

Kingdom-Focused Church

by

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Preface

“...make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.” Matthew 6:33b (NLT)

Welcome to our new series entitled, “The Kingdom-Focused Church”. This is not a series of lessons about techniques, nor is it one about programs. This is a series about “kingdom focus”, being focused on the kingdom of God.

Many of us have been Christians for a long time, while others amongst us are relatively new to Christianity. Some of us are doing better now spiritually than we have for years, whereas others feel that we are missing something. For those who have “been around longer”, we probably have had times of great victory in our spiritual walk, and some of us may be wishing we could get back to our old glory days – and some of us don’t even know where to begin to try! For those of us who are newer followers, we may be lacking a sense of direction. No matter which category we feel we are in, we inevitably have days where we begin with good intentions, only to end the day, or week, or month, or perhaps even year, feeling frustrated. Of course, we are comforted by the fact that we are saved by grace (AMEN!!), yet we yearn to really live lives that are pleasing to God. We want our lives to count! It is our hope that looking into the issue of being KINGDOM-FOCUSED will get us all back on track, not in a “faddish” way, but as a foundation for the whole of our Christian walk. Being KINGDOM-FOCUSED will determine whether or not our experience of Christianity is victorious, joyful, life-changing, refreshing, and progressive, or mediocre, frustrating, stagnant, boring, and ultimately, non-existent.

The Singapore church is a good-hearted church, filled with people who, for the most part, love God and love each other and who desire to live out our mission statement: WE GATHER HERE TO KNOW GOD AND MAKE GOD KNOWN. However, we sometimes fall

short because of a lack of focus, either in our personal lives or collectively. We live in a world that is constantly trying to divert our attention away from the kingdom and to instead be consumed with life's demands, worries, pleasures and possessions (recently called *affluenza* in the press) and where we are inundated with information and temptation through multi-media every hour! No wonder we are distracted!! And doesn't this sound just like **1 John 2:15-17**?

¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Or **Mark 4:10-11, 18-19**?

¹⁰When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables...

¹⁸Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

We are truly in a spiritual battle with Satan for our souls! And over the years, we have all seen others with inspiring plans, great dreams and dogged determination who ended up sliding off the path because somewhere down the line they got torn away from what is truly important – they lost their kingdom focus.

Since, in a church above 100 members, it is not really possible for all of us to know each other deeply, we rely on our deep friendships and

on our small groups for help in being spurred on to be KINGDOM-FOCUSED. Imagine, if you will, your small group as a relay race team preparing to compete in the Olympics. Think of the imagery in **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** (NIV)

²⁴Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Now, is your small group functioning like this, running together to get the prize, focused together on the kingdom, or is your small group functioning with well planned out schedules but without a purpose or direction? Are the members growing more Christ-like because of their fellowship, or are they just “comfortable” with one another? Are the people in your group excited to grow closer to God, or is their excitement based on having fun in a social club filled with entertaining events? Is the “heart beat” of your small group to see people change and become saved, and the saved change and become more like Christ, or does your group lack a “heart beat”? Is the leader of your group a kingdom-focused leader? If not, what can you do to help? It is our prayer that this series of lessons will walk you through the notion of practically putting God first and will bring about growth for some and a change of heart for others so that we will all be KINGDOM-FOCUSED CHRISTIANS working together in KINGDOM-FOCUSED SMALL GROUPS and that collectively we will be a KINGDOM-FOCUSED CHURCH.

John and Karen Louis

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- a. EKG, The Heartbeat of God by Ken Hemphill, (2004)
- b. Parenting with a Kingdom Purpose, by Richard Ross and Ken Hemphill (2005)

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John Louis

Kingdom-Focused Church

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Lesson One

The Kingdom-Focused Church

Introduction

When Jesus was on earth and went around teaching, his primary focus was on the kingdom of God. Jesus taught about this subject more than he taught about heaven, hell, money, or sin. In fact, the word “kingdom” appears 114 times in the Gospels alone! The matter most on his heart was the Kingdom of God.

When he began his ministry he preached about the kingdom:

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

He continued to preach about the kingdom of God, right up to the time when he ascended to heaven:

³After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1: 3)

Although the above verse is general, the example of his actual last words, which are known by heart to all, is more specific:

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28: 18-20)

In this passage, Jesus, God the Son, the Creator of the Universe, delegates to his followers and to their future followers a huge responsibility, but it is also a privilege – He trusts us to continue his legacy! Jesus has commanded us to have a kingdom focus – he wants us to have his heart to seek and save the lost, and it is a big job. But look at how much freedom He also has given us – He told us *what* to do, but did not tell us *how* to do it. The *how* is what we have to figure out, using our experience, our study of the scriptures, applying it practically in our culture and times, and getting guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, based on all of this, we can just about say that the kingdom was the first subject Jesus talked about when he began his ministry and it was also the last issue that he spoke about before going into heaven. Therefore, as his followers, we should strive to be like him and be a kingdom-focused church. But being kingdom-focused does not mean that we should be at church all the time, read the bible and pray continuously. It does not mean that we should not watch TV or go shopping, but what it *does* mean is that our minds should become attuned and alert, ready to be what we need to be or do what we need to do for Christ and his Kingdom. The apostle Peter finally understood this message, and shared it several times in his first letter:

¹³Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1: 13)

¹¹Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. (1 Peter 2: 11)

⁸Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5: 8)

And, just as in Peter's day, when we capture the essence of what it means to live for and seek the kingdom of God, we will see God perform incredible miracles before our very eyes, and will receive a rich welcome into eternity.

