

Entering the Kingdom

Duncan Watkinson

1.	The Entry Requirements	3
2.	Coming through Immigration	9
3.	The Heart of the Kingdom	15
4.	Being Salt and Light.....	22
5.	Exceedingly Righteous.....	28
6.	The Kingdom and Religion.....	34
7.	Building on Rock.....	40
8.	Advancing the Kingdom	46
9.	The Greatness of the Kingdom.....	51
10.	The Secrets of the Kingdom	57
11.	Forgiveness and More	63
12.	Oil-filled Service	69
13.	The Coming Kingdom	75

Entering the Kingdom

By Duncan Watkinson

This study book has been written to help fulfil the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations. We believe that you will benefit from studying this book by yourself, but that you will be blessed even more if you do it together with a small group of believers or in the context of a discipling relationship with another Christian.

In the process of writing this book, we have drawn from a wide cross section of God's church. We are extremely grateful for the many insights we have received from different sources. This study is dedicated to:

Alan Vincent

whose input publicly and personally, through books, conversations, sermons and conferences, has contributed much to our understanding of the kingdom. See www.outpouringministries.org for more information on Alan Vincent's remarkable ministry.

Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Published by: Duncan Watkinson
515, 4th A Main Road, OMBR Layout,
Bangalore 560 043, India

This edition published December, 2008

1. The Entry Requirements

Every day, thousands queue at American embassies around the world, each hoping for a visa that will change their lives. They undergo interviews, medical tests and financial scrutiny in the hope that they will be allowed to enter the country of their dreams. If they tried to enter America without a valid visa, they would be sent back where they came from or put in jail.

A person who wants to enter the kingdom of God also has to fulfill certain requirements. In **John 3:1-8**, Jesus described the conditions for entry. In this incident, Nicodemus, a senior religious ruler, came to Jesus at night. He knew that God was with Jesus in a special way – proved by the amazing miracles he performed. Write out Jesus’ reply to Nicodemus in **John 3:3** in full:

I tell you

.....
Jesus’ reply must have sounded strange to Nicodemus and was probably not what he had expected. He could not understand what Jesus meant because the only birth he knew was natural childbirth. So he asked Jesus, *How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!*

Read Jesus’ response in **John 3:5-6** and fill in the blanks:

*Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can
..... unless he is born of
and the Flesh gives birth to
but the gives birth to’*

According to these verses, Jesus wanted each person to:

1. Be born again of the Spirit
2. See the Kingdom
3. Enter the Kingdom

In the remainder of this chapter, we look at the first two of these steps in some detail. Subsequent chapters explore what it means to enter the kingdom.

A. Be born again

Jesus gave the command, You must be born again! (**John 3:7**) This is the only way a person can start the Christian life. Becoming a Christian means receiving the supernatural life of Jesus into our inner being. Summarise in your own words what the following verses teach about being born again:

John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*

1 Pet 1:23 *For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.*

1 John 3:9 *No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him...*

.....

Christianity is unlike any other religion or philosophy. The Christian life starts with a spiritual birth. For natural birth, both father and mother are involved in the conception. To be born again, God offers the seed (*sperma* in Greek) and each individual must receive that seed to become ‘pregnant’ with the life of God. This is supernatural conception. God wants every person to be impregnated with his seed.

Each human being must decide for himself whether he is willing to receive the seed of God’s life. If you are already born again, the life of Jesus is in you. If you have not yet received this life, you can receive it right now by:

- Admitting to God that you are a sinner
- Believing that Jesus forgives your sins and gives you eternal life

Confessing your sins to God

Deciding to receive the life of Jesus and to follow Jesus only

When you have done this, you should thank God for forgiving all your sins, and make a commitment to obey all his commands for the rest of your life.

B. See the Kingdom

Jesus said that, when we are born again, it would be possible for us to see the kingdom of God. He did not guarantee that we will see it; he only said that we would **not** be able to see it **unless** we are born again.

In fact, many people become Christians because they have been promised forgiveness of sin, heaven when they die, physical healing or financial blessing. These invitations are attractive and are based on some truth, but many people who accept them only see the personal benefits which they expect to receive. They do **not** see the kingdom. The message which Jesus proclaimed was different. Look up the following verses and write down what Jesus preached:

Matthew 4:23

.....

Matthew 9:35

.....

Luke 4:43

.....

Luke 8:1

.....

Luke 16:16

.....

Acts 1:3

.....

Now write down what these men preached:

Acts 8:12

Philip

Acts 19:8

Paul

Acts 28:31

Paul

If we have really seen the kingdom, it means that we recognise that:

1. There is a King whose name is Jesus

This King is totally loving, kind, merciful, concerned and generous.

- This King also has complete authority in heaven and on earth. He is in total charge of the entire universe.
- He rules in such a way that his character is expressed and his will is increasingly done on earth as it is in heaven.
- This King always uses his power and authority for the ultimate good of his people.
- He desires his rule – the kingdom of God - to be established in all individuals, families, companies, communities, cities and nations.

2. The Kingdom was always God's plan

God first established the kingdom of God in the Garden of Eden. Everything was in proper order and Satan could not interfere with God's good and loving government. Adam and Eve enjoyed four things:

- Perfect fellowship with God – basking in his love and kindness.
- Life in the power of the Spirit. God's life was in them and he was their wisdom and righteousness. Adam and Eve simply did what God said.
- Authority over all that God had made. They were created to be joint rulers over the earth. (**Genesis 1:26f**)
- Protection from the devil. Pain, suffering, sin, sickness and death were totally unknown on the earth. God ruled over all.

However, Adam and Eve gave away the kingdom of God by choosing to eat from the tree which the Lord had forbidden. The Lord had hoped that they would obey him voluntarily but they chose to follow their own desires.

1. Satan tempted Eve by offering her independence from God, and the possibility of 'self-realisation'. Eve, then Adam, fell for this.
2. They chose independence and stepped out of the kingdom. The kingdom is God's rule being done perfectly. Independence is my will being done.

Adam and Eve suffered the loss of all that they had enjoyed. The kingdom of God had been replaced by the dominion of darkness. See **Colossians 1:13**.

Instead of destroying his creation, including Satan and man, God chose to:

1. leave man as ruler on earth. This would allow Satan to be active for a season but would also provide opportunity for all men to be saved.
2. provide a legal, righteous means of redemption through his Son.

When Jesus came to earth, he lived in total dependence on God – just like Adam had done before he sinned. Jesus had the same potential to sin as Adam but he never sinned. Adam chose independence; Jesus chose obedience.

Jesus started the process of re-establishing the kingdom on earth. All that Adam lost – fellowship, power to live, authority and protection – was restored in Jesus. God's purpose was to bring in the kingdom in all its purity, power and glory. Once Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, his earthly life demonstrated the kingdom of God. He died on the Cross to pay the price for our independence. And he invited people to enter the kingdom so that they could live like him.

Jesus re-established the kingdom of God through his perfect submission and obedience. After his resurrection, he declared in

*Matthew 28:18: All in and on
..... has been given to me.*

The earth was once again under God's ultimate rule – that is the kingdom.

3. The Old Testament anticipated the kingdom

As soon as Adam and Eve lost the kingdom, God promised in **Genesis 3:15** that the woman's seed would ultimately destroy Satan. He also promised his people that the kingdom would one day be re-established

on earth through this seed, Jesus. Look up the following prophecies and fill in the blanks:

Isaiah 9:7 *Of the increase of his And peace there will be no end. He will on David's throne and over his*

Dan 2:44 *In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a that will never be*

Dan 7:14 *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His is an everlasting that will not pass away, and his.....is one that will never be destroyed.*

Now write out **Daniel 7:18** in full and notice who receive this kingdom:

.....
.....
.....

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you are born again, thank God that his life is in you. If you are not, seriously consider God's offer to give you new birth. 2. Reflect on the teaching on the kingdom. How much of the kingdom had you seen in the past? What have you learned from this lesson?

2. Coming through Immigration

You may have received that precious American visa and seen countless films about America; but you have not entered America until you have passed through immigration control and your passport has been stamped. Only then, are you actually in the country.

Similarly, many Christians have followed the first two steps of John 3. They are born again and have seen and understood something of the good news of the kingdom – but they have never actually entered it. Perhaps they are some of those Jesus referred to in **Matthew 7:21**. Write this verse out in full:

.....
.....
.....

.....
These people obviously said the right words but they never entered. Why?

A. What stops us entering the kingdom?

Matthew's gospel shows four obstacles to entering the kingdom.

1. Lack of righteousness

In **Matthew 5:20**, Jesus taught: *For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

This seems a high standard as these Jewish leaders were meticulous in observing the law. However, Paul explained that this legalistic righteousness falls short of what God is looking for. Please read **Romans 3:20-24** and answer the following questions:

What is the purpose of the law?

.....

How do we receive God’s righteousness?

Who needs to receive God’s righteousness?

How does God see a person who has received this?

The righteousness we require to enter the kingdom comes through faith, not the law. When we are born again, God credits the righteousness of Christ to us. **(Romans 4:23-24)** This righteousness far exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees. I still have to fight temptation and sinful desires, but I am justified by faith – it really is just as if I’d never sinned. God declares me righteous!

2. Lack of humility

Read **Matthew 18:3-4** and fill in the gaps: Jesus said: *‘I tell you the truth, unless youand become like you will neverTherefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the*

Some people are too proud or self-satisfied to enter the kingdom. They feel content with their station in life and see no need to change. Humility is required to recognize that what I have now is nothing compared to what I could have. Living in India, I may be proud of my nation and the way we do things. But, every year, tens of thousands of Indians want to enter America because they see the prosperous lifestyle and opportunities there. They then have to humble themselves to go through the process to get an American visa. Likewise, we need to change our outlook and humble ourselves to enter the kingdom.

3. Wealth and possessions

Matthew 19:16-24 tells of a rich young man who had strong religious inclinations. He wanted eternal life and seemed to be living a good life, observing most of the Jewish laws. But Jesus advised him:

If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.
(v21)

The rich young man went away sad, unwilling to pay the price. Jesus used the opportunity to teach his disciples. Fill in the blanks in **Matthew 19:23-24**:

*I tell you the truth, it is hard for a to
 Again I tell you, it is easier for a
 camel to go through the eye of a needle than for*

If we have wealth and possessions, we are accustomed to using our money to get what we want. When we enter the kingdom, our money belongs to our King and he has full authority to use it as he desires. Jesus may prosper us, or he may ask us to give it all away. Even if he asks us to sacrifice everything we have, we can be confident that he will always provide for our needs.

