perspectives	Kingdom Perspectives	Kingdom Practices: Attitudes & Actions
Blessedness is in position, power, wealth, comfort, safety, and acceptance in this domain.	1. Blessedness is in the assurance of ultimate comfort, reward, and intimacy in eternity (Mt. 5:1-12).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know that happiness is a long-range reality.</li> <li>• Honor and affirm those who are truly blessed.</li> <li>• Accept present lot in life in terms of its eternal reward.</li> </ul>
Purpose in life is to enhance and advance self in terms of personal peace and prosperity.	2. Purpose in life is to advance the cause of our King by functioning as flavor preservatives and light in a flat, decaying, and dark environment (Mt. 5:13-20).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirm righteousness.</li> <li>• Actively search for occasions to create hunger and thirst for God.</li> <li>• Actively attempt to stop decay.</li> </ul>
Relationships are used for personal benefit.	3. Relationships are to remain pure, blameless, fair to the weak, and forgiving to enemies (Mt. 5:21-48).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek the unquestionably right way to feel and act in every situation.</li> <li>• Make my rights or safety secondary to doing what is right.</li> </ul>
Good works are paraded for personal glory.	4. Personal piety means the focus is on private devotion to God (Mt. 6:1-18).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spend much time in the quiet and secret development of my relationship with God.</li> <li>• Meditate on ways to show His glory through my life.</li> </ul>

## KINGDOM PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES

*(from Matthew 5-7)*

<b>Earth-Side Perspectives</b>	<b>Kingdom Perspectives</b>	<b>Kingdom Practices: Attitudes &amp; Actions</b>
Prosperity comes by what I accumulate and gain.	5. True prosperity comes by contributing to eternity and the advance of Christ's kingdom (Mt. 6:19-24).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seek to advance eternity with all I possess.</li> <li>• Give my time and energy to activities that impact eternity.</li> </ul>
Life is lived on the edge of anxiety, fearing that all could be gone instantly.	6. Life is lived in peace, knowing that only eternal commodities are secure and worth pursuing (Mt. 6:25-34).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust God to care for me in His way and in His time.</li> <li>• Cast all my cares on Him.</li> </ul>
Personal actions are excused by comparing, blaming, and judging others.	7. I am accountable for personal actions before I can reprove others (Mt. 7:1-6).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on personal faults and take steps to correct them.</li> </ul>
Self-sufficient behavior questions the goodness or concern of God.	8. God-dependent behavior, as expressed through prayer, relies on the goodness of our Father (Mt. 7:7-12).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let prayer rule my life.</li> <li>• Trust God's loving responses to meet my basic needs, regardless of the outcome.</li> </ul>
Life is structured to be as natural, comfortable, and as acceptable to the majority as possible.	9. Life requires a willingness to endure difficulties and being in the minority (Mt. 7:13-23).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose to accept kingdom alternatives that are out of step with the majority.</li> <li>• Live by the narrow, right way even though it brings discomfort.</li> </ul>
Personal drives and desires are the authority in our lives.	10. The King's Word, the Bible, is the authority in our lives (Mt. 7:24-29).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display unquestioned loyalty to the King.</li> <li>• Obey gladly the decrees of the King.</li> </ul>

## A SNEAK PREVIEW

Those who are driven and defined by the principles of Christ's kingdom—who manage their lives in accordance with kingdom perspectives and practices—will penetrate the darkness with the light of eternity.

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*Those of us  
who have been  
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domain of darkness  
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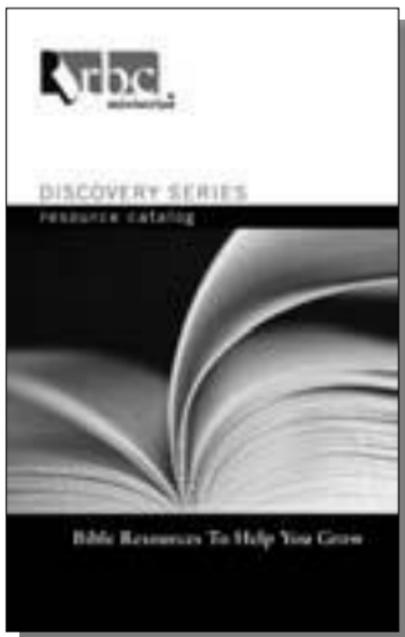
The kingdom has a culture. Eternity has a style. And those of us who have been transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son have the privilege and the responsibility to give our dying world a sneak preview of the really big show to come. Our challenge is to express the triumph of the kingdom world within amid the trouble in this fallen world.



This booklet is excerpted from *Eternity: Reclaiming A Passion For What Endures* by Joe Stowell, which is published by Discovery House Publishers, a member of the RBC Ministries family. Joe served for 18 years as the president of Moody Bible Institute. Currently he is the president of Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is also partnering with RBC Ministries in radio, writing, and television productions.

If this booklet has been helpful to you, check out Joe's ministry online at [www.getmorestrength.org](http://www.getmorestrength.org) for his weekly thought-provoking messages or his "Daily Strength" devotionals.

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