¹⁰Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1: 10-11)

Definition and Meanings

Before we go further in our study, it would be helpful to clarify the meaning of some words and terms that we will be using frequently.

1. The Kingdom of God

Mims (2003) defines the kingdom of God as:

“The reign of God in the lives of his people, enabling them to serve him wholeheartedly and to live the kind of life Jesus died to give us.”

To put it in another way, the kingdom of God in its simplest form is the reign of Jesus Christ as Lord and King in our lives. There are four ways the word kingdom is used in the scriptures:

- a. In the OT, the kingdom sometimes is referred to as the nation of Israel.
- b. It is also referred to as the universal reign of God over all creation.
- c. It can also refer to the reign of Christ when he returns.
- d. It can also refer to the church of Jesus Christ on earth.

When we open the pages of the New Testament, we begin with the book of Matthew, which in turn begins with the genealogy of God's people, starting with Abraham and ending with Jesus. Some of these people lived at a time when God's people were the envy of the other nations. During the rule of Joshua, David and Solomon, for example, God's kingdom rose to the pinnacle. At other times, God's people were at the lowest morally, and other nations even ruled over them, like during the exile. The period from Abraham till Jesus was a mixed bag, with its ups and downs, but through it all, God's kingdom always reigned. God was always in control. This genealogy is an encouraging reminder of this fact. God's kingdom, with its highs and lows, is an unfaltering and an unshakeable one that will always reign.

2. The Kingdom-Focused Person

What is a kingdom-focused person? The answer is not a theological one. It is a person who has the kingdom of God first and foremost in his heart. It is what he lives for and it is the reason why he exists. Everything that he does it is related to the kingdom of God, whether it concerns his family, calendar, checkbook or friends. His priorities in life will reflect his focus on the kingdom of God. In short, the kingdom of God is an exciting, life changing way to live and to serve. It impacts every area of our life, if we allow it to do so. Hemphill (2004) puts it in the following way:

A kingdom-focused person is:

- a. born out of the Spirit
- b. passionate about God's righteousness and about demonstrating God's character
- c. continually aware of his father's presence and pleased with his reward
- d. aware that he needs to build his life on the word of God, as Jesus says that only a house built on the rock of God's word will stand.

- e. enjoying the blessings of God and a constant relationship with the King.

When you are kingdom-focused, then you will experience the following:

- You will listen to the news and read the papers with a new kingdom perspective.
- You will view events of daily life with a kingdom focus.
- Standing in a queue will no longer be viewed as a waste of time, but a potential to let your light shine for the kingdom of God.
- You will view your own financial and time resources with a different perspective.
- Your time at work and play will take on a new meaning.
- You will be motivated to do your job with greater excellence.
- You will raise your children with an eye on how to best prepare them for the kingdom of God.

On the contrary, if we fail to grasp the meaning of the kingdom of God, then:

- We will fail to understand what is important to the Lord, what is on the heart of God from the creation of the world.
- We will fail to see the working of God's power all around us.
- We will fail to enjoy being partners with him.
- We will fail to be used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish great things.

3. The Church

The author A. H. Strong (1909) defined church as:

“The individual church may be defined as that smaller company of regenerate persons, who, in any given community, unite themselves voluntarily together in accordance with Christ’s laws, for the purpose of securing the complete establishment of his kingdom in themselves and in the world.”

A local church like ours is not THE kingdom of God. It is only a part of it. God alone sets and knows the boundaries of his entire kingdom. Let’s see what Jesus says about his church:

In Matthew 16: 13-19:

¹³When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

¹⁴They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

¹⁵“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

¹⁶Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

¹⁷Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.

¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

What did Jesus say after Peter gave a confession about who Jesus was? After hearing about Jesus being the Son of the living God, he talked about the church. What was the connection?

The passages in **1 Corinthians 12: 12-27** talks about the church or the body as having many parts, with each part doing its bit, and collectively, we are an organism growing and working together. The church works best when all the gifts are properly used to bring God glory. When we become disciples and receive the Holy Spirit at our baptism (**Acts 2: 38**), the Spirit will live in us and eventually bring out the fruit of the spirit from all of us. In **Galatians 5: 22**, it says that this fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness etc. Our goal as a member is to not focus and develop these qualities per se. Our goal is to know God and make him known. However, as we live a repentant life, these qualities will be fanned into flame and, in turn, they will help us be close to one another and be used by Him to serve where our gifts can best be used.

4. The Kingdom-Focused Church

What is a kingdom-focused church? Mims (2003) defined it as follows:

“A kingdom focused church is one that exists to transform unbelievers into Christ like believers and to mature these believers into kingdom multipliers of the message of Christ.”

Many of us are familiar with small groups and have been part of one for a while. However, some of our groups have not been moving forward. In **Matthew 7: 17**, Jesus says:

¹⁷Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree will bear good fruit. No doubt about it. According to this passage fruit is something we can recognize and detect with our senses, as tangible as fruit on a tree. Is your small group a “good tree”? What fruit have you seen over the last twelve months? We need to pointedly ask ourselves the following questions:

- a. Are the disciples changing in their character? Look at the fruit in **Galatians 5: 22**. Are they growing in these areas?
- b. Are weaknesses of the group members gradually being turned into strengths?
- c. Are the disciples growing in their righteousness and in their walk with God?
- d. Are the disciples sincerely involved in reaching out to the lost?

