

Called to the Kingdom and Glory of God

# THE KINGDOM TURN



*A ReVision Resource*

T. M. MOORE

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

The Kingdom Turn  
A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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## Contents

Welcome to <i>ViewPoint</i>	4
1 “Lift Up Your Eyes”	5
2 “More than These?”	7
3 “That They May Behold My Glory”	9
4 “Seek First the Kingdom of God”	11
5 “You Shall Receive Power”	13
6 “Your Father’s Good Pleasure”	15
7 “You Who Practice Lawlessness”	17

### Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *The Kingdom Turn*, a study which considers the dramatic difference living in the Kingdom of God can bring to our lives. *The Kingdom Turn* is a *ReVision* Resource of The Fellowship of Ailbe.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to receive your suggestions for future topics and studies. Contact us at our webpage. And if you're not receiving *ViewPoint* first thing every day, then be sure to register on the website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org).

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 “Lift Up Your Eyes!”

*“Do you not say, ‘There are still four months and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” Jn. 4.35*

### *Forever changed*

Sometime early in the year 1436, art and painting in the Western world changed dramatically and permanently.

Prior to 1436 artists in Europe depicted their subjects on a flat surface, without dimension. The colors were bright, the drawings were brilliant, and the themes were clear. But the paintings were flat. They didn’t “look like” people and scenes such as one might observe during the course of a day. Something was missing, and nobody understood quite what.

Then Leon Battista Alberti published his book, *Della pittura* – “On Painting” – and everything about art in the West changed forever.

Alberti explained that works of art should not be seen as a flat surface, but as a window. The scenes in a work of art should be posed as on a pyramid, which the viewer observed through the base toward the top. Four triangles comprised the pyramid, and everything should be painted on those triangles with reference to the point which marked the top of the pyramid. The point provided the referent for everything else on the pyramid, which the viewer observed as lying on its side. Alberti insisted that artists should “have no other aim but to make the shapes of things seen appear on the surface of the picture not otherwise than if this surface were of transparent glass and the visual pyramid passed through it, the distance, the lighting, and the point of sight being properly fixed.”

Leon Battista Alberti had discovered perspective, a technique for creating the illusion of depth and the sensation of dimension on a flat surface. Western art was forever changed, and Alberti’s technique continues being taught and practiced to this day.

### *Lift up your eyes*

The coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh signaled a change of perspective more significant, more radical, and more all-encompassing than Alberti’s introduction of perspective to painting. Prior to Jesus, faithful men and women anticipated the promised day when God would redeem His people, establish His Kingdom, and begin the work of reconciling the world to Himself. That would be a glorious day – the Jubilee – in which all the precious and very great promises of God would finally come to fruition, and all the world would be transformed and blessed.

Jesus declared that, by His coming to earth, the Kingdom of God had come near. The Incarnation inaugurated the consummation of history. The day of promise had arrived. The long-awaited in-breaking of the rule of God on earth as in heaven had begun. And the reconciling of all creation, culture, and humankind to God was under way.

With Jesus, everything changed. And this was no illusion, but a new reality – the Kingdom of God. And with the outpouring of God’s Spirit on that first Christian Pentecost, power arrived to carry out the promises of God, according to the teaching of Jesus, for the life and hope of the world.

When Jesus told His disciples to lift up their eyes, He wanted them to see that the end of history had broken into the middle, and from that moment forward, nothing would be the same. He, through them, would begin

making all things new. The various tributaries of human history, which had for centuries and millennia meandered their separate courses, were now draining into a new channel – the channel of the Kingdom of God – and, by a new and irresistible power, were being carried along according to the purpose of God to a consummation and conclusion He had determined and He would accomplish.

#### *The Kingdom turn*

Everyone who truly comes to faith in Jesus Christ is responding to a call from God, the Creator of the world and Father of the redeemed. He calls us into His Kingdom, there to know and live for His glory, as He works through us, by His Word and Spirit, to make all things new (1 Thess. 2.12; 2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

Coming to faith in Jesus Christ creates a turning point in a person's life, from a flat, lifeless, hopeless existence into the glorious depth, dimension, and direction inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer, if you have heard and answered the Father's call, then you have made a turn in life, the Kingdom turn, and now everything about your life must be forever new.