4. Religion

Matthew 23:13

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Religious people do not like the kingdom of God. That was true in Jesus' time and it is still true today – even for religious Christians. Religion is designed to make people feel OK with God, comfortable in their traditions and rituals. The kingdom of God is revolutionary. It will change the world – and it requires a radical change in the heart of its citizens.

As this verse shows, religious leaders assume they know what is right, and then they use their religious position to try and make people do it. Their intentions may be good but they are using the spirit of control to get the results they desire. Sadly, there are leaders in many churches and denominations who operate in this way.

In the kingdom, each one of us is answerable to the King and we are required to obey God rather than men. See **Acts 5:29**. Because their first commitment is to do the will of their Father, kingdom men and women will often not fit in with religious systems. In fact, they may be branded as ‘rebels’ in the same way as Martin Luther, John Wesley, William Booth and many others in church history were.

In some churches, leaders instruct people to do (or not do) something. Although an individual may obey, he actually feels he is being stopped from doing what the Lord has told him to do.

Have you ever experienced this?

YES/NO

Please describe the situation and be ready to discuss it:

.....
.....

B. How do we enter the kingdom?

1. By repentance

John the Baptist started his ministry proclaiming, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.* (**Matthew 3:1-2**) Similarly, Jesus began to preach with the same words, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.* (**Matthew 4:17**). Both declared that repentance was the entry point to the kingdom.

Repent literally means to ‘change one’s mind’. To enter the kingdom, we have to change our mind about our sinfulness and who Jesus is. Most of all, we have to repent of the independent life-style we inherited from Adam, and resolve to live a life of obedience to Jesus. Please look up **Acts 26:20** and see what Paul preached. Fill in the blanks:

I preached that they should..... and

..... and prove their

.....
 Repentance is a change of mind followed by a change of behaviour.
 John the Baptist also preached this. Read **Luke 3:7-14** and list some
 of the practical changes in everyday life which John expected from a
 repentant person:

.....

Is there an area of your life where you have not yet repented?

YES/NO

If so, write it down here:

.....

2. Through the narrow gate

Now read **Matthew 7:13-14**. This verse is clearly talking about
 entering the kingdom, even though the word ‘kingdom’ is not actually
 used. Jesus said that the gate into the kingdom is narrow and small.
 Many believe that ‘all roads lead to God’ but the Bible teaches that
 there is only one way in. Read **John 14:6** and write it out in full:

.....

Matthew 7:13 describes the road that leads to destruction as

.....

Matthew 7:14 describes the road that leads to life as

.....

When we decide to enter the kingdom through believing in Jesus and
 repenting, we have to recognize that the kingdom way is narrow and

we are no longer free to do what we feel like. We must do what the Lord says.

3. With desperation

Mark 9:47 *And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,*

Jesus is not talking about harming our bodies or mutilating ourselves. What he is looking for is a passionate commitment to the kingdom. It will cost us to turn our back on sin and to live an obedient lifestyle. He said that we should be so committed to entering the kingdom that we are even willing to lose an eye.

Now look up **Matthew 6:33** and write it out in full:

.....
.....

Jesus' appeal to 'enter the kingdom' is not an appeal to experience the first stage of salvation; it is not an appeal for new birth or for one's first repentance and faith. Rather it is an appeal that these disciples listening to Jesus will press on into a rich experience of the power of God's kingdom in their lives.

Michael Eaton

Although there is a cost involved in entering the kingdom, Jesus invites us to join his first disciples in helping to establish the kingdom of God on earth.

- Assignment**
1. Review this study and write down as many reasons as you can think of as to why there are so few genuine kingdom men and women. Be ready to discuss this at the next lesson.
 2. Declare **Matthew 6:10** each day this week: *Your kingdom come, and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

3. The Heart of the Kingdom

Matthew 5 to 7 is known as the Sermon on the Mount and describes kingdom life. **Matthew 5:1-12** is often called the Beatitudes and shows what the heart of a kingdom person should be. Read these verses now.

Most people would not choose these characteristics as the pathway to happiness – what Jesus called ‘blessedness’. In fact, natural man requires a change of heart to even desire them - and that is what Jesus wants in us. Jesus said that we are blessed if we are like each of the following:

A. *The poor in spirit (v3)*

The kingdom comes to people who know they are poor in spirit, needy and desperate. The worst thing that can happen to us is to smugly think we have everything we need. Read **Revelation 3:14-20** and answer these questions:

What was the Laodiceans’ spiritual temperature?

How did they feel about themselves?

.....
How did Jesus see their condition?

.....
What did Jesus urge them to get (v18)

.....
What did Jesus encourage them to do (v19)?

The Laodiceans were not poor in spirit. As you read this passage, did you feel that you were like them in any way?

If so, please explain how:

.....
.....

We need to cultivate a poverty of spirit which recognises that apart from Jesus, I can do nothing. See **John 15:5**.

A few years ago, I came across some prayers which help me remember this. You may like to pray them too:

1. Take out of my life the people I don't need. Bring into my life the people I do need, because I don't know who is who.
2. Don't give me anything I can't handle, because I don't know when to say 'Yes' or when to say 'No'.
3. Open the doors I need to walk through and close the doors I do not need to walk through, because I don't know which is which.
4. Help me to understand the seasons of my life, because I don't know how to distinguish them.

B. Those who mourn (v4)

This is not the professional wailing which happens at some funerals, but a deep grief at our condition. Many years ago, the Times of London invited eminent writers to write essays on the theme 'What is wrong with the world?'

The great Christian writer, G.K.Chesterton responded to the invitation with:

Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely yours,

G. K. Chesterton

And that is what leads us to mourn. Of course, there is much wrong in the world around us but my biggest problem is me. I fall so far short of the way Jesus lived, what the Bible teaches, even what I know in my heart I could be. So I mourn before God and lament my condition.

Have you ever mourned in this way?

YES/NO

Be ready to talk about what happened if you did mourn like this. If you have never lamented in this way, consider why not and discuss your thoughts.

Of course, we do not *grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope*. (**1 Thessalonians 4:13**) Although the context of this verse is death, it reminds us that we should never feel hopeless at our condition. The Lord will indeed comfort those who mourn as he works in us to make us Christ-like.

We also need to learn to weep for the things for which God weeps – the lost, violence, poverty, injustice... Ask God to break your heart for the things which break his. **Romans 8:26** teaches that his Holy Spirit helps us to do this.

C. The meek (v5)

Meekness is often misunderstood because it sounds like weakness. Jesus is described as gentle and humble in **Matthew 11:29**, but a better translation is ‘meek and lowly.’ Jesus promised the earth to those who are meek like him.

The word translated ‘meek’ is the Greek word *praus*. It is used to describe a mighty stallion trained for battle. The horse retains its basic strength but is under the control of its master. A touch of the rein directs a ton of horseflesh. Meekness means being under the control of God. Our Lord reigns and reins! ‘It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.’ (Vine’s Expository Dictionary)

Write down your ideas of how true meekness would show in a person’s life:

.....

.....

.....

D. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (v6)

Jesus expects kingdom men and women to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Natural man cannot live without food and drink. In the same way a kingdom person should not be able to live without righteousness. Look up **Hebrews 1:8-9** and answer these questions:

What did Jesus love?

What did Jesus hate?

How did God reward him?

Jesus was passionate about righteousness. **Hebrews 1:8** says that righteousness is the sceptre of the kingdom, the guiding principle. In **Matthew 6:33** Jesus commanded us to *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness....*

Seeking the kingdom is the same as pursuing righteousness. We shall explore this in more detail in later lessons. God rewarded Jesus for his righteousness, and will reward us too – *all these things will be given as well.*

E. The merciful (v7)

Write out the command of Jesus in **Luke 6:36**:

.....
.....

Ephesians 2:4 tells us that God is rich in mercy. Mercy not only feels deep sympathy for a person in need, but also endeavours to provide resources to meet that need. God saw our need of salvation and sent Jesus into this world.

When we see people in need, we can often be critical, judgmental or uncaring towards their difficulties. Look up **James 2:13** and underline which activity is more important:

Showing mercy

Criticising

The first part of this verse also contains a warning to each of us: Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. We need to learn to be merciful in this life if we want to receive God’s mercy.

This is especially true in the area of forgiving others. Chapter 11 (page 63) has a more detailed study on the importance of forgiveness.

F. The pure in heart (v8)

If we have a pure heart, Jesus promises that we will see God. Pure means clean, sinless, without mixture or dishonesty. In **John 1:47** we read how Jesus described Nathaniel as a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false. Because of this purity of heart, Jesus promised him in v51:

You shall see

.....
Nathaniel was told that he would see God at work in amazing ways. If you also long for that, keep your heart pure. Complete James 4: 8:

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

..... *you sinners, and*

.....
Notice that the root of an impure heart is doublemindedness – wanting the things of God but also wanting what the world offers. In what areas are you tempted to be double-minded?
.....
.....

G. The peacemakers (v9)

God is a peacemaker which is why he sent Jesus. His desire is to establish peace between God and man, and between people. **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** tells us that all of us have been given one ministry. What is it?

Read **Hebrews 12:14** and fill in the gaps:

*Make every to live in with
..... and to be holy*

Kingdom people seek to reconcile men and women to God, and also to each other. Peace does not mean passivity and just doing anything to 'keep the peace'. It is honestly facing the separation and the issues which caused it, then doing all we can to bring about reconciliation.

H. Those who are persecuted because of righteousness (vv10-12)

The persecution Jesus means is described in v11. It is when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Jesus. We only receive this blessing if we are persecuted because of our righteous stand for Jesus and his ways. Jesus himself was insulted, mocked, falsely accused, rejected, unjustly tried and ultimately put to death on false charges. He endured all this to gain the long term benefit of salvation for mankind.

The early Christians understood this. Write out the second part of **Acts 14:22**:

We must

Now read **2 Thessalonians 1:5** and fill in the missing words:

*.. you will be counted worthy,
for which you are*

There is blessing on earth and reward in heaven for those who suffer like this.

Assignment

1. Review the eight blessings which Jesus pronounced. Consider in which of these you qualify for blessing – and in which you need to change. Pray and ask the Lord to begin to change you.
2. Pray for any Christians who you know are being persecuted now.

4. Being Salt and Light

The Beatitudes describe the heart of a kingdom person. Following these verses, Jesus used two everyday metaphors to show that people with a ‘beatitude’ heart will stand out in the world as salt and light. Read **Matthew 5:13-15**.

Salt has a number of useful properties:

- It improves taste. Without the right amount of salt, a meal is tasteless.
- It preserves meat, even when it is stored at room temperature.
- It helps to clean and heal wounds – a good antiseptic.
- It even makes ice melt in cold countries.