There is no doubt that fruit, be it the fruit of the Spirit in **Galatians 5: 22** or fruit in terms of the growth of the gospel as mentioned in **Colossians 1: 6**, will be harvested if we sow the principles and values that are pleasing to God. Paul says this in **1 Corinthians 3: 6-9**:

⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Nurture and Nature

Here it says that whether we water or plant, we have the same purpose to participate in the building of God’s kingdom. Take note that the verse also says that while God brings about growth, our labor also plays a part. It may be small in comparison to the role that God plays, but it is crucial nonetheless. We cannot force a plant to grow. That is God’s part. However, we can maximize the conditions to make way for God to bring about growth to his kingdom. Or we can get

distracted and be lazy and think that our part is inconsequential. Nothing is further from the truth. What we do makes a difference. How much growth God brings about is sometimes proportional to our labor in sowing and reaping. Growth from God does not come from “magic” or “luck”. It comes from a focused effort to sow and water as best as we know how, then trusting God to do the rest. Focused nurturing makes a world of difference as nature takes its course to bring about growth. The same argument applies to us raising our children. In the end, we can’t make them grow. That is, as we say up to nature, but we can nurture and make a difference. Effective, focused parenting makes a huge difference to the outcome of children’s development. The argument then is not about nature OR nurture, but rather nature AND nurture, both working hand in hand. God is the author of nature. We do not need to advise him on how to do his job. He will bring about growth as he sees fit. However, we need to take stock on how we have done our part. This is what this series, the Kingdom-Focused Church, is about.

Discussion Questions:

Complete the following sentence:

- A. “If a restaurant serves food to people, and a hotel provides rooms for people, what does a church do?”

- B. Is your small group doing that? How “different” is your small group?

- C. How much did Jesus think about the kingdom? How are you in this area? What tends to distract you? (Worries of this life, the temptation of wealth, or the desire for other things, apathy or just plain exhaustion...)

Lesson Two

The Kingdom Privilege

1. The Kingdom Witnesses

The last prophet of the Old Testament was Malachi. For the next four hundred years to come, there was a period of “silence”. No other prophet commissioned by God appeared to Israel. The people began to thirst for his intervention and the coming of his kingdom. The people were waiting for the arrival of a political kingdom, but God had other plans. His plan was to bring about a spiritual kingdom whose boundaries were invisible. Only certain privileged individuals knew about it before the preaching publicly by John the Baptist and Jesus. The following were the early witnesses privy to the news of the coming of the kingdom:

- a. Joseph and Mary - God first chose Mary, a humble and righteous woman to conceive Jesus, the Son of God. Yes, she was bewildered at the role she played, but she also took God at his word and was fully obedient. An ordinary, young devout woman was chosen for this incredible privilege. The same could be said of Joseph, an ordinary young, God fearing man. **(Luke 1: 26-38; Matthew 1: 18-25)**
- b. Zechariah – He was an ordinary Jewish priest and was performing his duty at the temple like many others. One day he saw a vision that his barren wife would bear a son named John who would, “prepare the way for the Lord.” **(Luke 1: 5-17)**
- c. Simeon – Another ordinary Jew, he was righteous and devout, and was waiting for the consolation of Israel. **(Luke 2: 25)**
- d. Anna – A prophetess, she had been a widow for seventy-seven years! She was a devout woman who worshiped God day and night **(Luke 2: 37)** and she was chosen to see Jesus.

- e. Magi from the East – Men from the East, they had followed the star to Bethlehem and saw Jesus for themselves. (**Matthew 2: 9**)
- f. Shepherds – They were minding their own business when their usual shepherding duties were interrupted by a choir of angels! (**Luke 2 : 8-15**)

All of them were ordinary people (except for the Magi perhaps, but little is known about them). The people God chose to reveal his secrets to were devout, God fearing men and woman. That was the only common trait that ran through all of them. It was God's number one criterion. They were not people of high position, but were humble ordinary ones, the kind that would be seen everyday in the streets of their communities.

While the people of high position, such as Herod, his sons, Annas and Caiaphas, the high priesthood of Jesus' day, were totally immersed in their duties and responsibilities, the kingdom of God was making its beginning in the land of Israel. It is interesting that in **Luke 3: 1-2**,

¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— ²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

It was as if Luke were trying to say, as he listed out all the political leaders by name, that while these people were assuming their posts (leaders like Tiberias, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Herod's brother Philip, Lysanias, Annas and Caiaphas), John was preaching in the desert. The following is the list of the political leaders who were totally oblivious to the coming of the kingdom:

- a. Tiberius Caesar
- b. Pontius Pilate
- c. Herod

- d. Philip
- e. Lysanias
- f. Annas
- g. Caiaphas

Compare this list with the one that was privileged to see the initial revelation of the kingdom. Notice the vast difference between the two. Outside of the bible, history has virtually no record of the God-fearing humble servants. However, history has a fair bit to say about the political leaders named above.

If you had the task of introducing the kingdom to the world, who would you have selected? The most flamboyant, talented and influential people? Or would you pick people based on their spirituality? That was how God chose to break the 400 years of silence from the time of Malachi! John himself was far from being pompous and grand – he wore a coat made of camel’s hair and a leather belt. He had a simple and interesting diet. However, he abstained from drinking wine from birth, brought up to know the scriptures, and was no doubt a God fearing individual. What a humble God we have as our King. Isn’t it amazing that God would chose the ordinary yet godly people to hear of his initial revelation of his kingdom, and to do so in such a humble manner, totally contrary to the majestic, extravagant fashion of the world?

2. The Kingdom Banquet

Now let’s look at another example of the two kingdoms, one at that time ruled by King Herod and the other by Jesus. Let’s read the passage from **Mark 6: 14-44**:

¹⁴King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

¹⁵Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."

¹⁶But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

¹⁷For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married.