The Kingdom turn is a watershed experience, and it begins with a dramatic shift in perspective, in which we lift up our eyes and understand that the world we live in is bigger, brighter, and more fraught with possibilities for glory than we ever imagined before. If you've made this Kingdom turn, then every day is an adventure of lifting up your eyes to a horizon bright with hope, broader than the material cosmos, and brimming with possibilities for glory and love.

This perspective – this Kingdom turn – provides a vantage point for living that brings new depth and dimension to every aspect of our lives, as we engage in everything Him Who declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21.5).

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. What does it mean to be called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12)?
2. How does entering the Kingdom of God change our *perspective* on life and the world?
3. “Coming to faith in Jesus Christ creates a turning point in a person's life, from a flat, lifeless, hopeless existence into the glorious depth, dimension, and direction inaugurated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the best rating you can give, to what extent does this statement reflect your experience of being a Christian?
4. In what ways has your world become “bigger, brighter, and more fraught with possibilities for glory” since making the Kingdom turn?
5. What are your goals for this study? What do you hope to learn? How do you expect to grow?

*Next steps: How would you explain your experience of making this “Kingdom turn”? Talk with a Christian friend about what it means for you to have answered the Father's call and to have entered into His Kingdom and glory.*

## 2 “More than These?”

*So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonab, do you love Me more than these?”* John 21.15

### *The life we should love*

In the book of Revelation those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ, who have truly made the Kingdom turn, are described as not loving their lives so much that they would not gladly die for their faith (Rev. 12.10, 11, especially in NASB).

The wellbeing of our lives is not threatened only by persecution, as in the book of Revelation. All kinds of situations can challenge us to consider whether we love this present life so much that the prospect of losing it can depress and destroy us.

Todd Billings writes about such a prospect in his book, *Rejoicing in Lament*. A brilliant young theologian with a young family, Billings was diagnosed with incurable cancer in his late thirties. His life would soon be over, and, obviously, much sooner than he’d ever imagined.

Faced with such a prospect, human emotions run the gamut from confusion to resentment to anger to complete and utter dismay. The life they love so much is about to be taken away from them, and not even the very best efforts of modern science can keep that from happening.

Such situations remind us to keep things in a Kingdom perspective, and to remember that the life we should love above all else is not that which we enjoy in this temporal domain, but that which is ours in God.

### *Dwelling in His beauty*

This is where Todd Billings had to come, and he found his way there by learning to pray the psalms. In the book of Psalms Billings found a way of facing and dealing with the emotions that flooded his soul as his young life began its rapid ebb.

But because Billings had made the Kingdom turn, he understood that this life, for all its wonder, joy, challenge, love, and fun, is not *ultimate* life. Therefore, it is not the life to be loved and desired above all else. *That* life – ultimate, eternal, indestructible life – is found in God and Jesus Christ, as all who have made the Kingdom turn realize more and more each day.

For Todd Billings the psalms helped him express, manage, and redirect his passions, so that he was able to struggle through his fears and sadness to enjoy a deeper love and hope, which can never be taken away.

He writes of his experience praying through Psalm 27: “This prayer was hard work. I had to repeat these words many times for them to become my prayer. Gradually my mind would focus, tense muscles would release, and I was brought into a place that was not just the story of my cancer, my steroids, my chemo. By the Spirit, I was led into God’s presence with my fear, with my anger, and with my hope being recentered on life with God, to ‘dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.’ The fight with cancer was not repressed or left behind...[b]ut in praying the Psalms – in soaking in its words – I was moved toward trust and even hope.”

Through his experience of cancer Todd Billings came to realize that Jesus was asking him the question, concerning everything good and desirable about his life in this world – “Do you love Me more than these?”

And he was learning to answer, “Yes, Lord, I do!”

*A triumph of the heart*

Todd Billings’ book, *Rejoicing in Lament*, is a song of triumph, a testimony to the power of the Word and Spirit of God to shape our passions from fear to trust, despair to hope, sorrow to joy, loss to great and everlasting gain. Cancer might destroy his body in *this* life, but this life is not the life to be loved above all else.

Those who have made the Kingdom turn understand this, and they do not love their lives in the here and now so much that they love their lives in Christ less. Life is a gift, a wonderful package deal of loves, joys, challenges, achievements, delights, disappointments, and mysteries. But life in this world is only a foretaste, a foreshadowing of the true and eternal and imperishable life of glory we know with God in Jesus Christ.