Salt makes a difference in many areas of everyday life.

Light is also essential. It is so important that God created it first, as we read in **Genesis 1:3**: And God said, ‘*Let there be light, and there was light.*’

Light enables us to see, discover things, read books, find our path and so on.

Look again at **Matthew 5:13-14** and fill in the blanks. We are meant to be:

The salt of the The light of the

These two phrases show that kingdom people should be making an impact on every area of human activity in every part of the world. Over the years, many Christians have devoted their energies to building the church and have neglected the assignment of establishing the kingdom of God in the world.

It is true that **Ephesians 5:23-27** teaches that Jesus will return for his Bride – a perfect spotless church. But Jesus used the word ‘church’ twice in the Gospels whereas he used the word ‘kingdom’ 111 times

in connection with the kingdom of God. His mission was to see this kingdom re-established on earth.

Our society functions in seven major realms of influence and Jesus wants the kingdom to impact each of them, (See www.reclaim7mountains.com) In his book, 'Dreaming with God', Bill Johnson summarises these spheres as follows:

Arts/Entertainment/Sports

- Business
- Church
- Education
- Family
- Government & Politics
- Science & Medicine

Review this list and, against each mountain, write down the name of any Christian who, you think, is influencing that area of society for the kingdom of God. Discuss your list of names with the others doing this study with you.

As you probably noticed, there are many areas where kingdom men and women have little influence. God's desire is not only to place people in each sphere of activity, but also to raise their level of authority so that they can bring the atmosphere of heaven into everything within their field of influence.

A. An unhealthy separation

For too long, some people have thought that the church is the only setting for ministry, and that church work is superior to other kinds of kingdom activity. In fact, the word 'ministry' comes from the Latin word to serve, so all ministry is serving God and his purposes.

Colossians 3:24 tells slaves plainly that, It is the Lord Christ you are serving. All Christians are expected to serve God in whichever place and whatever work he has appointed us to.

The apostle Paul did not differentiate between different types of ‘ministry’. Complete the following verses:

Acts 20:34-35 *You yourselves know that these have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of we must help the weak,*

1 Cor 4:12 *We with our*

1 Th 4:11 *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to, just as we told you*

2 Th 3:8-10 *nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not, he shall not*

Paul moved in and out of his job as a tentmaker according to his situation. He seemed to enjoy his work, where his business acumen enabled him to serve God, as he supported his friends and gave to the poor. He also served God’s people as an apostle, encouraging their walk with the Lord and finding time to write much of the New Testament.

*There is no such thing as secular employment for the believer... Every believer is in full-time ministry – only a few have pulpits in sanctuaries. The rest have pulpits in their areas of expertise and favour in the world system. Be sure to preach only good news. And when necessary, use words! **Bill Johnson***

God wants kingdom people in positions of influence throughout society - films, business, government, sports or whatever. Write out **Proverbs 29:2** to see why:

.....

.....

.....

B. A limited teaching

The relationship between the church and the kingdom has often been misunderstood. Whilst the kingdom is recognised to be bigger than the church, some assume that the church is the only agent for advancing the kingdom.

This is not true, because God can raise up non-Christians – like Cyrus at the time of Ezra – who enact God’s will and establish righteousness. In fact, some non-Christians are better at promoting God’s ways than the church is. Do you know any examples of non-Christians who have implemented God’s ways in their companies, communities or countries? If so, write down some of their names here, alongwith the area of life which they have impacted:

.....

.....

There are also times when the organised church is not actually functioning in the righteous ways of the kingdom. These parts of the church are full of selfish ambition, politics, immorality, lawsuits, bribery, gossip, meanspiritedness and other works of the flesh. These have nothing to do with the kingdom of God.

The church is the *ekklesia* – the called out ones who have been born again through repentance and faith. As we have seen, there are many born-again people who have never entered the kingdom, which is why some churches and denominations are never able to advance the kingdom.

Thankfully, many parts of the church are advancing the kingdom - living for the kingdom and functioning righteously. Please note down some of the kingdom activities which you have noticed in the life of the local church you are part of:

.....
.....

C. A supernatural authority

Read **Matthew 16:13-20**. This incident took place in Caesarea Philippi, a city built on a huge rock and the centre of worship to the Greek god, Pan. It was an immoral, idolatrous city. Here, Jesus firstly asked his disciples what people were saying about him. Then in **Matthew 16:15**, he questioned them, *‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’*

Write out Peter’s answer in full (**Matthew 16:16**)

.....
.....

Jesus was delighted with Peter’s response and the revelation he had received. He then went on to declare that he would build his church on the rock – a phrase which can be interpreted in various ways. However, the most likely explanation, given the geographical location, is that Jesus meant that he would build his church in the midst of the worst kinds of immorality and idolatry – the gates of Hades. True kingdom people will be able to stand strong in the most demonic environments. From **Matthew 16:19**, please answer this question:

What did Jesus give?

Ever since Jesus spoke these words, Christians have been seeking the keys of the church! But Jesus has kept them for himself because he wants our priority to be his kingdom. These keys give us a spiritual authority which we should use in every situation we face.

Please complete the following sentences from **Matthew 16:19**, which show what these keys would do:

Whatever you bind on earth

Whatever you loose on earth

The more accurate translation is ‘will have been bound’, rather than ‘will be bound’. This means that we have been given the keys so that we can bring to earth those things that are already happening in the presence of God in heaven; and also to remove from earth those activities which never take place in heaven.

Think of some of the things which are in heaven. Write down a few:

.....
.....
.....

Now write down some of the things which are certainly not in heaven:

.....
.....
.....

Our job is to loose on earth, through our prayers and our righteous lifestyle, those things which are already in heaven. At the same time, our prayers and lifestyle should come against those things on earth which are not in heaven. This is how we use the authority given to us through the keys of the kingdom.

<p>Assignment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Spend time every day this week praying with authority for heaven to come down on earth in the area where you live. 2. Pray that God will raise up kingdom men and women in positions of influence on all the seven mountains.
--

5. Exceedingly Righteous

After our Indian friend with his US visa finally passed through Immigration Control, he entered America and faced a whole new world. For one thing, they drive on the ‘other’ side of the road, and he was about to discover many other differences in the way Americans live. They were not going to change their ways for him; he was going to have to adapt to American culture.

It is the same when we enter the kingdom. We are expected to embrace the culture of the kingdom and to live according to its standards. Before we entered the kingdom, we may have had all sorts of habits and ways of doing things. But Jesus wants us to have a new way of thinking (See **Ephesians 4:23**) and a new way of life.

Read **Matthew 5:17-20**. The Pharisees and teachers of the law had established a precise set of rules for what they considered to be holy living. They thought that righteousness meant avoiding those activities which the law forbade.

Jesus personally fulfilled all the law’s requirements, but he explained that the kingdom has a higher standard than the law. We have already seen that our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to us. However, Jesus taught that there our righteousness should also exceed theirs in our daily living.

The Old Testament laws laid out clear instructions for how people should live, but Jesus taught a totally new approach. It does not come out of our human strength, working hard to obey a set of rules, but is an expression of the life of Jesus within us. For each Old Testament law which Jesus mentioned in **Matthew 5:21–48**, write down what he taught the kingdom standard should be:

All the Old Testament laws dealt with external actions, but Jesus expected a change of heart, which would produce a totally different

way of living. We will now look at each of these contrasts in more detail.

1. Murder and anger (vv 21-26)

These two seem very different, but read the account of Cain and Abel in **Genesis 4:1-10**. Cain got angry because he did not get what he wanted. He had expected God’s approval for his sacrifice but did not receive it. All of us get angry for the same reason: we are not getting what we want. Think of a time you got angry and write down what it was you wanted but did not get:

.....
.....

After Cain got angry, the Lord gave him wise advice and a clear warning in **Genesis 4:6-7**:

To fulfil the law To enter the Kingdom

v 21 Do not murder

v 27 Do not commit adultery

v 31 Do not divorce without a certificate
.....
.....

v 33 Do not break your oath

v 38 Do not take excessive revenge

v 43 Hate your enemy

Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.

Feeling angry is not a sin, but what happens next often is. **Ephesians 4:26-27** warns us that uncontrolled anger gives the devil a foothold. That is why God told Cain that he must master his anger – or the anger would master him. Sadly, Cain did not master his anger and he ended up murdering his brother.

The next time you feel angry, reflect on this passage and ask the Lord to help you master your anger so that it does not lead you into sin.

2. Adultery and lust (vv 27-30)

Adultery is ‘voluntary sexual intercourse between a married man and someone other than his wife or between a married woman and someone other than her husband.’ The Ten Commandments forbade it and the punishment for it was stoning to death. See **Leviticus 20:10**. God is so opposed to adultery because it devastates marriages, destroys families and damages society. He intended the powerful gift of sex to be used only between a husband and his wife.

Hebrews 13:4 instructs us that *Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure. No Christian should be an adulterer.*

But Jesus raised the standard for those who enter the kingdom. He knew that adultery starts with lust in the heart, so he instructed men to not even look at a woman lustfully. He said that looking like this was equivalent to committing adultery in the heart. The world today is full of people, images, books and films which constantly encourage lust. But Job had to face similar temptations thousands of years ago. On the next page, please write out **Job 31:1**:

.....
.....

Job recognised that fighting lust starts with controlling the eyes. David failed to do this and ended up committing adultery with Bathsheba. 2

Samuel 11:2 records that his sin started when he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. List some of the things you see which could tempt you to lust if you were not careful to turn your eyes away:

.....
.....

Whilst men have the bigger problem with lust, women should also recognise that they can sin by stirring up lust. What was Bathsheba doing bathing where King David could see her?! It was not just his problem. That is why *Paul told women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety (1 Timothy 2:9)*

Jesus himself instructed his disciples in **Luke 17:1-2**:

Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.

It is wrong for kingdom people to look lustfully. But it is also wrong for them to dress or conduct themselves in a way which provokes others to lust.

3. Law and heart (vv 31-32)

For the Jews, the main legal issue with divorce was that the man should give his wife the right certificate. This was a good law in that it stopped people being casual about divorce, but it missed the heart of God. He hates divorce! (**Malachi 2:16**) He never wants a couple to divorce because divorce damages people. The certificate is secondary. If a wife has committed adultery, he is willing to permit divorce, but he would prefer the couple to forgive each other and work at rebuilding their marriage. Read **Matthew 19:3-9** and write out:

The Pharisees' question (v 3) Is it

.....?
Jesus' response (v 8) Moses permitted

.....