¹⁸For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

²¹Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. ²²When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." ²³And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

²⁴She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

²⁵At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

²⁶The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's

head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

³²So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

³⁵By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

³⁷But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages[c]! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

³⁸"How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five—and two fish."

³⁹Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So they sat down in groups of

hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Both these kings, Herod and Jesus, held a banquet, so to speak, where people came to listen and be fed. Perhaps Mark wrote these two stories together and juxtaposed them so that we can use it and make comparisons.

The banquet held by Herod had the following characteristics:

- It was a pompous one, where people dressed in their best and it was held in a grand setting, probably in his palace.
- Only the important people were invited.
- It was completely sensual, full of worldliness and lust.
- It ended up in disgrace with the killing of John the Baptist. People left with a bitter taste in their mouth, to say the least.
- Herod, as powerful as he was, wanted to look good in front of others.
- Herod was served by the people and his servants.

The banquet held by Jesus, in the feeding of the 5,000, on the contrary had the following characteristics:

- It was in the open country and the people sat on the green grass.
- Everybody was invited.
- It was totally spiritual, not sensual.
- It ended up with people being satisfied (6: 42)
- Jesus did this miracle to meet the needs of the people and to increase the faith of his disciples. It was not done to please men.
- Jesus served them, not the other way round.

This is the kind of contrast that existed then between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God. It is no different today. Many of the activities provided in the kingdom of the world center on pleasing one another, looking good, sexuality, being served, and void of all spirituality.

Which kind of banquet would you rather attend? Jesus invites us to come as we are to his banquet, but we must be prepared to take on his values and change accordingly. The result is always this – we will leave satisfied.

When we come together for church services, do people leave satisfied? We need to take stock of how we conduct our activities and services. Our goal is to not please everyone. Jesus has not called us to do that. However, we should make every effort to conduct and plan for those that attend so that they will feel “inspired” and “satisfied”. Take a look at our role in the kingdom, what ever it may be, and answer the following:

- a. Do I serve wholeheartedly (song leading, singing, playing an instrument, ushering, etc) or do I constantly look for a replacement?
- b. When I have to lead the church in a presentation, for example in communion, prayer or contribution, do I take time to prepare well and get advice and help?
- c. After performing a task do I get feedback on it? Am I humble to ask?
- d. Do I come to church on time? It makes a difference when people see how punctual members are for services and activities.
- e. Do I reach out to those visiting? Do I greet them and take initiative? Do I invite them to go with us for lunch?
- f. Do I sing wholeheartedly at services?

This may all seem trivial to you, but our collective efforts will result in an inspiring church service and, as it was with Jesus, the people will leave satisfied and will want to return for more inspiration.

Let's take all of our responsibilities seriously, be it leading in front of the church or leading lessons in our Bible Talks or small groups, and make a focused effort to be inspiring.

Discussion Questions:

A. How do we feel about the qualities that God looks out for in people who are to be his instruments?

B. Does God operate in this manner in the 21st century? What do you think of this approach?

C. Do we esteem “high ranking officials” and leaders and get embarrassed about our own church? If you struggle with this, please talk to someone about this and have a plan.

D. Do we see the importance of taking all of our responsibilities seriously to ensure our gatherings are as inspirational as possible to those visiting? Do people leave satisfied?

Lesson Three

The People of the Kingdom

When one types the word “kingdom” into an Old Testament electronic concordance, something very interesting occurs – this word was not used to refer to God’s people until the time when God defined them as his people in Exodus 19, at Mount Sinai. Prior to that time, the Israelites were known as ‘the house of Jacob’ or the “people of Israel”, a less endearing term. After Mount Sinai, God began to refer to them as his “kingdom of priests” or “my treasured possession”, which is a more affectionate term, bringing out the idea of God closeness to his people. Isn’t that awesome? This is seen from **Exodus 19: 1-6**:

¹In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. ²After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

³Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ⁴You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, ⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

It was as if the encounter between God and his people at Mount Sinai was the defining moment when they entered into a covenant with him, and thereafter words such as “his kingdom of priests” and “treasured possession” and a “holy nation” were used to the people of Israel.

Hereafter, they in turn, also had a crucial role in fulfilling God's kingdom purposes.

What does it mean to be his treasured possession? Kaiser (2000) says that some translations define "my own possession" as being "my peculiar people", which comes from the Latin word meaning "property". God explains about being his people, or treasured possession in the following scriptures:

a. Deuteronomy 7: 6

⁶For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

b. Deuteronomy 26: 18

¹⁸And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands.

c. Malachi 3: 17

¹⁷"They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.

This is like a father who really loves his children and keeps reminding him of his love. It is not a boss-employee relationship or a manager-servant one. Doesn't it boggle your mind to think that the creator of the universe thinks that you are so special? We should enjoy and take comfort that God looks at us from this vantage point – his most highly valuable possession. Does he look at the stars like this? Does he look at any part of his creation like this? Perhaps his angels, but as far as the earth is concerned, only his people enjoy this term of endearment from him.

However, with this privilege, come responsibilities. God calls his people:

1. To be a People Who Mediate Others to God

God used the words “kingdom of priests” to his people. **Exodus 19: 6** says:

***⁶ you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.
These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."***

Isn't it interesting that although there was to be a priestly class among God's people, namely from the family line of Aaron, the whole kingdom of Israel was also regarded as a priestly one. This means *everyone*, the people from the tribes of Levites and also the ordinary Israelites from the other tribes. This was not a kingdom of servants, or of soldiers, but a kingdom of priests.