Christians understand that the heart is the heart of the matter when it comes to what really matters in life. Whatever we love or desire or enjoy or serve more than Jesus is merely “one of these” mundane, passing things that can keep us from directing all our truest and most enduring passions toward Him Who lives forever and ever.

As the new perspective which is the Kingdom turn comes to dominate our hearts, we will find our affections changing so that knowing Christ and loving Him become the thing we desire above all else – above even, “all of these” things that make up the wonder, pleasure, and challenges of our earthly lives.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Meditate on Proverbs 4.23. Why do we say that the heart is the heart of the matter when it comes to the life of faith?
2. What other “loves” compete with love for Christ in our lives? How can we keep these in perspective?
3. The Kingdom turn redirects our *passion* so that love for Christ reconfigures and re-organizes all other loves in our lives. In what ways have you found this to be true?
4. Have you ever tried praying the psalms? Try praying through Psalm 27. How does this psalm speak to what we love and most desire in life?
5. “As the new perspective which is the Kingdom turn comes to dominate our hearts, we will find our affections changing so that knowing Christ and loving Him become the thing we desire above all else – above even, “all of these” things that make up the wonder, pleasure, and challenges of our earthly lives.” How does this work in us? How does making the Kingdom turn change our *passion*?

*Next steps: How would you answer Jesus’ question to Peter? Is there anything in your life that you love more than Jesus? How do you know? Talk with a close friend about these questions.*



### 3 “That They May Behold My Glory”

*“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory...”*  
John 17.24

#### *The money priority*

For many people – undoubtedly, too many – money is *the* determining factor in all their priorities. It is the *great* priority that drives everything else they do. But it’s interesting to consider the different ways people pursue this highest priority.

We’re all familiar with the guy who wants to get rich and enjoy all the benefits money can afford. He’s the guy who’ll go to any length to get the money he wants, even if, like Bernie Madoff, he cons and swindles people out of *their* money in order to line his own pockets.

But there are also people with money – lots of money – who come by it honestly and use it commendably. They have a great idea, invent something extremely useful, or demonstrate skills that others consider to be so valuable they’re willing to pay large sums for their advice. Here we think of people like Henry Ford, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, or the various political advisors hired by presidential candidates.

I doubt that any of these people would have continued to do what they did, or do, unless they believed that, sooner or later, big chunks of money were going to come their way.

Then there are those in the movement known as “extreme altruism” who want to make as much money as they can in order to give away as much as possible to meet pressing needs worldwide. Young people in this movement make as much, and often more, than most of us, but they also give away as much as 50% of their income to care for the poor. Making money is their sole passion. They have few friends, are reluctant to marry and have a family, and think only of how they can live smaller in order to give more.

Then there’s the rest of us, whose pursuit of money serves as a default priority in how we manage our time, not because we hope to become fabulously rich, but just because one needs a certain amount of money to get by in the world.

#### *Time and money*

We’ve all heard it said that “Time is money.” This is the language of an economy driven by money, an economy of getting-and-spending, and it reminds us that time is the framework in which we make money, so we’d better learn to make the most of our time in order to gain or save the most money we can.

Jesus understood this mindset when He told the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.14-30. He knew that people think in terms of money, that money is the “currency” of the secular economy, and that getting and making and enjoying money is pretty much on everyone’s mind, at least at some level.

But Jesus used that parable, not to encourage people in their getting-and-spending aspirations. Rather, He used their understanding of money to challenge them with the larger question of how they use their time, talents, and treasure before the watchful eye of God. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift, and He gives His gifts for a purpose.

God gives each person the gift of time – and all the gifts, abilities, opportunities, and responsibilities that fill that time – not so that we might spend our time merely on ourselves, knocking ourselves out in pursuit of things that cannot last. God is seeking a return on investment from the time He invests in us, and the return

He's seeking is not monetary.

*Living in and for glory*

God's purpose in creation is to glorify Himself. The unfathomable scope, wondrous diversity, glorious beauty, and mysterious power of the creation all testify to the glory of God. Creation witnesses to God and declares to us something of what He is like and what He expects for and of His creation.