The Pharisees wanted to know what the law would permit them to get away with. Jesus recognised that the root cause behind divorce is hardness of heart. Living in the kingdom is not primarily about following a set of rules but about keeping a pure heart before God.

4. Oaths and truth (vv 33-37)

The Jews had a system of oaths, in which they swore by heaven, the earth, Jerusalem, their head or whatever. A person is required to take an oath to try and make them speak honestly. In British law courts, a witness was traditionally expected to swear on a Bible, ‘I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God.’ The oath may have made a person less likely to lie, because he did not want to be punished for perjury, but it did not make him honest. Jesus taught that kingdom people should always be honest, so there is no need for them to take an oath, or say, ‘I promise...’ He expects them to always tell the truth. Write out **Matthew 5:37** in full:

.....

.....

.....

If we do not cultivate this ruthless honesty in what we say, Jesus said that we are actually speaking the evil one’s thoughts and words. We have to learn to say what we mean and to mean what we say. Do you think that you have to be more careful with the honesty of your

speech? YES/NO

Give some recent examples of where you lacked total honesty:

.....

.....

5. Revenge and blessing (vv 38-48)

Once again, this law was good in that it limited a person from excessively punishing another who had wronged him. It forbade him from inflicting more injury than he had received. But Jesus said that

we should not even think of how to punish a person who has wronged us. Instead, we should bless them. Make a list of the different things Jesus told us to do to those who wrong us:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

If you learn to do these things, and follow all the other practices mentioned in Matthew 5, you will indeed be *perfect, ... as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Assignment

- 1. This lesson has looked at many areas where Jesus sets a high standard of righteousness. Decide before God which ones you need to work on.
- 2. Then, begin to pray about a specific area where you need to change. Ask the Lord to work in you and to give you situations in which you can behave as a kingdom person, and not in your usual way.

6. The Kingdom and Religion

The Sermon on the Mount now turns to activities practised by members of all religions. Religious works focus on external things which create a good impression, whereas kingdom activity comes from the heart.

A. *Three religious practices*

Complete these verses in Matthew 6 to see the activities Jesus taught on:

v 2 when

v 5 when

v 16 when

Jesus started each with ‘when’ not ‘if’ because he assumed all kingdom men and woman would give to the poor, pray and fast. He also knew that most people had only been exposed to religious examples before they entered the kingdom, so he began each topic by teaching what we should **not** do.

1. Giving to the needy (Matthew 6:1-4)

Read **Matthew 6:1-4** and answer these questions:

What should we not do when we give to the needy?

.....

What motivates that kind of giving?

.....

How should we give to the needy?

.....

How does Father respond to such giving?

.....

When a religious person gives, he likes the recognition he receives from men. It makes him feel good and important.

All over the world, plaques commemorate the generosity of people who have already received their reward on earth. Sadly, they receive no reward from Father. It is foolish to advertise our giving!

But we are still expected to give to the poor and needy and not ignore them. Our heavenly Father cares deeply for such people and wants us to share his concern. See pages 73-75. Now read **Acts 9:36-41** and answer these questions:

How had Tabitha (Dorcas) spent her life before she died

v 36

How did Father reward her?

.....

Now read the account of Cornelius in **Acts 10:1-2; 30-31; 44-48** and answer:

What was Cornelius known for?

.....

How did Father reward him?

.....

Truly, Father rewards those who give to the poor and needy.

2. Praying (Matthew 6:5-15)

Jesus warned against two wrong approaches to prayer in verses 5 and 7. In your own words, summarise what these are:

v 5

v 7

Once again, we see that the danger of religious activity is this human desire to put on an act to impress others. In **Matthew 6:6**, Jesus taught us the best way to approach prayer. Please write it out in full:

.....

.....

This does not mean that praying with others is unnecessary. In **Matthew 18:19**, Jesus promised that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. **Acts 1:14** is one example of the early church praying together. But the foundation for prayer is in the ‘secret place’ where you are alone with God. When you are on your own with him you are much less likely to be hypocritical and ‘babble on’. Jesus promised that Father would reward such private prayer.

Jesus then gave us a model prayer, which we often call the Lord’s prayer. It is quite likely that you know it off by heart, but here it is again:

1.	Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,	
2.	your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.	
3.	Give us today our daily bread.	
4.	Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors	
5.	And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.	

In the right hand column, write down one or two words which summarise the thrust of the sentence in the left hand column. For example against the 3rd statement, you could write ‘Provision’ or something similar. When you have written in your five words or phrases, you now have your own outline for prayer. Try using it the next time you are in the secret place with Father.

Jesus felt that he had to expand and emphasise what he had taught us to pray in statement number 4 above, so read **Matthew 6:14-15** and fill in the blanks:

For if you men when they sin against you, your

heavenly Father will also you. But if you do not men their sins, your Father will not your sins.

He taught us to ask for forgiveness from Father in the same way as we have already forgiven others. He also warned that if we do not do this, then the Father will not forgive us.

This is covered in more detail on page 43.

3. Fasting (Matthew 6:16-18)

Jesus assumed that kingdom people would fast and, once again, his teaching began with a warning. What behaviour did Jesus warn his disciples against?

.....

A much fuller teaching on fasting is found in the companion booklet, *Drawing Closer to God*, pages 19-21. That study looks at many references to fasting throughout the Bible and draws the following conclusions:

- People fast at various times, to:
 - a) Confess sin and demonstrate genuine repentance.
 - b) Seek God's intervention in a difficult situation.
 - c) Obtain guidance or direction from the Lord.
 - d) Grieve over someone's death.

Fasting expresses an earnest seeking after God and a passionate desire for him and his ways. Jesus promised that Father would reward such fasting.

- The most common fast is a one day fast, or at least abstaining from food 'until the sun sets'. A few people undertook longer fasts, but all of these were in response to the Lord's direct leading. See **Matthew 4:2** and **Exodus 34:28**.
- There are two dangers for us in the way we handle our bodies:

- a) Treating our bodies harshly because we believe they cause our spiritual problems. This is like the ascetics of Hinduism. See **Colossians 2:20-21**.
- b) Indulging our fleshly desires because we are ‘under grace’ so that we do not learn self control. See **Philippians: 3:18-19**

A godly approach to fasting avoids these extremes.

B. Two important indicators

1. Earthly possessions (Matthew 6:19-24)

We have seen (p 11) that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom. In this section, Jesus warned again about being wrongly concerned with money. What two reasons did he give why we should not store up treasures on earth?

- 1.
- 2.

Instead of accumulating treasures on earth, Jesus urged us to store up treasures in heaven, where our investment would be eternally safe. We have to see the importance of this, so Jesus emphasised our need for good eyes. We will never invest in heaven if we cannot see the value of putting our treasure there. Write down your ideas of what Jesus meant by storing up treasures in heaven:

.....

.....

.....

He concluded this teaching with a solemn warning. Please read **Matthew 6:24** and complete this sentence:

You cannot serve both

If 10 = serving God completely, and 0 = totally living for money, how do you think an honest person would rate your life?

Please be ready to discuss the reasons for your score.

Even in Paul's time, some preachers of the Gospel were living for money. In **2 Corinthians 2:17**, he 'boasted': Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. May our 'boast' be the same throughout our lives.

2. Worry (Matthew 6:25-34)

Worry and anxiety mean that we do not trust God. The nub of this teaching is found in Jesus' exclamation in v 30 – O you of little faith! It requires faith to enter the kingdom, and faith to live a kingdom life in obedience to the King. Write down the three areas we could easily worry about if we have no faith:

v 25

v 28

v 34

The way to overcome anxiety is to cast ourselves upon God. We are more valuable than the birds and more important than the lilies of the field. If he provides for them, he will certainly provide for us. The way to cast ourselves on God is described in a verse we have looked at earlier,

Matthew 6:33: *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

If we play our part in advancing God's kingdom, and his righteousness, on earth as it is in heaven, the Lord will certainly give us all these things.

Assignment

Write down any ways in which you plan to change the way you give to the poor, pray and/or fast. Be ready to talk about the steps you have taken when you meet for the next study.

7. Building on Rock

Matthew 7 is the final chapter of the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus described the kingdom way of life. He has earlier tackled everyday subjects such as anger, lust and anxiety. He now turns to other aspects of daily living.

1. Judging (Matthew 7:1-6)

Jesus gave a strong warning against judging, telling us that we will be judged with the same measure which we use to judge others. Jesus set a very high standard and clearly wants us to avoid judging. However, we need to understand exactly what Jesus meant. Write out **1 Corinthians 2:15** in full:

.....

.....

.....

This seems to contradict what Jesus taught in **Matthew 7:1**. Of course, this is not the case, but it is confusing because ‘judging’ has two meanings:

1. Assessing: evaluating whether something is right or wrong; correct or incorrect. This is what the jury does when it assesses whether a person under trial is guilty or not. Assessing does not punish a person; it only assesses whether the person has done wrong or not.
2. Condemning: punishing a person who has done wrong. The judge may pronounce ‘Five years’ imprisonment’ over someone found guilty of theft. The thief has now been condemned. We can also condemn people when we speak harsh, critical, judgemental words over them.

Jesus told us not to condemn people, but he certainly expected us to assess them. **Matthew 7:6** makes this clear: *Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.* How can we know who are pigs and dogs if we do not learn to assess? In your own words, write

down two reasons which Jesus gave as to why we should not condemn people:

.....
.....
.....

When we begin to get irritated by others' faults, we should remember:

- How patient God is with our faults. He keeps loving us even though we keep on doing wrong.
- That others have to put up with our faults too.
- That, by nature, we magnify others' faults and make light of our own. We should therefore be slow to look for specks in other people.

2. Prayer - again! (Matthew 7:7-11)

Read **Matthew 7:7-11** and fill in the blanks:

..... and it will be given to you; and you will find; and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who..... receives; he who finds; and to him who, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give
.....!

Although Jesus warned against religious prayer in Matthew 6, he longs for his people to have such an intimate relationship with Father that they are not shy to ask him for whatever they need. These verses promise that we will receive whatever we ask for. Write down any instance when you asked for something and Father gave it:

3. A summary of kingdom living

Matthew 7:12 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

This is a staggering statement – all the requirements of the Old Testament law are summed up by Jesus in one sentence. The apostle Paul also made his summation of the law in Galatians 5:14. Please write it out:

Both Jesus and Paul take the focus away from laws about what I ought to do, and replace them with a concern for others - how will other people be affected by what I do? Laws are made to stop people harming others and behaving inconsiderately. No law can change a person’s heart, although it may make him behave better because he does not want to be punished for breaking the law. When we are born again, Jesus begins a process of transformation within us.

Read this promise from Ezekiel 36:26 and fill in the blanks:

I will give you a new and put a new in you; I will remove from you your..... of stone and give you a of flesh.