What comes to our minds when we think of the word “priest”? A person who is somewhat isolated from the community and who does not engage in the daily works and routine of ordinary people. If the entire nation were priests, it follows that they were to be serving someone or mediating between one party and God. So who might that party be? The other nations of the world. That was their mission, seen in the following versus:

a. Isaiah 49: 6

⁶ he says:

***"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."***

b. Isaiah 60: 1-3

¹*"Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.*

²*See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.*

³*Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

c. Zechariah 8: 22-23

²²*And many peoples and powerful nations will come to
Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him."*

²³*This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten
men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one
Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you,
because we have heard that God is with you.' "*

God wanted his people to be a light to the other nations, acting as a priest and bringing others to him.

Likewise, in the New Testament, we, as a priestly nation, are to perform a similar role and mediate between the lost people and God. This is supported by the scriptures in **1 Peter 2: 5**, which says:

⁵*you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual
house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

As a priestly people, we are to *offer* spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God. What may they be? The answers are found in the following scriptures:

a. Romans 12 : 1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (NIV)

¹And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ²Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

Our bodies, not just as individuals, but as a whole church. The book of Romans was written to the church in Rome, and collectively as a body, they were to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God. We do this in response to being shown mercy by our God. We have done nothing to deserve this privilege. It came about totally as a result of his mercy.

Later on in **Romans 12: 4-8**, the bible says:

⁴Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace

given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; ⁸if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

The bible clearly says that for the church to function healthily, the members need to use their gifts accordingly. There is a role for everyone if we can identify our gifts, given to us by our heavenly father. Many disciples do not even know their gifts. They serve and some are great servants, but never fully use their gifts. People who do use their gifts in the church are the most joyful people in the body. They appreciate using their gifts and talents to promote the well being of the church. It is sad to see how many people do not use their gifts, which is to the detriment of the church. There are so many ways to serve in the church. We can't leave it to just the full time people to run all aspects of the church. This is unbiblical. God expects all members of the body to use their gifts. The list in Romans is by no means exhaustive. If we are unsure of our gifts, we need to make an effort to identify them. Asking your leaders and those who know you for feedback may put you in the right direction to bring glory to God by using your gifts

b. Hebrews 13: 15

¹⁵Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.

Our wholeheartedness in serving the living God – This should be the fruit of our lips that confesses his name, not just saying nice words in our services, but backing it up with our lives.

c. Hebrews 13: 16

¹⁶And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Our sharing – This includes our time and resources. By sacrificing our time and effort to reach out to others and pouring out of lives, it becomes to God a pleasing sacrifice.

d. Romans 15: 16

¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Our Evangelism – Paul says here that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable to God. It was his priestly duty to do, not because he was an Apostle, but because he was called to be a kingdom priest. His impact on them was part of his priestly sacrifice to God.

Again, it should be stressed that we are not saved by these works, but we are saved to work. It is our priestly duty and privilege to fulfill these responsibilities.

2. To be a People Who Are Obedient

God expected his people, after entering into a covenant with him, to obey his laws. **Deuteronomy 11: 26-27** says:

²⁶See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse- 27 the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today;

Hemphill (2003) puts it aptly:

*“Partial obedience is not total obedience
Delayed obedience is present tense disobedience
Thus, full obedience is the only cure for disobedience.”*

In **1 Peter 1: 15-16**, it says:

¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

We are to be holy because that is God’s heart and we are the windows that others will look through to see God. Our obedience must radiate *from* us and impact them.

Discussion Questions:

- A. What does being “God’s holy priests” look like? How are we doing at being God’s holy priests?

B. Go back and read Romans 12:1-2 in the NLT again. How are we responding to the call of being “living sacrifices”? How does being a “living sacrifice” tie in with not being influenced with the customs and behaviour of the culture around us? How are we doing in this area?

C. How do we feel about being set apart as God’s treasured possession? Have any of us ever spent a whole week meditating on how much God loves us and how special we are to Him? How would doing this change our lives for the better? (Discuss when the group could do this together.)

D. Have you identified your gift/s? Are you ready to use it for God’s kingdom? How?

Lesson Four

The King Tempted and Triumphant

Let us now focus on the time when Jesus was tempted in the desert by the Devil. This was a time right before Jesus began preaching about the kingdom of God. The account of his temptation is found in **Matthew 4: 1-11**, which says:

¹*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. ²After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."*

⁴*Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "*

⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶"If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: " 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' "*

⁷*Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "*

⁸*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."*

¹⁰*Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' "*

¹¹Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil wanted to trip Jesus from doing God's will. God allowed him to be tempted, but the temptations themselves came from the Devil. It is important to note that all of Jesus' responses to Satan when he challenged the Devil came from the **Deuteronomy 6-8** section of the Old Testament. Interestingly, the teachings in Deuteronomy were given by Moses to the Israelites after the forty years of wanderings in the desert, seen in **Deuteronomy 1: 1-3**

¹These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan—that is, in the Arabah—opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab. ²(It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir road.)

³In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the LORD had commanded him concerning them.

This was a time when the new generation of fighting men (except Joshua and Caleb) and their families were about to enter the promised land, Canaan. Moses was giving them the laws that they had to abide as part of their covenant with God, which he initiated at Mount Sinai, before they entered the promise land. The parallel between the nation of Israel entering the promised land and Jesus beginning his ministry is striking. Just as Israel was about to enter the promised land after forty years of wanderings, Jesus was also about to begin his ministry after his trial period of forty days in the desert. Let's look closely at each of the temptations that Jesus faced.

