

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 2: Characteristics Necessary For Kingdom Growth

The seed of God's word contains all the potential for amazing growth. Through it, the effects of God's rule will grow within an individual and be spread to others throughout this world. However, while God's word will do its work, we need to learn that there are characteristics necessary of us for God's word to produce the kind of fruit God intends. While there are many important characteristics, we will consider the most basic of them here. These characteristics are fundamental to God's word growing in us and working through us.

1) Humility. Humility involves having a modest estimation of yourself in comparison with God, as well as with others. Humility is even such a key characteristic of citizenship in God's kingdom that Jesus pointed to it as being the only way to achieve true greatness in God's kingdom (Matthew 18:1-4; Mark 9:33-37). In fact, God plainly demonstrates in the Scriptures that humility is essential for receiving God's grace (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5-7). But, why is this characteristic so essential for kingdom citizens and critical to the growth of God's kingdom? First, without humility, you will not recognize your own sin and need for God. With humility, you will recognize your brokenness apart from the salvation Jesus offers and will diligently seek after Him. Compare the attitudes seen in the parable Jesus taught in Luke 18:9-14 (also Matthew 5:3). Second, without humility, you will not consider yourself to be a servant of others. With humility, you will empty yourself and willingly position yourself as the servant of others to the glory of God. Compare the attitudes seen in the disciples wanting to be the greatest and Jesus's humility as a servant in Matthew 20:20-28 (also Philippians 2:1-11). Having a heart full of humility will be soil that God's word can be effective in, as God will be able to mold you into whoever He wants you to be in serving Him and

others (in contrast with one who is stubborn and rebellious, Jeremiah 18:1-6).

2) Faith. Faith involves trusting God so as to do whatever He desires from your life. Faith is such a key characteristic of citizenship in the kingdom of God that God simply says that one cannot please Him without faith (Hebrews 11:1, 6). In fact, Jesus taught that if people would not truly believe He is the promised Messiah, Son of God, and King, they could not be saved from their sins (John 8:24). But, why is this characteristic so essential for kingdom citizens and critical to the growth of God's kingdom? First, without full faith, you will put your trust in your own ideas, plans, possessions, etc. that are bound to fail. With faith, you will put your trust in Jesus and know that whatever He says will come to pass regardless of how unlikely it may seem. Compare the attitudes of most people who saw Jesus and a centurion's faith that whatever Jesus would say would come to pass in Matthew 8:5-13. Second, without full faith you will limit how much you will give in serving God and how much of your life will truly be devoted to him. With faith, you will step beyond your comfort zone and trust that you can do whatever Jesus wants you to do regardless of how difficult or impossible it may seem at first. Compare the common reaction to Jesus walking on water with Peter's initial demonstration of faith that resulted in him walking on the water in Matthew 14:22-33. Having a heart full of faith in God will result from hearing God's word (Romans 10:17) and be the fertilizer that stimulates a life of obedience and service to Jesus – even when it is difficult (Luke 6:46-49; James 2:14-26).

3) Love. Love involves sacrificially giving yourself for another. Love is such a key characteristic of citizenship in God's kingdom that Jesus taught

loving God was the most important command of God's law (Matthew 22:34-40). In fact, love was a characteristic that would clearly distinguish those who followed Jesus (John 13:34-35; 1 John 4:7-21). But, why is this characteristic so essential for kingdom citizens and crucial to the growth of God's kingdom? First, without love for God, you will consider the commandments of God to be burdensome and allow many things to get in the way of the service He desires. With love, you will never see anything God wants from your life as being too great a sacrifice to make considering all that He has done for you. Compare the attitudes of those who were invited to the banquet in Jesus's parable in Luke 14:15-24 (also 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 John 5:1-4). Second, without love for others, you will not be focused on whether those you meet during your life hear and obey the gospel of the kingdom. With love for others, you will be focused on doing whatever you can to sacrificially give yourself so the others will also get to partake in the eternal blessings of Heaven. Compare the attitudes of those who passed by the wounded man in Jesus's parable in Luke 10:25-37 (also Luke 15:1-10). Having a heart full of love for God and for all people will properly motivate you to do all that you can to allow God's word to work effectively and grow in your life as well as sharing it with everyone you possibly can (Titus 2:11-14).

Although there are other characteristics that will impact kingdom growth, these three seem to have a fundamental place in Jesus's teaching. Furthermore, as you study the growth of God's kingdom (i.e. in the book of Acts), these are repeatedly seen as being the characteristics that underlie the effects. Therefore, as you consider the soil of your own heart, you must make sure these three characteristics (humility, faith, and love) are present and prominent so that God's rule can grow in and through you!

Thought Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correction: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?