The new birth has brought Jesus into our innermost being and makes us sensitive like him. We can begin to get into other people’s shoes and feel something of what they must feel. If this has not started happening to you, ask the Lord to soften your heart and give you real concern for others.

All Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount fit in with this instruction of Matthew 7:12. We do not want others to get angry with us, so we should not get angry with them. We would not like some

man to lust after our wife, sister or daughter, so we should not do that to another's. When we have wronged a person, we do not want them to take revenge on us. So we should behave the same towards those who wrong us. And so on.

List some of the things which you do **not** like other people doing to you:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Now, consider the list and ask yourself whether you have done any of these to others. If you have, repent and ask the Lord to forgive you. And ask him to help you to treat others in the way in which you would like to be treated.

4. Trees and fruit (Matthew 7:13-20)

We have already looked at **Matthew 7:13-14** (page 14) where Jesus urged us to enter by the narrow gate, and warned against taking the wide road that leads to destruction. In **Matthew 7:15-20**, he describes false prophets who had chosen this wide path. These false prophets seem fine on the outside but their heart has not been touched. They have not received the heart of flesh promised by Ezekiel and, inwardly, they are still ferocious wolves interested only in satisfying their own desires. Their basic selfishness has not been touched by the Lord even though they look like genuine sheep. Jesus understood that it might be difficult to recognise such people so he provided a test to help us to identify them.

What was the test?

Write down what you think Jesus had in mind by good fruit?

.....
.....

.....

Fruit, of course, does not appear immediately a tree is planted, and it may take years for us to actually know whether a person is a false or true prophet. Even false prophets appear very convincing and attractive when we first meet them, so we should be cautious of a new person, without being overly suspicious.

5. Building on rock (Matthew 7:21-27)

Matthew 7:21 contains a general principle which we looked at on page 7. There are many people – not just false prophets – who say, ‘Lord, Lord’ but they do not actually enter the kingdom. These people sound passionate and excited about Jesus, but they never enter the kingdom to do the Father’s will.

Jesus wants obedience - not just good words!

Then in **Matthew 7:22-23**, Jesus highlights another area of concern. He mentions people who claim to have done three things. Please write them down:

.....

.....

.....

They seemed like true charismatic Christians! But Jesus will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.’ They had obviously not been born again and were only giving an appearance of spirituality. Whilst doing the Father’s will is essential for advancing the kingdom, our obedience must flow from our love relationship with him. As Jesus said in **John 14:15**, If you love me, you will obey what I command. Our motivation must be our love for him.

Jesus wants a relationship of love - not just obedience!

Jesus then concluded his ‘kingdom manifesto’ with a story encouraging them to live the kingdom life. Read **Matthew 7:24-27** and answer these questions:

Where did the wise man build his house?

What happened to it when the storm and floods came?
.....

Where did the foolish man build his house?

What happened to it when the storm and floods came?
.....

Which of these men heard the words of Jesus?

What did the wise man do with the words of Jesus?
.....

What did the foolish man do with the words of Jesus?
.....

Jesus wants obedience - not just good listeners! Jesus wants us to build our lives on the rock of total obedience to everything he says. **Matthew 7:21** shows that entering the kingdom is a life of obedience, doing the will of the Father. Look up **Romans 14:17** and write it out in full:
.....
.....
.....

The kingdom lifestyle has a foundation of righteousness – doing what is right in God’s sight. If we discipline ourselves to do that on a daily basis, it will lead to the peace and joy of **Romans 14:17**. But there is no shortcut.

Assignment

Ask the Lord to show you areas of your life where you are not practising the words of Jesus. Note these and be ready to talk about them at the next lesson.

8. Advancing the Kingdom

We need to understand four complementary truths about the kingdom:

1. The kingdom has not yet come. It will ultimately be established when Jesus returns with final judgment. See **Matthew 24:27**; 30-44 and many other verses.
2. The kingdom has come. See **Luke 17:20-21**. At this present time, we can now taste and experience something of the future kingdom. **Hebrews 6:5** says that we have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age.
3. The kingdom is coming immediately. It is now 'at hand' or 'near'. See **Matthew 4:17** etc.
4. The kingdom will be delayed. It is not yet here but it will definitely come. See **Revelation 11:15**

We live in both the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the kingdom. Jesus began his ministry, demonstrating the kingdom and introducing certain aspects of the kingdom, but he knew that the kingdom would not be fully established on earth until he returns.

In Matthew 11, John the Baptist was in prison, wondering whether he had been mistaken about Jesus. He was living in the 'not yet' of the kingdom. Was Jesus really the one who was bringing in the kingdom of heaven? To reassure him, Jesus sent John a message:

Matthew 11:4-5 *Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*

Jesus had no doubt that the miracles confirmed that he really was the one sent from God. See **John 10:38**.

We have seen that both John the Baptist and Jesus started their ministries with exactly the same message, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. See **Matthew 3:2** and **Matthew 4:17**.

However, **John 10:41** tells us that John never performed even one miracle. In contrast, Jesus was constantly working signs and wonders

everywhere he preached. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (**Matthew 4:23**) In **Matthew 11:11**, Jesus affirmed how important John the Baptist had been in preparing the way for him. He also made an almost unbelievable statement about people in the kingdom. Write out this verse in full:

.....
 Jesus pointed out that John the Baptist was only born of a woman. He had seen the kingdom but he had not experienced the second birth which Jesus explained to Nicodemus in John 3.

He also stated that the least in the kingdom is greater than John! This is because the least in the kingdom has been born again and baptised in the Holy Spirit. Unlike John the Baptist, the least in the kingdom has the power and authority to work miracles. Now read and complete **Matthew 11:12**:

*From the days of John the Baptist until now, the
 has beenadvancing, and lay hold of it.*

The least person in the kingdom is able to ‘forcefully’ advance the kingdom in the same way as Jesus did – through the message and the miracles. Force is the application of power. A car engine may develop 50 horsepower and can be raced so that it makes a lot of noise. But that power is of no use until it is transmitted through the wheels. When the power gets to the wheels, they exert a force on the road which pushes the car forward.

In **Acts 1:8**, Jesus promised that we would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon us. It is our job to forcefully use that power to push the kingdom forward. That is what Jesus had been doing from the days of John the Baptist. And he expects us to forcefully do the same by fighting the forces of darkness and increasing the expression of the kingdom of God on earth.

An alternative translation of **Matthew 11:12** says, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence. There is a violent battle going on with the dominion of darkness which we, kingdom people, have to fight forcefully.

As we have seen, we live in the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom. Jesus has equipped us to play our part now in establishing his kingdom on earth. Here are some weapons we can use to help forcefully advance it.

1. Praise and Worship

Read **Acts 16:23-26** and write down what Paul and Silas did in the middle of the night when they were in jail in

Philippi:

Now turn to **2 Chronicles 20:14-22** and write down what Jehoshaphat and the people of Israel did to win victory:

.....
David was the greatest warrior king of the Old Testament and he won many great victories against his enemies. He was also the greatest worshipper of the Old Testament, as the Psalms show. Although praise and worship does not always bring victory in itself, it prepares the heart for battle and aligns our minds and spirits with the greatness of the God who gives us victory.

2. Praying

As we have seen, Jesus considered prayer an essential foundation to the kingdom life. Write out **Matthew 6:9-10** – the words Jesus taught us to pray:

.....
Prayer starts with honouring our Father in heaven; it continues with praying for the kingdom to come. That means asking for the Lord’s will to be done on earth. Our prayers, on our own, and with others, make a difference to how quickly God’s ways are established on earth.

Because we are fighting a battle against the forces of darkness, there often has to be real aggression in our prayers. An example of this is found in **Acts 4:24-31**. In your own words, write down what the believers prayed for:

.....

3. Proclaiming Jesus

There is something so wonderful about the name of Jesus. Peter and John had realised this through their years of walking with him. That is why they told the Jewish rulers and elders in **Acts 4:12**: *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*

Because God wants all people to be saved, it is important that we keep on proclaiming the name of Jesus. He is the Saviour. And he is Lord.

Now read **1 Peter 3:15** and answer these questions:

Whom do we set apart in our hearts?

When should we be ready to give an answer?

Whom should we give the answer to?

What is the reason for our hope?

How should we give the answer?

We should take every opportunity to use tracts, testimonies and simple sharing of the Gospel to let people know of the Saviour.

4. Performing miracles

Look up **1 Corinthians 4:20** and fill in the blanks:

For the..... is not a matter of but of.....

For Jesus, the message of the kingdom and the working of miracles went together. **Matthew 9:35** records that: Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

In **Matthew 10:7-8**, Jesus instructed his disciples as he sent them out:

Please fill in the blanks: As you go, preach this message:

*'The is near.' the sick,
..... the dead, those who have,
..... out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.*

Jesus expected the message of the kingdom to be followed by a demonstration of the power of God. **Mark 16:20** records that, after Jesus had ascended into heaven, ...*the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.*

Now read the following verse many times, until it is in your spirit. You may also want to memorise this amazing promise so that it grips you completely.

John 14:12 *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

This truth applies to you! Kingdom people know they have received authority to work miracles. They then step out in faith wherever they are and expect to see the Lord working mighty signs and wonders through them.

5. Practising righteousness

We have looked at the connection between righteousness and the kingdom on several occasions. Living righteously is being a kingdom person. Righteousness has got authority, and, we will discover that our righteous life impacts people around us. Peoples' minds can be challenged and changed when we demonstrate love, honesty, refusal to bribe or any other aspect of the kingdom.

Can you think of any time when your righteous behaviour changed the way the people around you thought or acted? If so make a note of it here and share it with the others in your group.

.....
.....

Assignment
In the coming week, compile a record of each time you do something to advance the kingdom of God. Be ready to talk about it at the next study.

9. The Greatness of the Kingdom

This study book is based mainly on Matthew's Gospel. Matthew used the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' 32 times and the phrase 'kingdom of God' on 4 occasions. Interestingly, the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament. Instead, Mark, Luke and John used the phrase 'kingdom of God', which appears 48 times in their writings.

Often, there seems to be no real difference between the phrases. Look up each of these verses and fill in the blanks:

Matthew 4:17 *From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the is near.'*

Mark 1:15 *'The time has come,' he said. 'The is near. Repent and believe the good news!'*

Matthew's teaching emphasises where the seat of government is, and the heavenly atmosphere which is created when the kingdom is established. The other Gospels focus on the One who is doing the governing. Each Gospel writer used the phrase which would communicate best with his 'target' audience. Matthew was writing primarily to Jews who were quite familiar with the idea of heaven. The others were writing to Romans and Greeks who understood the government of kings and emperors.