1. The First Temptation

After forty days in the desert, fasting, the bible says he was hungry, one of the greatest understatements in the bible! When Jesus was

starving, the devil launched his attack. Notice the first temptation did not come before the forty day period. It came after, when Jesus was at his weakest. Jesus was victorious over the first temptation as he quoted a passage from **Deuteronomy 8: 3**, which says:

³He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Just the same way the people of Israel depended on manna that was provided by God, we are to depend on God for our every need. The Israelites received sufficient manna for that particular day (except for one day when they had twice the amount to avoid working on the Sabbath). In the same way they were specifically told not to collect any more than one day's portion, we should not run after daily provisions like the pagans:

³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. (Matthew 6: 32)

Instead we should, like the Israelites, trust God and seek first his kingdom and he will provide our every need. The kingdom should be our number one priority, not accumulating wealth and money. Putting God number one also means not just adopting the culture of the church and staying religious but with a schedule that actually reflects our commitment to work as the number one priority.

2. The Second Temptation

The devil took him to a high place, which was about 180 feet high. When you take into account the topography of the area, Jesus was about 500 feet above the Kidron Valley (Hemphill, 2004). It was here that the devil told Jesus to throw himself off the cliff, for no other

reason that to see if God would come to his rescue. To this, Jesus replied, quoting a passage from **Deuteronomy 6: 16** which says,

¹⁶Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.

Do we also want God to prove himself before we go out by faith? How often do we do that? By deliberately putting God in a “corner” saying, “If you bless me then I will...?” Instead we are to follow the right paths, do what’s right and then, during the course of our action, trust that God will take care of us. No doubt about it, he will.

3. The Third Temptation

Here the devil took him to a high mountain and showed him all of his dominion, and he told Jesus that all of his kingdom would be with Jesus, if only he would bow down and do homage. Jesus replied, **Deuteronomy 6: 13:**

¹³Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

The devil was willing to give Jesus his kingdom, but Jesus was after another kingdom, a kingdom that involved the cross. The devil offered him kingship without any suffering, but by merely bowing down to him once. God had in mind a better, more lasting, and a more powerful kingdom, that involved carrying the cross daily. Likewise, we should not look out for shortcuts in God’s kingdom. We should not fall into the devil’s trap by embracing the devil’s kingdom, which is perhaps more glamorous, and definitely easier. Instead we should passionately embrace God’s kingdom, which is glorious. Jesus defeated Satan in his schemes by relying on the word of God. That was where he found the strength. As Paul says, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil. It takes relying on the spiritual to fight against the spiritual. This is why we should take every care to have great QTs daily. Our times in prayer

and in the word should not be done out of a duty. We should desire it and make our times a great “experience”. It takes effort to do this. It takes focus. The rewards will far outweigh the pain of our struggles.

After Moses told them to take heed of God’s law, that particular generation, under Joshua’s leadership, did just that. Amen! However, the generations that followed disobeyed God. With Jesus, his time in the desert was victorious. Thereafter he went on from there to preach, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” He was in pursuit of a better kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Discussion Questions:

A. Do you seek to earn a good living so that you can meet the needs of your family and have excess from which to finance kingdom activity through your church? If not, do you want help to be able to do this? What can you do to make changes?

B. Do your lifestyle, calendar and checkbook give clear testimony that you are seeking first the kingdom of God and your Father's approval? If not, do you want help to be able to do this? What can you do to make changes?

C. In your QTs, do you look forward to your time with God? Does it generally turn out to be an awesome "experience" or is it more like a duty? How could you improve?

Lesson Five

The Kingdom Menu

Jesus declared his message most clearly about his kingdom in a series of scriptures known as the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5 – 7**). The kingdom is a constant theme here. The standards laid out here are very high, no doubt about it. Many who believe in Jesus confuse discussing high standards and repentance with “salvation by works”. Accepting and being thankful for salvation by grace does not take away the need for us to repent of our sins and strive to maintain a Sermon-on-the-Mount type of repentant life. When we strive to walk this walk, we will still fail miserably, and then we will REALLY appreciate God’s grace, because we will know that truly we are nothing without God. There are many professing Christians who make no attempt to live by the principles laid out here but rather embrace a “health, wealth and prosperity gospel”, the values of which are completely contrary to those laid out by Jesus. Hopefully, a study of Jesus’ “Constitution” will help us all to get the right balance.

Let us now look at the key principles and values of Jesus and his kingdom as found in the Beatitudes: **Matthew 5: 1- 10**

¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them saying:

*³"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*⁴Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*⁵Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*⁷Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

- a. **Poor** – Spiritual bankruptcy. We are to seek his kingdom and his righteousness, not be self-righteous. We need to humbly acknowledge our need for him in our lives. Look at the attitude of the centurion who came to Jesus on behalf of his servant in **Matthew 8: 5-13**. His sense of unworthiness was a kingdom response. We struggle with this kind of response because we are taught by the world to be self-reliant. We like to give the impression that we have it all together.

Do we ask for help in areas of our struggles? What about our marriages? Our purity? Many of us have switched off and give standard answers like “I am OK ...” We are not open in our small groups. Conversations get superficial and we never change.

- b. **Mourn** – This refers to us mourning of our sin and others’. We recognize temptations to sin as the work of the devil and we get happy when we are victorious.

Do we see sin as sin, as we say, call a spade a spade? Do we justify our luke-warmness and get into arguments with our leaders constantly? Do we need to get pushed to excel as a Christian?

- c. **Meek** – The heroes of our day are not meek, they are often depicted as being revengeful, strong and are always right.

Meekness is not weakness, passivity or cowardice. In **Numbers 12: 3**, the bible says that Moses was the most humble man on earth, but he was not weak or passive.

Do we share our weaknesses humbly with others? Do we share with our leaders what we have learned from them? Are we aloof?