This includes the time God invests in us – the time in which we establish and pursue the priorities of our lives. As Jesus explained, in the Kingdom of God, making money is not the driving force. We cannot serve God *and* mammon. The driving force, the number one priority in the Kingdom of God is knowing, enjoying, growing in, and making known the glory of the infinite, eternal, wise, and loving God.

Those who have made the Kingdom turn live in *this* economy first, and in our secular economy only second. Their passion to know and love God drives them each day to consider how best to use the time of their lives so as to experience and exhibit the glory of God. They understand that God's declared intention is that the knowledge of His glory should cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14), and they make it their point, in all the time of their lives, to seek and to refract the presence, power, and promises of God to the people around them (1 Cor. 10.31).

In the Kingdom of God, our first priority lines up exactly with God's, and with what Jesus prayed for us in that garden long ago: To know the glory of God, and to make that glory known in everything we do.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What is the glory of God? What does it mean to experience the glory of God?
2. In what sense should the glory of God become the dominating *priority* of our lives? Can you see how this flows from the change in *perspective* and *passion* which the Kingdom turn effects?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. In the divine economy, time is not money; time is glory. Explain.
4. What are some ways you have seen creation testifying to the glory of God?
5. What does it mean for us to "make known" the glory of God through our lives?

*Next steps: What does it mean to "know" the glory of God? In what ways do you know God's glory? How do you approach the use of your time so that the glory of God is your top priority at all times? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.*

## 4 “Seek First the Kingdom of God”

*“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”* Matthew 6.33

*First things...*

Everybody understands the idea of priorities. Priorities determine the way we use our time and the ways we invest our strength, abilities, and treasure.

But priorities have to be translated into more concrete terms before we can actually *pursue* them. For example, “become rich” isn’t something one can pursue apart from some more concrete objectives, such as “get a good job,” “work hard,” “save as much as I can,” and so forth.

Our *priorities*, in other words, need to be translated into tangible, meaningful *pursuits* or else they’ll just remain more pie-in-the-sky than bird-in-the-hand.

The key to achieving our priorities, therefore, lies in making our *pursuits* as concrete as possible, and then continually regarding those pursuits as the *first things* we must attend to every day.

*...not just first, but always*

The Kingdom of God is the concrete *pursuit* which enables us to act on and toward the priority of glorifying God in all things.

Jesus wants us to know God and to glorify Him, and He says that the way to do this is to “seek first” the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

But in this case, seeking the Kingdom of God is not a matter of doing first things first. Seeking the Kingdom is not just the first thing on the Christian’s daily to-do list. Seeking the Kingdom is a first things *always* proposition, so that whatever is on our to-do list on any given day, seeking the Kingdom is the *first things pursuit* which defines and directs everything else we do.

Going to work today? Seek the Kingdom. Taking the kids to the library? Seek the Kingdom. Going for a walk? Working out at the gym? Taking a test at school? Seek the Kingdom. Everything in our lives – every moment of every day – is an arena for seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Seeking the Kingdom is first things first and always, the *defining* pursuit of all who have made the Kingdom turn.

*What is the Kingdom?*

But it’s possible that the Kingdom of God may itself be a somewhat abstract idea for some people. Jesus understood that. This is why He employed so many different images and stories to help us in thinking about the Kingdom – its character, value, and potential.

Jesus helps us cultivate a vision of the Kingdom, but you can’t beat the Apostle Paul for reducing difficult ideas down to manageable definitions. Paul tells us that the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). In our personal lives, all our relationships, all our involvement with culture – in all these areas we are seeking at all times to

realize more of the Kingdom of God, His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit, where now the various worldviews of relativism and materialism hold sway.

Righteousness describes the *character* of the Kingdom. It is the character of Jesus, the Law of God, and all the moral teaching of the Bible. We must *learn* righteousness and then “put it on” every day, in every situation, in all our words and deeds (Eph. 4.17-24).

Peace is the *condition* brought about by a life of righteousness. When we live in righteousness we are “in step” with Jesus Himself (1 Jn. 2.1-6), and He is, after all the Prince of Peace. His peace reaches us to the depths of our souls, so that nothing can shake us from that overall sense of wellbeing which walking in righteousness produces in us (Phil. 4.6, 7).

