

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 3: Personal Disciplines Involved In Kingdom Growth, Part 1

While the power for growth in God's kingdom resides in the seed of God's word and we cannot know or control how it works (Mark 4:26-29), God also uses people to facilitate the growth of His kingdom. Therefore, for God's kingdom to grow as He has designed and desires, His people must be involved in some various personal disciplines. These disciplines are often taught and then demonstrated as important elements of the growth of God's kingdom in the New Testament (particularly in the book of Acts).

1) Worship. Those who believe and obey the gospel of the kingdom are often pictured in the Scriptures as being a people who are devoted to worshiping God. First, God's people worshiped privately (Matthew 6:5-13; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13). Each follower of Christ should make a commitment to bowing before the majestic God and offering Him the praise He is due throughout our lives, even giving our entire lives as a sacrifice that praises Him (Romans 12:1)! Second, God's people worshipped in the assemblies of the local church (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26). Each follower of Christ should make a commitment to assembling with the local church in his/her community to join with other Christians in offering praise to God (Hebrews 10:24-25)! Third, God's people worshipped with other Christians outside the assemblies of the local church (Acts 2:46-47; Acts 16:25). Each follower of Christ should make a commitment to spending time together with other Christians to enjoy the fellowship God has provided in Christ and worship should be a natural component of these times spent together (Acts 4:23-31)! While worship is about praising God, it also then has the effect of producing growth in the worshipers (1 Corinthians 14:26; Colossians 3:16)!

2) Fellowship. Those who have entered fellowship with God through Jesus Christ are also brought into fellowship with one another (1 John 1:5-7). As such, God has given those who submit to

Him responsibilities toward the others involved in this fellowship. These responsibilities are especially experienced within the context of a local congregation of people who have submitted to Jesus. They include "one another" responsibilities such as: Loving one another (1 Peter 4:8), showing hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9), carrying one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), correcting one another (James 5:19-20), encouraging one another (Hebrews 3:12-13), praying for one another (James 5:16), weeping and rejoicing with one another (Romans 12:15), etc. Each of these involve both giving and receiving. So, as you receive the blessings of this fellowship, you are built up and made stronger in your faith by other Christians in these ways. Then, as you give the blessings of this fellowship, you are helping other Christians be built up and made stronger in their faiths. For, all Christians are fighting for the cause of Christ in this world against a common enemy (1 Peter 5:8-9).

3) Holiness. The gospel of Christ is intended to transform lives, not be an empty theology of doctrinal beliefs. So, those who accepted the gospel of Christ in the Scriptures were expected to change their lives. Consider how this can be seen in the Thessalonians (Acts 17:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:8-10) and the Corinthians (Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The pursuit of holiness is necessary for God's kingdom to grow in at least three ways. First, this pursuit of holiness results in individual growth so that each one becomes increasingly more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 7:1; James 1:21, 27). Second, this pursuit of holiness results in helping the entire church to stay pure (1 Corinthians 5:6-8, 13; Hebrews 3:12-13). Third, this pursuit of holiness results in people who are living in sin seeing the light of Christ reflected around them so that they might come to give glory to God themselves (Matthew 5:14-16; 1 Peter 3:1-2). As God is holy in every respect, God expects His people to be committed to practicing holiness as those He has

called out of darkness to live in the marvelous light of His holiness (1 Peter 1:13-16; 2:9-10)! If God's people fail to live holy as they should, they can actually result in great harm being done to the cause of His kingdom (Romans 2:17-24; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Revelation 2:20).

4) Learning God's word. Since the gospel is the seed that results in the growth of the kingdom of God, it should come as no surprise that God's people are often pictured in the Scriptures as being devoted to learning its teaching (Acts 2:42; 11:21-26; 19:8-10; 20:20). This was also a point of emphasis in the assemblies of the churches during New Testament times (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:26-31; Colossians 3:16; 4:16; 1 Timothy 4:13, 16). For, the gospel of Jesus Christ is clearly recognized by God's people as the catalyst for kingdom growth in a few major ways (1 Peter 2:2-3). First, it results in individuals growing in their own knowledge and maturity in Christ. Second, it results in local congregations becoming stronger as each member grows and more become able to teach and lead in the congregation. Third, it results in members knowing the teachings of God well enough they can then share them with those who do not believe and obey the gospel. However, if God's people fail to learn God's word as they should, it impedes the growth of the kingdom (Hebrews 5:12-14)!

These four disciplines can be seen as contributing to the growth of God's kingdom in New Testament times. Therefore, if we desire for God's kingdom to continue growing in the ways that it can (according to God's design), God's people must continue being committed to these same disciplines today. In the next lesson, we will look at four additional disciplines.

Discipleship 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?