- d. **Hunger and thirst** – This is the idea of longing and a deep desire to be satisfied spiritually. That’s how a kingdom person is to pursue righteousness. Do you look forward to your time with God? It is generally an inspiring time?

Do we ask others to study the bible with us? Are we eager to learn? Do we get offended when someone challenges us with the scriptures?

- e. **Mercy** – This is different from justice. Justice means dealing out what is fair, but mercy means giving people what is “unfair”, i.e. the grace they don’t deserve. Which is typical of our behavior, the pursuit of justice or mercy?

Do we seek justice and when we don’t get it, sink into bitterness with other people?

- f. **Pure in heart** – Avoiding sinful behaviors and thoughts, and instead, doing what is right, not for personal gain but simply because that is how God wants it.

- g. **Peacemakers** – Not peace lovers, but peace-makers. Not paying back evil with evil. (See **Romans 12: 17-21**)

Do we help resolve issues between people in the church? Are we conflict avoiders? Do we like to gossip?

- h. **Persecuted** – All those who want to lead a godly life will be persecuted. (See **2 Timothy 3: 12**)

Hemphill and Ross (2005) draw a distinction between people who are kingdom-focused and those who are not but who are still decent individuals who have some spirituality about them. The two writers say that at the very core, those individuals put more value on the worldly things than on the kingdom of God. Take a look at the following list:

People who are not totally kingdom-focused but who are still decent people are those who:

- Work hard and are financially independent
- Live as good citizens and obey the law
- Relate to spouse, children, and extended family in a warm loving way.
- Attend church
- Live fairly morally

A word to the parents - Many parents have overextended their own working schedule and that of their children in order to provide “good things” for them. However, if they are honest, they might acknowledge that the real issue is their own ego. They want their children to achieve great things, like getting to the best schools, getting the best grades, and joining many after school activities or ECAs/CCAs, in order to bring satisfaction to themselves, then secondly to their children. These parents also are motivated because they want to achieve a higher standard of living. There is nothing wrong in working hard. The bible actually encourages us to do so. However, is it worth the huge amount of extra stress brought upon by over extending ourselves in order to achieve this better standard of living? We can work only so many hours without bringing damage to our family.

Kingdom-focused people have the following mindset:

- Have as their highest life priority bringing glory to God.
- Commit themselves, their families and their resources to expanding the kingdom of God by the power of God.
- Choose vocations, activities, and relationships so that all the nations of the earth might be drawn to God.

Discussion Questions:

A. How does the way we treat people reflect whether or not we are embracing the Beatitudes? Look back at the lesson and answer the questions written there as a group.

B. In which areas in the Beatitudes are we excelling? In which areas are we falling short?

C. How message does God want us to remember when we are persecuted? If we never get *any* persecution of *any* kind because of our faith, might that also be a message for us?

Lesson Six

The Kingdom Spice

After Jesus discoursed about the beatitudes, Jesus then went on to talk about everyday examples that the people could relate to such as salt and light, seen in **Matthew 5: 13-16**

¹³"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

These are everyday common items that do have an impact. Jesus was trying to get the idea across that this is the kind of life that he wants his kingdom subjects to lead. We will be talking about both of these separately.

1. The Salt of the Earth

Salt had many different uses in Jesus' day. Here are some:

- a. Salt was a preservative –Today we use refrigeration to keep meat fresh, but in Jesus' day people used salt to keep meat fresh. Without salt, how could a catch from the sea be preserved before it gets to the market place? Likewise we are to act as preservatives of the society, not letting the world disintegrate.

- b. Salt was an antiseptic – When we have a cut and then spend a fair amount of time in the sea, our cuts do get healed noticeably faster. That’s because salt in the sea water acts as an antiseptic. We, as subject of God’s kingdom, need to kill off the “germs” of the society, not decay with it. We should influence people for the better, not for the worse.

- c. Salt was a catalyst for fire (Hemphill 2004) – In Palestine one of the most common fuels used in an outdoor oven was dung. To make the ovens burn better, people lined the bottom with salt plates and also sprinkled salt on the manure itself. However, over time the chemical reaction would cause the salt to lose its saltiness, which was what Jesus alluded to in **Luke 14: 34-35**. Likewise we are to ignite fires around us.

As those called to be the salt of the earth, how are we doing? Are we spreading ourselves throughout our community, influencing people constantly as subjects of his kingdom? Is it a norm for your small group to have one or two people studying the bible? Do you know how to meet the needs spiritually (sometime physically) of those to whom you are reaching out? We should strive to meet their needs, not just push down bible information on them. We should think about different aspects of their lives, like the following:

- i. If they go through a bad patch in their marriage, are we helping them?
- ii. If they are having difficulties with their children, are we helping them?
- iii. If they are lonely, are we there for them?

Do we portray an “unconditional” love to them?

2. The Light of the World

Jesus, The Light of the World, has also called us to be a light of the world. **Philippians 2: 15**

¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

According to Paul, we have to shine like stars in the universe. Jesus used two different illustrations to depict this.

- a. A light on a lamp stand -This is an individual light, like the ones we use in our homes. We should not be embarrassed about sharing our faith. Satan will tempt us to feel like a fool, but we should do this for our king as subjects of his kingdom.
- b. The lights of a city on a hill - For a city to shine from a distant hill, it cannot be from just one source of light. It takes a collective group of lights to shine from a hill. We should shine collectively as a church, not only as individuals.

Do our lights go on and off like Christmas tree lights? We are to stay on and on...

Notice Jesus did not say that we should possess the qualities of salt and light. Instead he said we are “the salt of the earth” and “light of the world”. This means we need to be resolutely focused on his mission and make a difference to the people around us. Keeping quiet is not an option.