Joy is the *consequence* of righteousness and peace, so that, as we work to bring the character of the Kingdom into every aspect of life, and know the peace that comes with that, joy and rejoicing lead us to worship God with gladness and gratitude. Thus *God is glorified and we experience His glory*, just as He intends.

And all this, of course, can only be accomplished “in the Spirit,” as Paul says. The Spirit is the *power* for our *pursuit* of the Kingdom and glory of God. And if you’ve made the Kingdom turn, incredible, unlimited power is available to you, for the asking. But you must, of course, dare to ask.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness?
2. Seeking the Kingdom is the defining *pursuit* of all who have truly made the Kingdom turn. Do you agree? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven in the spheres of influence of your life – your Personal Mission Field?
4. What does T. M. mean by the character, condition, and consequence of the Kingdom of God? How do you experience this? How do you pursue it?
5. Meditate on Ephesians 3.20. What might God have in store for you that you’ve never dared to ask or think?

*Next steps: What do you do to make sure that seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God is the “first thing always” in every aspect of your life? Ask a church leader to help you think through this question.*

## 5 “You Shall Receive Power”

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...” Acts 1.8

### *The rip current of secularism*

The Kingdom turn brings a new *perspective* on life, so that those who come to faith in Jesus Christ view their lives, and live them, from the vantage point of eternity. The more we realize the abundant blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ, the greater our *passion* for Him becomes, as love for Him re-organizes all the other loves of our life.

The Kingdom turn establishes a new *priority* in our lives – the joyous, burning desire to glorify God in all we do. And this translates into concrete *pursuits* that bring the reality of the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy into all the relationships, roles, and responsibilities of our everyday lives.

So when we’re swimming with the current of the Kingdom of God, we know peace and joy greater than anything else in life can bring.

But we need always to be mindful of the rip current of this secular and materialistic age. Wave after wave of the Kingdom of God is washing up on the shores of time through the lives of those who have made the Kingdom turn. But our secular age flows earnestly in exactly the other direction, and it can carry the unwary far from the shores of righteousness to a dangerous floundering amid the flotsam and jetsam of materialism.

So how do we overcome this constant and strong power that wants to deprive us of the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Kingdom of God?

By the constant and stronger power of the Holy Spirit.

### *Real power*

Jesus promised His followers that, when they have made the Kingdom turn, they will enter into a new realm of power, a power that can overcome every obstacle, even the strong pull and allure of our secular and material age.

The power of the Spirit works within the followers of Christ to make us willing and able to enter and fulfill the pleasure of God. Now understand, we are not naturally inclined to such. Left to ourselves, the rip current of secularism makes us self-seeking, short-sighted, and things-oriented in every area of our lives. The Spirit of God breaks this strong tendency by showing us Jesus, capturing our passions, and engaging our minds for seeking Christ and His Kingdom.

This is real power, but it’s not automatic. The Spirit of God dwells in all who truly believe in Jesus Christ, but not everyone who believes in Jesus experiences that power in the way God intends.

God intends His power to transform us, from self-centered, floundering sinners, into Christ-centered, Christ-like waves of truth and grace. The Spirit exercises this power as we seek the Lord

Jesus in His Word and walk in obedient faith to bring His Kingdom and glory to light in our lives.

This is power that can make everything new in our lives, and through us, everything new in the world around us. This is exceeding abundant power – like you’ve never known before – and it can turn our everyday lives into a big-surf adventure of riding the waves of Kingdom progress.

*But you must dare*

This power is available by faith. As we read God’s Word and learn more about His Kingdom agenda, by faith we resolve to submit to that Word, and to carry out its guidance in every area of our lives.

Paul says exceeding abundant power is available to us for bringing glory to God by realizing more of His Kingdom progress in our lives. The problem is not that the power is not available. The problem is that we too often get tangled up in the rip current of our secular age, and we don’t dare to think that our lives can break free of this, or to ask God’s help in enabling us to do so (Eph. 3.20).

If you’ve made the Kingdom turn, and you know that power exists to help you rise above the puny, paltry promises of our secular age, then you’ll begin to believe it, and to ask for it in every situation of your life.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Is spiritual *power* a real operative power in human life? In what ways?
2. How do you experience the “rip current” of secularism? How do you resist it?
3. Explain the connection between faith and the power of God’s Spirit?
4. What does it mean to “be” a witness for Christ (Acts 1.8)? How does the power of God’s Spirit work to make us such witnesses?
5. What are some hindrances that can keep us from knowing more of the Spirit’s power in our lives? How can Christians help one another deal with these hindrances?