Whilst the differences could be explored further, the main point is that God is looking for people who will obey him so completely that the atmosphere of heaven is produced on earth.

Now please read and discuss the quotations on page 52 with the others doing this study with you:

The kingdom of heaven recasts life on this planet from Jesus’ own perspective... Jesus introduced a new way of thinking, raising sights to a life that extends into eternity and involves unseen worlds which we do not have the capacity to detect. He came to establish an alternate community centred on values from that invisible world, ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’ Seen in that light, the kingdom of heaven promotes what matters most and lasts longest.

Philip Yancey

The kingdom of God has the power to undo everything that the kingdom of darkness has established in its absence. The Bible speaks several times of the restoration of all things. The kingdom of God is the instrument through which that restoration takes place.

Alan Vincent

In Matthew 12, Jesus contrasted the kingdom with three different parts of Jewish history. Read the following verses and complete the comparisons:

- v 6 *One greater*
- v 41 *One greater*
- v 42 *One greater*

‘One greater’ may be more accurately translated ‘something greater’ and refers to the kingdom, which is greater than each of these three.

A. Greater than the Temple

The temple was the focal point of the Jewish religion. This is its history:

957 BC Solomon completed the temple; Babylonians destroyed it in 586 BC

515 BC	Zerubbabel rebuilt it in a simpler form but it was desecrated by Romans in 169 BC. It was later cleansed for religious activities.
19 BC	Herod the Great started to rebuild the temple piece by piece. It was completed in 64AD and destroyed by the Roman armies in 70AD.
Today	The Muslim shrine, 'The Dome of the Rock' stands on the site.

Jews (and some Christians) are praying for the temple to be restored, but history shows that God did not seek to protect or preserve it. The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus was looking for something greater than the temple.

Read **John 2:14-22** and answer these questions:

What did Jesus find in the temple courts?

.....

What action did he take?

What motivated Jesus to do this?

What did the Jews demand?

What did Jesus promise?

What temple was he speaking of?

On another occasion, Jesus stood in front of the temple and promised that: *the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.* (**Luke 21:6**)

Jesus was not particularly interested in the physical building and its religious practices. He was concerned for his body – the people of God who would love him and freely follow him. Fill in the blanks in **1 Cor 3:16-17**:

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's
and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's*

....., *God will destroy him; for God's is sacred, and you are that*

The kingdom offers something greater than temple religion as the following chart shows. Think about the church you presently attend and, against each contrast, write down your rating in the right hand column on a scale of 0 to 10, where: 0 = totally Temple and 10 = completely Kingdom.

<u>Temple religion</u>	<u>Kingdom model</u>	<u>?</u>
Professional clergy or 'full timers' have special status, special clothes and/or titles. They take the lead whilst 'ordinary' church members are spectators or 'the laity'	All are priests. 1 Peter 2:9 . Every believer has the authority to pray, baptise, break bread, move in spiritual gifts and make disciples. Matthew 28:18-20	
Distinct areas for Gentiles, women, and men. Leads to class distinctions and casteism. James 2:2ff	All are welcome – regardless of background and social standing. Matthew 8:11; Colossians 3:11	
Place is very important – often an expensive and decorated building. A holy place, sanctuary.	Place is not important. Any home, office or school will do. Matthew 10:11-13; Romans 16:5	
Holy Communion is a formalised, religious ceremony administered by professionals.	Communion is a community meal eaten together with gladness – not a formality. Acts 2:46; 1 Cor 11:20-23	
Worship involves a few 'specialists' and tends to become performance oriented and dominated by musicians and/or the worship leader.	Everybody participates in worship in prayer, prophecy, singing and instructing. 1 Corinthians 14:26f; Ephesians 5:19	
The work expands by inviting people to come in to a church meeting. This requires more and more buildings.	The work grows as believers meet and pray for unbelievers, and moving in God's power. Mark 16:20 .	

Submission to one man, or group of men, who often are part of an authority hierarchy.	Submission to the Lord first and foremost, and then to one another. James 4:7; Eph 5:21	
Professional(s) control the flock, who often live in fear of ‘pastor’	People honour and respect elders but are not controlled by them	
Organizational and denominational churches under own leaders, each church belonging to its own empire	Regional network of churches relating loosely and without central, imposed authority	
Appears successful and appeals to people’s religious spirit and pride. Matthew 23:5	Appears ‘insignificant’, and often unimpressive. It may be slightly humbling to be associated with it	
Develops selfish Christians who are primarily concerned with whether the church meets their needs	Develops serving Christians who care for one another and for people in need. Matthew 25:31-46	
Appeals to one’s religious instincts	Ministers to one’s hunger for God	

Be ready to discuss the reasons for each score you have put down.

B. Greater than Jonah

Almost all of us know the story of how Jonah was swallowed by a whale because he disobeyed the Lord’s call to Nineveh. One amazing truth from this story is that God was so full of grace that he was willing to give him a second chance. Read Jonah 3 and answer these questions:

What was the Lord’s instruction?

.....

How did Jonah respond?

How did the Ninevites respond to Jonah?

.....

How did the King respond?

How did God respond?

When Jesus said that the kingdom is greater than Jonah, he was talking about the city-wide impact Jonah witnessed – not about Jonah’s disobedience or the whale. Nineveh took three days to walk across and was inhabited by some 600,000 people. The city and its ruler were transformed because they all responded to Jonah’s warning of impending destruction. The gospel of the kingdom has even greater power than anything Jonah said. It can transform the city or region where you live. Ask God to do it!

C. Greater than Solomon

Solomon established a vast empire which brought goods and riches from many different nations. Write out **1 Kings 10:22-23** in full:

.....
.....

Solomon traded with most parts of the known world, but the kingdom is greater than Solomon’s empire because it will impact all nations. In **Matthew 24:14**, Jesus promised that, ... this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. All people will hear the gospel of the kingdom. And, in the same way that Solomon’s empire amassed great wealth, finances will pour into kingdom enterprises to:

- 1. Help the poor and needy. See **Acts 2:45**; 4:34-37
- 2. Bring about equality. See **2 Corinthians 8:13-14**
- 3. Establish excellent hospitals and centres of education
- 4. Develop new kingdom businesses
- 5. Any other ideas?

<p>Assignment</p> <p>In what ways has this lesson helped you appreciate the kingdom more? Write down specific ways in which you have grown in your understanding.</p>
--

10. The Secrets of the Kingdom

A. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9)

We now look at one of Jesus' most famous kingdom parables. Read **Matthew 13:1-9**. This is a simple, inoffensive, rural story which everybody knew was true to life. But write out his conclusion in v9:

.....
Jesus implied that there was more to this parable than the obvious farming truth. His disciples understood this but did not know what the deeper meaning was which is why they complained about Jesus speaking to the people in parables (v 10). Now read **Matthew 13:11-17** and answer these questions:

Who has been given the secrets of the kingdom of heaven?

.....
Why have they been given these secrets?

.....
Why can others not receive these secrets?

.....
.....

Why should the disciples – and us – be happy that we know these things?

.....
This passage shows how important the disciples were to Jesus. Whilst he was investing so much into them, he did not seem concerned that the crowds could not understand his teaching. In **Matthew 13:18-23**, Jesus interpreted each element in the parable. In your own words, write his interpretation here:

The Seed

The Path

- Rocky places
- Among thorns
- Good soil

The point of the parable is that some people receive the seed, which is the message of the kingdom, but others do not. Those who receive it have the potential to produce a massive yield. In Luke’s version of the parable, there are three keys for being good soil. Read **Luke 8:15** and write them out, praying that the Lord will enable you to be good soil like this:

1.
2.
3.

The message of the kingdom requires a personal commitment!

This parable is followed by six others, each intended to motivate the disciples to seek first the kingdom. Jesus is passionate about his kingdom – and he wants all his disciples to be passionate too.

B. The Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30)

Read **Matthew 13:24-30**, and also Jesus’ explanation in **Matthew 13:36-43**. This parable teaches that there will be a judgment at the end of the age. Some will be saved and go to heaven; others will go to hell. In our day and age, this sounds stark and unloving, but it was consistently taught by Jesus himself:

Matthew 5:22 *But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

Matthew 18:9 *It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.*

- Matthew 25:41** *Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*
- John 3:16** *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- John 3:36** *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.*
- John 15:6** *If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.*

The question remains though: Why did Jesus tell this parable immediately after urging them to be disciples who would bear much fruit for the kingdom?

Jesus probably realized that his disciples could see how *well the sons of the evil one* were doing in this earthly life. Asaph struggled with the same problem in **Psalm 73:3**: *For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* Jesus was teaching his disciples that, even though there would be a sacrifice in this life, they would receive blessings for all eternity.

List some of the occasions when you have had to make a costly stand for the Kingdom:

.....

.....

Standing for the kingdom will be worth it in the end!

C. The Mustard Seed and the Yeast (Matthew 13:31-33)

Jesus had been enthusing about the kingdom, but his apostles probably began looking at their little group – just twelve young men with

limited ability. What difference could they make? In these two parables, Jesus was again motivating them to give their all for the kingdom. Write down the transformation which takes place in the elements in each of the parables:

Matthew 13:31-32 A
becomes

Matthew 13:33 transforms
.....

Jesus told these parables to build his disciples’ faith. Even though they were small in number, he knew they could make a huge impact. In **Acts 4:13**, the Jewish leaders recognised that *they were unschooled, ordinary men*.

Within 20 years, the enemies of Christianity were complaining about how effective the disciples and their followers had been. Read **Acts 17:6**, and write down the complaint:

These men
.....

Even a few kingdom people can make a great impact!

**D. The Hidden Treasure and the Pearl
(Matthew 13:44-46)**

Read **Matthew 13:44-46**. These two parables have a simple point – it is worth giving up everything to get the kingdom. With the hidden treasure, the man was not even looking for it. He just discovered it whilst digging and realized that it was in his interest to sell everything he had to buy that field.

In contrast, the pearl merchant was earnestly seeking pearls. And, like the digger, he sold everything he had when he saw the value of the pearl. This pair of parables reminds us that the kingdom can be

entered both by seekers, and also by those who just stumble upon it. Underline which type you were:

A seeker

A stumbler

Once again, though, we need to ask why Jesus told these two parables. Perhaps the disciples had begun wondering about what sacrifices would be required of them. Jesus assured them that it was worth losing everything if they just got the kingdom – the pearl of great price.

