

How God's Kingdom Grows

Lesson 4: Personal Disciplines Involved In Kingdom Growth, Part 2

While the power for growth in God's kingdom resides in the seed of God's word, we have started to see that God also uses people to facilitate the growth of His kingdom (i.e. personal spiritual growth and numeric growth). In the previous lesson, we discovered four personal disciplines involved in kingdom growth: Worship, fellowship, holiness, and learning God's word. Now, we will consider four more personal disciplines involved in kingdom growth.

1) Service. Living as citizens of God's kingdom is not some sort of honorary position you get to claim that does not really impact your life. Instead, Jesus has led the way in demonstrating that His kingdom is about service. First, Jesus demonstrated that His kingdom is about serving God (John 4:34; 17:4). So, those in Jesus's kingdom must also serve God (Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:4-5). This involves letting God work through your life to do all that He would desire you to do (as revealed in the Bible). As citizens of this kingdom, then, we must conduct ourselves as ambassadors (representatives) of Christ on this earth (2 Corinthians 5:20). Second, Jesus demonstrated that His kingdom involves serving others (Matthew 20:26-28; John 13:1-17). So, those in Jesus's kingdom must also good works of service toward others (Galatians 6:9-10; Acts 9:36-39; Romans 16:1-2). In fact, Jesus demonstrates that how we have served others will be considered on the Judgment Day as acts of service that were either done or not done to Him (Matthew 25:31-46)! In all this service to God and others, you will grow in your faith and help others see the love of Christ!

2) Evangelism. Of all the ways you can serve others, there is no better way than helping others learn the good news about salvation from sin! This was Jesus's primary focus in His interactions with others (Matthew 9:35-38; Luke 19:10). Then, when Jesus had accomplished His mission and prepared to

leave this earth, He left His disciples with the responsibility of sharing the gospel and making disciples of others (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). The early disciples embraced this as a key part of their mission and work on this earth – both as individual disciples and as local churches. For example, the persecuted Christians in Jerusalem were scattered and went on their ways preaching the word wherever they went (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21). The church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to support the spreading of the gospel (Acts 11:19-26). The church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas on a journey to preach God's word (Acts 13:1-3). The church in Thessalonica were ringing out the message of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:8-10). As disciples of Christ embrace the salvation offered by Christ, they are then committed to sharing the good news of salvation with others (Romans 10:13-15; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 1 Peter 3:14-16). This work results in individual growth when Christians teach God's word to others and gives opportunity for numeric growth.

3) Prayer. Christians in the New Testament were taught to be committed to prayer (Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 5:16). This should come as no surprise, though, since Jesus was also committed to prayer (Luke 5:16; 6:12). Consider some examples of God's people praying to observe the prominent place of prayer in the growth of God's kingdom in the first century (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:23-31; 6:6; 12:5, 12; 13:1-3; 14:21-23; 16:25; 20:36; etc.). As you can see, the early disciples and churches were regularly in prayer and prayer surrounded everything that was being done. After all, while there are things God's people can and should do to contribute to the growth of the kingdom, the growth is not controlled by us! Therefore, we must pray to the Lord who is the one who gives the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:1-2; 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13). Praying in these ways will

help us grow by always depending on Him and trusting in His power to see others come into His kingdom!

4) Fasting. The Bible shows fasting as part of what God's people do. For example, Jesus taught that His disciples would fast when He was no longer with them (Matthew 6:16-18; Mark 2:18-20). We then see fasting as something done by God's people on two solemn occasions in the book of Acts. First, we see the church in Antioch fasting in connection with their service to God (perhaps in connection with an assembly of the church, Acts 13:2). Then, after the Holy Spirit instructed Barnabas and Saul to be set apart and sent to share the gospel, they fasted, prayed, laid hands on them, and sent them off (Acts 13:3). Second, we see Paul and Barnabas (and possibly the other churches) praying with fasting in connection with the appointment of elders (Acts 14:23). From these, we can conclude that fasting was connected with the growth of God's kingdom in the New Testament. Although there is no passage that commands Christians and churches to fast at specific times, fasting is clearly to be recognized as an important discipline of God's people. Through the abstinence from some earthly thing (i.e. food), we may engage in such periods of devotion to God – which will result in growth!

We have seen eight disciples that can be seen as contributing to the growth of God's kingdom in New Testament times: Worship, fellowship, holiness, learning God's word, service, evangelism, prayer, and fasting. While there may be others to consider alongside these, we should commit to doing whatever we can to contribute to the growth of God's kingdom. For, God's kingdom will continue to grow through the same means today as it has in the past!

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?