*Next steps: What specifically will it mean for you to think and ask for the power of the Spirit to work in your life today? Write a prayer to carry with you that will remind you to ask for what God is able to give you in the power of His Spirit.*

## 6 “Your Father’s Good Pleasure”

*“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* Luke 12.32

### *The pleasure of His company*

Contrary to what many people seem to think, life in the Kingdom of God is a life of deeply satisfying pleasure.

David understood this, and he remarked that the pleasures forevermore are centered at the right hand of God (Ps. 16.11). This is where Jesus sits (Ps. 110), as He administers His Kingdom and leads those who have made the Kingdom turn into greater riches of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. And Paul says that we have been “seated with Christ” in the epicenter of divine pleasure (Eph. 2.6), so that our lives can be deeply satisfying, lacking nothing, as we rest in Jesus and the pleasure of the Lord.

No wonder Paul could say, as he sat in a Roman prison, “For me to live is Christ!” (Phil. 1.21)

The pleasure we know in the Kingdom of God is not the fleeting pleasures of sensuality or materialism. It is the eternal, unshakeable, always-expanding experience of *the very pleasure of God Himself*. If you’ve made the Kingdom turn, then no matter what comes your way in life, seated with Jesus at the Father’s right hand, you can know true and lasting pleasure.

### *To gain what you delight in*

Perhaps we should define the word “pleasure” a bit more carefully. One’s pleasure is that which one enjoys, that which brings delight, satisfaction, fulfillment, excitement, and an overall sense of wellbeing.

These days “pleasure” has become almost an idol, a thing to be sought, however we define it, for itself alone. Pleasure is associated with all manner of fleshly, earthly delights – food, sex, adventure, things, and so forth. Pleasure is the experience people know who delight in such things as these.

And, to be sure, there is pleasure to be known in such things. But the pleasure of our secular and material age is false pleasure because it can never completely satisfy. None of the things people in our secular age take pleasure in will last forever or follow them to the grave. Such things are but diversions from the pressures, duties, fears, and boredom of everyday living.

But *Kingdom* pleasure is of an entirely different sort. Kingdom pleasure is the pleasure of God Himself, the pleasure He takes in Himself and His glory, the infinite, unfailing enjoyment of resting in Him and His good and perfect will. It is a pleasure so real and so deep that knowing it we can sing, even in the midst of life’s most terrible moments, “It is well with my soul.”

And it is a pleasure that grows and grows and becomes richer and more exciting each time we know it.

*Delight in the Lord*

This is because God promises those who take pleasure in Him that He will give them the desires of their hearts (Ps. 37.4). If our desire is to know our fullest pleasure and satisfaction, our deepest fulfillment and peak of enjoyment, in the Lord, then it pleases the Lord to give us more of Himself and of the pleasure of His company.

No wonder we see such longing for God throughout the pages of Scripture! The psalmists say it best. They pant like a thirsting deer to know the presence of God (Ps. 42.1). They lift up the cup of the Lord's salvation and drink it down gladly (Ps. 116.12, 13). They cry out to know the Lord's presence and the pleasure of His company (Ps. 13). They rejoice in Him to be led into the safety and bounty of His presence and pleasure (Ps. 23). And, knowing God's pleasure, everything else pales into insignificance compared to the delight, the joy, the wonder – the pleasure – of knowing God and His salvation.

Delight in the Lord. Seek your pleasure in Him. All who have made the Kingdom turn are able to shrug off the gewgaws and doodads of this flimsy, fleeting world and to strive for the true pleasure God intends for us, the pleasure of His company and blessing.

Delight in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. He will give you more of Himself, and with that, fullness of joy and pleasures – *true* pleasures – forevermore.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. God does not give us *pleasure*. He *is* our pleasure, at least, for those who have made the Kingdom turn. Explain.
2. What kind of pleasure are we able to know at the Father's right hand (Ps. 16.11)? What makes this pleasure superior to all others?
3. "If our desire is to know our fullest pleasure and satisfaction, our deepest fulfillment and peak of enjoyment, in the Lord, then it pleases the Lord to give us more of Himself and of the pleasure of His company." What does this require of us?
4. Briefly explain the relationship between perspective, priorities, pursuits, power, and pleasure as these are affected by the Kingdom turn.