Matthew 19:27 records Peter’s concern, *‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?’* Jesus responded to Peter’s anxiety by promising him, and each of us, in **Matthew 19:29** that: *...everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*

The common point of these parables is that both men realized it was worth giving up everything they had to get what they had seen. It is also true that it is worth sacrificing everything we have to enter the kingdom and play our part in advancing it.

Have you made that decision yet?

YES/NO

If you answered ‘YES’, describe in a few words when and how this happened:

.....
.....

Getting the kingdom is worth losing everything for!

E. The Parable of the Net (Matthew 13:47-50)

This parable, like most of the earlier ones, begins with the familiar words (v 47): *Once*

..... *net...*

Each parable in this chapter captures an aspect of the kingdom. Read **Matthew 13:47-50** which teaches something similar to the parable of the weeds. Please answer the following questions:

What were caught in the net?

What do these types of fish signify?
.....

What happened to the bad fish?

What happens to the wicked?
..... This parable is probably intended as a final exhortation to the disciples to live for the kingdom,

If you don't seek the kingdom, you will lose everything!

and a severe warning to them of the consequences of living for any other cause.

Assignment
In this study we have seen various kingdom parables in which Jesus was motivating his disciples to seek first the kingdom.
In a similar context to Matthew 13, Mark 4 includes one more parable. Read **Mark 4:26-29** and ask the Lord to show you what motivation Jesus was giving to his disciples there. Be ready to discuss this at your next meeting.

11. Forgiveness and More

This chapter looks at five kingdom parables. As you come to each parable, first read through the full story which Jesus told. If you have time, pause after each parable and ask the Lord for deeper insight.

A. *The wicked servant (Matthew 18:21-35)*

What a story! The first servant had built up a huge debt of 10,000 talents - over \$9,000,000,000 at today's gold rate. It was virtually impossible to repay, yet he came to his master, *fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me, he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'* (**Matthew 18:26**)

The master was incredibly gracious, *took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.* (**Matthew 18:27**) It was an amazing act of mercy by the master as there was not much possibility of the servant ever repaying the debt. This is a picture of the way the Lord forgives us when we believe in Jesus.

According to **Romans 3:23**, what have all done?

.....

According to **Romans 6:23**, what is the punishment for sin?

.....

We deserved to die for our sins but God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (**John 3:16**) The master has let us off. We are forgiven all our sins – or debts as the parable calls them.

Then this first servant who had been forgiven so much went out and met another servant who owed him 100 denarii – the average daily wage for 100 days. This was a fraction of what he had just been forgiven, but he refused to listen to his colleague's plea and had him put in prison until he could pay his debt.

This behaviour shocked the other servants and should shock us too. But the reality is that we often behave in exactly the same way. We

have been forgiven sins which deserved death, but, when another person sins against us, we refuse to forgive them. **Colossians 3:13** describes the standard God expects of us. Look it up and write it out:

.....
.....
.....

This verse makes it clear that God expects us to forgive whatever grievances we may have, and to do it in the same way as the Lord has forgiven us. To grasp what this means, we need to be aware that when the Lord forgives us:

- we owe him nothing; Jesus has paid in full. **Isaiah 53:6**
- he removes our sins far away from us. **Psalms 103:12**
- he chooses to remember our sins no more. **Isaiah 43:25**

This is the family standard of forgiveness. Now turn to **Mark 11:25** and fill in the blanks: *And when you, if you hold against anyone, him, so that your Father in heaven may you your sins.*

This verse shows us that:

- We should not wait until we are asked by a person to forgive him. We may never be. We should forgive when we are alone with God in prayer.
- The command covers anything and anyone – whatever grievances. It may be big or small - anything we have held against another person.
- We have to forgive the person who has wronged us so that we can keep receiving God’s forgiveness. This is what is taught in

Matthew 6:14-15 and what was shown by the master in the parable in Matthew 18.

Can you think of any person you have not forgiven? Decide now to forgive them without waiting any longer. Decide now that they owe you nothing. Now write out Jesus conclusion to this parable in **Matthew 18:35**:

.....
.....

If we do not forgive a person who has wronged us, we end up in a jail of our own making, as v 34 teaches. There, we will be tortured by our own bitterness and resentment. So, be quick to forgive, just as the Lord has forgiven you!

Forgiveness is not an option in the kingdom; it is essential

B. The Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16)

Read through this parable, imagining that you are one of the labourers who start working at 6am. As you toil, a few more people join in at 9am, then more at noon and 3pm. A final group of workers only begin work at 5pm. You have watched this happen but have faithfully got on with the tasks you were given.

Then comes pay time and the boss gives one denarius to those who started at 5pm. You start calculating: ‘One denarius for one hour’s work, I should get twelve for a full day.’ That’s reasonable. But then he just gives everybody, including you, one denarius. What you would feel in that situation?

I might well feel the same! In **Matthew 20:15**, Jesus pointed to the heart problem which surfaces in a situation like this. Fill in the blanks:

Or are you because I am?

When God blesses others, it is so easy for us to resent the blessing the other gets. God may give somebody else a healing, a new job, a wonderful spouse, financial gain, a supernatural miracle, outstanding

spiritual gifts or whatever he chooses. When another person is blessed our first reaction is sometimes envy. Why did he bless them and not me? Write down a situation when you have felt like that:

.....

The first step in dealing with envy is recognizing it, which you have now done. The second step is to confess the sin envy to the Lord. **1 John 1:9** assures us that: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Then, we need to ask the Lord to help us rejoice when others rejoice, just as **1 Corinthians 12:26** teaches us.

Envy has no place in the hearts of kingdom people

C. The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32)

We have seen that entering the kingdom of God means doing the will of the Father. Summarise the behaviour of the two sons in your own words:

The first son

.....

The second son

.....

Matthew 7:21 shows that many people make the right religious noises, but never enter the kingdom. The second son made a similar promise but actually did nothing – like many Christians. Have you ever made a commitment to do something for the Lord, and then not actually done it?

YES/NO

Be ready to share about this.

In the kingdom, obedience is more important than empty

Jesus addressed this parable to the Jewish leaders and followed it in **Mathew 21:31** with the sad comment: I tell you the truth, the tax

collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

Even though the Jewish leaders saw how the tax collectors and prostitutes responded to John’s message, they themselves refused to repent and believe – and enter the kingdom. Why do you think they would not enter the kingdom?

.....
.....

Please read **Luke 18:9-14** to see at least one of the reasons why the religious leaders would not enter the kingdom.

D. The Tenants in the Vineyard (Matthew 21:33-46)

Matthew 21:45 says that: When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. This parable accurately and prophetically described how the religious leaders would treat the Son of God. Now read **Matthew 21:43**, and write out what Jesus declared to them:

.....
.....
.....

God took the kingdom away from the followers of Judaism and gave it to men and women who would produce fruit. He expects two kinds of fruit:

a) Internal

This fruit grows inside us as we allow God to change our character. Read **Galatians 5:22-23** and write down the fruit mentioned by the apostle Paul:

.....
.....
.....

Ask yourself whether you have grown in any of these fruit in the last year. Be ready to talk about your answer.

b) External

This fruit is seen in people around us because Jesus is making an impact on them through us. This kind of fruit includes:

- sharing the Gospel so that people get saved
- helping the poor and needy so that they know God's love
- influencing people to live righteously
- visiting the sick and those in prison and blessing them
- discipling others so that they become strong Christians
- being a channel for supernatural miracles

Tick any of the above where you have seen real fruit, and be ready to share your experiences with the others doing this study.

Kingdom men and women must produce fruit for their

E. The Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14)

This parable teaches that everybody is invited to the banquet. **1 Timothy 2:4** says that God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. But they must be wearing the right clothes!

Isaiah 61:10 describes them as the garments of salvation and a robe of righteousness. We receive these when we repent from our sin and believe in Jesus. That's the only way we can get into the banquet. Kingdom people are already dressed for the wedding banquet

Assignment

Select one of the five parables we have looked at in this study. Read it each day for the next week and ask the Lord to give you revelation and deeper understanding of it. Be ready to talk about what you have received at the next study.

12. Oil-filled Service

Matthew 25 contains Jesus' final teachings before he was handed over to be crucified. He knew that, after his resurrection, he would be ascending to heaven and his disciples would be on their own on earth. The three kingdom parables in this chapter provided them with vital instructions for the rest of their lives. They are good directives for all who aspire to be kingdom people.

A. *Be filled with oil!* (Matthew 25:1-13)

This parable starts with a familiar phrase, *The kingdom of heaven will be like...* As we have seen, Jesus did not provide an instruction manual on the kingdom, but painted many word pictures to help us see the kingdom from different angles. This parable teaches two things:

1. The bridegroom is definitely coming back. See page 81
2. When he returns, some people will be ready, others will not.

Jesus illustrated readiness with the need for oil in a lamp. All his listeners knew how important it was to have oil in their lamps. They also understood the wisdom of having extra stock in case the oil ran out. In the parable, the foolish virgins *took their lamps, but did not take any oil with them.*

In **Psalm 23:5**, David said to the Lord: You anoint my head with oil. Oil and anointing go together. Read **1 Samuel 10:1** and fill in the blanks:

Then Samuel took a and poured it on Saul's and kissed him, saying, 'Has not the LORD you leader over his inheritance?'

Jesus' life on earth was empowered by the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove. When he came back to Nazareth, he went to the synagogue he had known for years. There he read **Luke 4:18-19**. *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me.....*

Now read **Mark 6:13** and fill in the blanks: *They drove out many demons and many sick people with and them.*

Anointing and power go together. The parable of the ten virgins teaches us that a wise virgin is ready to serve her master at all times. In the same way, kingdom men and women should be anointed at all times so that they are ready to do whatever their King desires. The Holy Spirit gives this anointing. Now write out **Ephesians 5:18**:

.....
.....

This literally says that we should keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Every day, we should exercise our faith and ask the Lord to fill us again.

We should also watch out for any leaks caused by sin or disobedience. In **Acts 1:8** Jesus promised: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.....* So make sure you keep on being filled, ready for Jesus.

B. Use your talents! (Matthew 25:14-30)

This parable starts with: Again, it will be like... Jesus was once more talking about the kingdom of heaven. This parable teaches that:

1. The master is going away for an extended period of time but he will definitely return.
2. He has given all of us some gifts or talents which he expects us to use for his benefit.
3. He will judge us, and reward or punish us, according to what we have done with our talent.

The talent may have been silver or gold, but, either way, it was valuable. At today's prices, a gold talent would be worth about \$1 million! We sometimes fail to appreciate the great value of what the Lord has put into us. The new birth, the constant filling of the Holy

Spirit and the spiritual and natural gifts he has given us are amazingly precious and have incredible potential.