Thereafter, from **Matthew 5: 21** onwards, Jesus specifically touched on the following topics:

- i) Anger
- ii) Sexual Immorality

- iii) Divorce
- iv) Oaths
- v) Revenge
- vi) Love for Enemies
- vii) Giving to the Needy
- viii) Prayer
- ix) Fasting

The above were some of the issues that plagued the people of his day. It is no different now, some 2,000 years later. No matter how advanced the world has become, the basic sinful character of man will always remain unchanged.

When we look at this list, we can feel overwhelmed and think that this is too difficult, that there is no way we can measure up. What impression does the world get by looking at this list? Words like impossible, boring, unachievable, harsh and dull come to mind. People think that God is making it difficult for us to make it to heaven. Instead, the counsel given to us by Jesus on these subjects actually prevents real harm in our lives and if we don't obey his teaching, we will cause ourselves and others more pain in our lives on earth, let alone prevent ourselves from making it to heaven.

It is a real paradox that people who put these principles into practice are the most free and fulfilled people on earth!

Our Rewards

Jesus also warned us to not seek men's approval. In **Matthew 6: 5**, we see

⁵"And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

It says here that the Pharisees loved to be *seen* by others in the streets. They loved others to think of them highly. They also fasted in such a way as to look pious.

Our motives are so crucial in all that we do. We do not do things to get a reward from any man except from God, our Father. What are our motives for doing what we do? Let's go through some of the common roles in the church:

Singers and those who speak or lead in a "conspicuous" position – Why do you volunteer your efforts? To be seen by others? Or to help in our worship service knowing you have the talent and are willing to use it for his kingdom?

Lay leaders – Why do you lead? Do you covet the title or do you want to serve people, the way Jesus came to serve?

Staff – Why are you in the ministry? Are you willing to walk the talk or just talk the talk?

We should always do our best but our motives must be to please our King and to advance his kingdom.

Discussion Questions:

A. Is your small group functioning as salt and light to the world? (If yes, give examples.)

B. Is anything stopping you from being salt and light? (brainstorm about possible reasons, for eg, are you distracted, feeling timid, discouraged?)

C. In what ways are you different from when you were a non-Christian? (Give specific examples.) Which sin(s) is(are) still plaguing you after all these years since you were baptized? How will being Kingdom-Focused help you to fight against this(these) sin(s) better?

Lesson Seven

The Kingdom-Focused Example

Jesus demonstrated a kingdom-focused attitude although he was pressed very often with all kinds of potential distractions from the Pharisees and others. The religious leaders wanted to trap Jesus, the sick wanted to tap into his healing power, and the hungry wanted to have their fill.

Let's look at **Matthew 9**, who records a busy day in the life of Jesus.

- 9: 1-8 Jesus healed the paralytic and forgave the man of his sins.
- 9: 9 Jesus commanded Matthew to follow him.
- 9: 10-13 He had a tiff with the Pharisees about eating with 'sinners and tax collectors'.
- 9: 18-26 He raised a little girl from the dead.
- 9: 27-31 He healed two blind men.
- 9: 32-34 He cast out a demon from a man.
- 9: 35-36 Jesus went to all the towns and villages teaching about the kingdom.
- 9: 37 Jesus taught his disciples privately.

After a draining day of healing the paralytic, conversing with Matthew, raising a girl from the dead, and healing two blind men, Jesus must have been exhausted. Still he went out into all the towns and villages, teaching and preaching the good news of the *kingdom*. What a kingdom-focused leader! He still had a heart to show compassion on the crowd who followed him, and not get irritated.

Let's get a glimpse of another day in the life of Jesus, found further on in **Matthew 14: 13-36**

- 14: 13 Jesus heard about John's death and wanted to be by himself
- 14: 14 Jesus was interrupted and was moved by compassion. He set aside his own need and focused on others.
- 14: 16-19 Jesus performed a miracle in front of the disciples and increased their faith.
- 14: 23 Jesus then went off to a mountainside to pray.
- 14: 25-33 Jesus performed another miracle by walking on water. He also taught Peter and the others some valuable lessons as well.
- 14: 34-36 Jesus went on to heal the sick and met needs.

How did Jesus impact the people that he was with?

- a. When he healed the sick, others were watching. He allowed this to happen. These encounters helped those watching to increase their faith in God and in him.
- b. When he had finished teaching and feeding the crowd, he then privately taught his disciples (9: 37). This was where he provided them with further training. He talked to them about the harvest and inspired them that people were hungry for God's word and the kingdom

Discussion Questions:

A. Does your small group regularly rope in visitors and studies to join in your sharing times?

B. Do they also meet regularly for private times to sharpen one another up?

C. Do you set goals that you can all control as a small group? Are you focused as a group to meet them?

Conclusion

Are you a kingdom-focused person individually?

Collectively, is your small group a kingdom-focused small group?

What does a kingdom-focused church look like? If we turn our attention to the book of **Acts 2: 42-47**, it would be clear:

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Are we willing to change? Do our calendar, schedule, checkbook reflect kingdom priorities? If you are a parent, are you helping your children develop a kingdom focus? Does your small group have the courage to set goals together? For example, we can control how many calls we make, so we could at times set goals about the number of people we would all like to call during a given week. We can control how much time we spend in prayer and in studying the bible, so at times we could set goals for these things as a group. By setting goals in these areas, we will put ourselves on the edge and God will then work his miracles (“...more than we ask or imagine”). What do you have to change in your life to be a kingdom person? What changes should your small group make? Is your small group a kingdom-focused small group? Would you like to be one?

Then...

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