*Next steps: What kinds of things keep us from desiring the pleasure of God and His company? How can believers help one another to overcome these obstacles? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.*



## 7 “You Who Practice Lawlessness”

“*And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*” Matthew 7.23

*Surprise, surprise!*

My friend Mike Slay refers to this passage as the “scariest verse in the Bible.”

And he’s absolutely right.

The setting is the final judgment. The peoples of the world appear before the Lord of glory to give an account of their lives. A troop appears insisting that they had done all manner of good works in the name of Jesus. “Look at all *we have done* in Your name, Lord!” And, of course, they are fully expecting some kind of gold star and a seat in the front row of heaven.

Instead, Jesus condemns them because their *practices* were not such as He expects of those who have made the Kingdom turn. They were self-serving, self-vaunting, and probably undertaken with the maximum amount of convenience and the minimum amount of sacrifice. Good works they may have been, but Jesus saw them as lacking in love for God and neighbor. And He condemned those who boasted in their good works and expected to be honored and blessed *because* of them.

It’s possible to undertake all kinds of efforts that we might consider to be *good works*, only to discover – surprise, surprise – that they’re not at all what our King and Savior commends.

*Lawlessness*

Jesus condemned the “good works” of these appellants because they were not in line with the teaching of God’s Law. Instead of being *law-like* their works were *lawless*. Their works were not consistent with the teaching of the Law of God but merely schemes and projects invented by human minds. The motive behind them was to provide those doing them with some semblance of wellbeing – some “Jack Horner” view of their so-called Christian lives: “My, what a good Christian am I!”

But they had no love. No love for God, so that they learned, loved, and lived His Law with all their souls and strength. And no love for their neighbors, except insofar as doing something for their neighbors could make them feel good about themselves or look good before their friends.

Jesus said that people who neglect the Law of God will find their love growing colder and colder (Matt. 24.12). They may do all kinds of good and important and impressive things, but there will be no love in them because they are undertaken as the best efforts of *men* rather than the prescribed practices of *God*.

*This way to the Kingdom turn*

Jesus does not share the attitude of many contemporary believers toward the Law of God. Too many Christians today avoid the Law of God, fearful either of being broken to pieces on the rocks of works salvation, or sucked into the whirlpool of Pharisaic legalism. They may know the Ten Commandments, and bluster about how wrong it is for these not to be posted in our schools and

court houses. But they are not hiding the Law of God in their hearts, and the result is they are unable to practice the life of faith working by love which Jesus and the Apostles commend (Ps. 119.9-11).

The Kingdom turn begins by turning away from the path you walked before coming to know Jesus Christ, and beginning to walk the new path that He walks – the path of God’s Law (1 Jn. 2.1-6). The Kingdom turn holds the potential for Kingdom greatness to all who enter into it, but that way can only be realized through the Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19).

By the Law of God we mean the Law in two senses, first, the commandments and statutes given through Moses, and interpreted as to their spirit through Spirit of God today; and second, the Law as it is unfolded in all the rest of Scripture – the prophets, writings, gospels, epistles, and all the rest. If we’ve made the Kingdom turn we’ll hunger to walk the Kingdom way, and this means desiring to know Jesus Christ through His Word.

When the Word of God is the joy and rejoicing of our hearts, the practices of Jesus – words and works of love for God and neighbors – will be the practices that define us as people in whom all things are being made new. And then the scariest verse in the Bible will hold no terror for us.

Have you made the Kingdom turn? Really made it? And, having made it, are you following Jesus along the path of His Law and Word into Kingdom greatness and glory?

*For reflection or discussion*

1. Meditate on Matthew 24.12. Why does this happen? How does it happen?
2. Meditate on Matthew 22.34-40. Give some examples of the kind of *practices* that demonstrate love for God and neighbor.
3. Why is the Law of God so important for making the most of the Kingdom turn?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Next steps: What is your view of the Law of God? What has been your practice in “hiding” the Law in your heart? How might you improve on this? Ask a pastor or church leader to help you think through these questions.*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.