The Lord expects his massive investment into our lives to yield results. During the time the master was away, the first two servants produced a 100% return on what they had been given. They were duly honoured. Write out the Lord’s acclamation to both the five talent and the two talent servants (vv 21,23)

.....
The master appreciated and rewarded their faithfulness. God values faithfulness because it reflects his character. **1 Corinthians 10:13**, and many other verses, tell us the same truth: *God is faithful*. He also expects us to grow in faithfulness.

Jesus explained this in more detail in **Luke 16:10-12** where he gave three spheres to illustrate where we should be faithful, or trustworthy. Write out the three areas Jesus mentioned where we need to be trustworthy.

.....
.....
The ‘little things’ Jesus talked could be simply making sure we do what we say:

- I’ll be back in ten minutes
- I’ll be there at 9 o’clock
- I’ll call you when I am next in town
- I’ll definitely visit you
- I’ll make sure he gets the message
- I’ll pay the money next week
- I’ll post that letter on my way home
- I’ll return that book on Wednesday

Please put a mark against any of the ‘little things’ mentioned on page 71, where you know you have not been faithful to your word.

Jesus also taught that we should be faithful with money and with property belonging to somebody else. Think about your life for a few moments and make a note of a time when you were not trustworthy in these matters.

.....

Jesus promised that he would reward faithfulness in each of these areas. The man with one talent, however, was not faithful and gained nothing for his master from what he had been given.

The man’s main reason for burying his talent is given in **Matthew 25:25**, *I was afraid*. **Hebrew 11:6** teaches us that: *without faith it is impossible to please God*. Fear so dominated this one-talent man that he could not put his valuable talent to use.

Do you think that you have talents which you are not using for the Lord? If so, write down what these talents are and how you could develop them:

.....

Why do you think you have not been using these talents?

.....

C. Serve the needy! (Matthew 25:31-46)

This may or may not be a parable, but it is clear kingdom teaching. Jesus explained that there are two types of people – pictured as sheep and goats – and that there will be a final judgment when the sheep will be welcomed into the eternal kingdom whilst the goats will go to eternal punishment.

Read this parable and write down in your own words what the King honoured the sheep for doing (the same things as he condemned the goats for not doing):

- 1.
- 2.

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

This list shows six types of need where Jesus wants his people to express his love and concern. He says that when we carry his burden and care for people in need, we are actually caring for him. Complete each of these verses:

- v 40 *whatever you did*
-
- v 45 *whatever you did not do*
-

We live in a world of growing inequality in which the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer. The richest 1% of households in the world now earn more than the 60% of households at the bottom of the income distribution. The top 1% own 40% of the world’s wealth. This is not God’s intention for mankind as **2 Corinthians 8:13-14** makes clear: *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,*

This means that we have to grow in kindness and compassion towards those in need, and find ways of making a practical difference to the lives of poor people.

Matthew 6 showed that God disapproved of the way religious people gave to the poor, prayed and fasted but **James 1:27** teaches that there is a kind of religion that God accepts. Please look up the verse and write it out in full:

.....

Before finishing with this parable, the following verses from Proverbs highlight the importance of being concerned for the poor and needy:

Proverbs 14:31 *He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God.*

Proverbs 19:17 *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.*

Proverbs 21:13 *If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.*

Proverbs 22:9 *A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.*

Proverbs 28:27 *He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.*

Proverbs 29:7 *The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.*

Spend some time meditating on the above verses, and ask the Lord to show you if there is something he wants you to do in terms of serving people in need. Be ready to discuss your thoughts with those doing this study with you.

Assignment

The three parables we have looked at in this lesson are so famous that phrases from each are now in everyday English. On your own, read each of them again. Ask the Lord to give you further revelation which you could apply to your life. He is faithful and he will respond to your request.

13. The Coming Kingdom

In this final study, we turn to **Luke 17:20-37**. Please read this passage and write down the question which the Pharisees asked in verse 20:

.....

A. *Where does it come?*

In one sense, Jesus must have been pleased that the Pharisees had begun to ask about the kingdom of God. As we have seen, he had constantly preached the good news of the kingdom and tried to help his disciples understand it. And yet he knew that that the Pharisees had still not grasped the message of the kingdom. Write out Jesus' reply in **Luke 17:20-21** in full:

The kingdom of God

.....

.....

The Pharisees were looking for an external sign of the kingdom but Jesus knew the kingdom would be of no value to them until they had settled an issue within their hearts. If the kingdom is within you, it means that:

1. You have decided that Jesus is your King and you will do everything he says. You want to live in line with the King's will, his commands, and his desires, even when it is costly and difficult.
2. You have a longing to see the righteous ways of the kingdom established in your family, community, government, and across the nations
3. You are willing to give your time, energy, resources - your very life - for advancing the kingdom.
4. You have a hatred for all non-kingdom things – greed, violence, cheating, lying, impurity, immorality, bribery and so on.
5. Your heart is set on the kingdom, even though you are aware that your life is not perfect.

Jesus was challenging the Pharisees, but, before we continue with this lesson, it is wise for us to ask ourselves the same question:

Is the kingdom of God within me? YES/NO

Some people can complete a study like this and become experts on the teachings of the kingdom. But the kingdom has to come into you so that you are totally gripped by a passion for the King and his kingdom.

I hope that you have already decided to live the rest of your life as a kingdom person. If you have not yet made that decision, why wait any longer? You can make a commitment to enter the kingdom right now.

B. When will it come?

In fact, the Pharisees had asked a good question even though Jesus did not give them answer they were looking for. But he was happy to give his disciples the reply because he knew the kingdom was already within them. Jesus told them: The time is coming when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not see it. (v22) Jesus knew that a time would come when the disciples would desperately long for Jesus to return and establish his kingdom.

Romans 8:19 declares that the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. Every part of God’s creation longs for that day when Jesus will rid the world of sin, sickness, corruption and every type of evil. It will definitely happen, but nobody knows exactly when. See **Matthew 24:36**.

Because there is such a deep longing for that day, Jesus warned that some people will begin to say that Jesus has already come. They will point to men and say ‘There he is!’ or ‘Here he is!’ (**Luke 17:23**)

Write down what Jesus said we should do when we hear people talking like that:

.....

Then Jesus went on to explain what would happen on the day of his coming:

1. His coming will be obvious! (Luke 17:24)

Read **Matthew 24:27** and fill in the blanks:

For as lightning that comes from the is visible even in the, so will be

.....
It will be visible to everybody. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** declares: *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* It will not only be visible; it will be audible too.

Jesus' disciples have no need to worry when people spread rumours and gossip about that day. It will be obvious to everybody. We can't miss it!

2. His coming has been authenticated (Luke 17:25)

Jesus also told them, *But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.* Jesus put this prophecy next to the one about his second coming. We who live after the Cross know that this first part has been fulfilled, and so we can be confident that Jesus was telling the truth about his second coming.

Even in the early days of the church, people were doubting what Jesus had promised. That is why the apostle Peter wrote in **2 Peter 3:3-4**: *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?"*

Some people continue to scoff or make fun of the possibility of Jesus' return. We do not know when he will come, but we know he definitely will. Jesus was right about his suffering, and he was also right about his future return.

3. His coming will be a surprise (Luke 17:26-30)

On the day of Jesus’ coming again, everybody will be going about their daily business - eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting and building. Nothing is wrong with these activities, but, in the midst of an ordinary day, Jesus will return out of the blue. Unannounced!

Read **1 Thessalonians 5:2** and write out how *the day of the Lord will come*:

No thief announces in advance his intention to burgle your house. In fact, surprise is one of his weapons. Likewise, Jesus’ coming will be a surprise.

Jesus illustrated this suddenness by referring to Noah and Lot, who both escaped the judgement to come. For both of them, the judgement came so abruptly that, in a short time, it was too late for anybody else to be saved. We should be using the time we have to try and save people from that judgement. As we have seen, God’s desire is that all are saved and nobody should perish.

This warning of the suddenness of Jesus’ return is also a warning to believers. At the moment he returns, what will he find us doing? Some of us delay doing things for the Lord ‘until I’ve finished this’, ‘until I’ve earned that’ or ‘until the children grow up’. He may well return before these things happen and then we will have all eternity to think about what God could have done with our life.

4. His coming will require a right response (Luke 17:31-33)

Jesus had already referred to Lot’s salvation, but he pointed out that Lot’s wife missed out because she looked back at the life she was leaving behind. She went along with her husband but her heart was set on earthly things and she did not really want to forsake them. Write out the two instructions of **Colossians 3:1-2**:

Set

Set

Lot’s wife had her heart and mind set on things below. It is easy to think how foolish she was, but will we react better when that day comes? This life is a practice for that day. Are we spending our time running after earthly treasures or are we learning to say ‘No’ to them? On that day, we will have to say ‘No’ or we will end up like Lot’s wife. Read **Luke 17:33** and write it out in full:

.....
.....
.....

Matthew 16:24 explains that losing our life means learning to deny ourselves in everyday life now. Is Jesus and his kingdom our priority - or earthly possessions and pleasures? That day will reveal what our hearts have really been set on.

5. His coming will be divisive (Luke 17:34-37)

We have already looked at the reality of heaven and hell, but again Jesus taught that the day of his coming will bring about eternal separation. *On that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left.*

Some people will go straight to be with Jesus. Some will be left behind. This should motivate us to pray for the lost and share the good news of the kingdom with them. After that day, they will have no opportunity to be saved.

Jesus continued with **Luke 17:37** Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather. In the context, this probably means that those left behind will become food for the birds of prey. Write down the names of people you know who are not saved and whom you long to bring to Jesus:

.....
.....

Now, make a decision to pray for them regularly.

6. His coming requires constant faith (Luke 18:1-8)

This parable of the kingdom confirms that God will definitely answer our persevering prayers. But in **Luke 18:8**, Jesus asked a question which shows that this parable is linked to Luke 17. Write down the question Jesus asked:

.....
.....

As we live our life, waiting for that unknown day, is there faith in our hearts? Are we trusting him on a daily basis? That day will certainly come and we should be looking forward to it with growing faith.

The history of life on earth as we know it reaches a climax on that day. **Revelation 11:15** records that the seventh angel will sound his trumpet, and there will be loud voices in heaven, saying: *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.*

Then, the kingdom will have come on earth as it is in heaven. All our prayers will have been fulfilled. All our longings satisfied. Jesus will reign over all.

Assignment

Congratulations on completing this study! Before you put this book back on your shelf, stop for some time and reflect on all 13 lessons. What is the most important truth you have gained? And how will it affect your everyday life? For your own benefit, write down your answer to these questions so that you can check on your progress in six months' time. God bless you!





