

The Kingdom Turn Part 5

KINGDOM PURSUIT



A ReVision Resource

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Kingdom Pursuit
The Kingdom Turn Part 5
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Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *Kingdom Pursuit*, part 5 in our 8-part series on *The Kingdom Turn*. This study takes up the practical question of what it means to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness every day, in every area of our lives. *Kingdom Pursuit* 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.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 First and Always

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6.33

Primary emphasis

Can there be any doubt that when Jesus said, “Seek first”, He was speaking of what must be the number one, overarching, all-pervading priority and pursuit in the life of every believer? Not just the first pursuit of the week, as in why we go to church, but the first pursuit at all times, every day, in everything.

As Jesus went about preaching and teaching during His brief earthly sojourn, the Kingdom of God was His primary emphasis. He preached the Kingdom on hillsides, along the roads, and in homes and synagogues throughout Palestine. His parables are rich metaphors exploring the nature and importance of the Kingdom of God. We simply aren’t paying attention to the gospel accounts if we come away from them thinking that anything other than seeking the Kingdom of God must be our primary pursuit at all times.

But what is the Kingdom of God? And how should we go about to seek it? For unless we know what we’re after, and how to go about gaining it, we shall not be able to fulfill Jesus’ command to seek first the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

The Kingdom of God

To be brief, the Kingdom of God is the rule of King Jesus which He has now brought into the affairs of men and nations. The Kingdom of God – the rule on earth of King Jesus – is present; yet the Kingdom of God is always coming, as Jesus implied by teaching us to pray for the coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 6.10).

Throughout the Old Testament God ruled all creation and its peoples, as He has from the beginning. Yet He kept His distance, so to speak, and allowed Satan, the Father of Lies, to blind the world and shroud it in the darkness of unbelief and sin. Satan was always God’s servant during those many years, and could only do what the Father allowed him (cf. Job 1, 2). God gave Satan a long leash, so much so that, not only were God’s chosen people, the Israelites, blinded to His will for most of their history, but the rest of the world was plunged into paganism, idolatry, violence, and mayhem.

But with the coming of Jesus, everything changed: ““The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11.15). A new order has broken into the lives of men and nations; a new King has ascended His eternal throne; a new power, in the Person of God’s Spirit, is unleashed in the world; Satan is bound (Matt. 12.22-29), though still dangerous (1 Pet. 5.8); Christ is building His Church (Matt. 16.18); and the Holy Scriptures now provide the map and manual for a new people with a new mission and purpose.

Advancing now

To be sure, the full coming of the Kingdom awaits the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. But now, and for 2,000 years, the rule of Christ on earth has been advancing against the wiles of the devil, the opposition of men and nations, and the lies and half-truths of the best of human thinking. As the Apostle John observed in his day, the light of the Kingdom is advancing and the darkness of sin and unbelief cannot overcome it (Jn. 1.5; 1 Jn. 2.8).

The Kingdom of God is advancing as the Church pursues her mission and her members take up the daily challenge of seeking the Kingdom of God as their primary pursuit in all their activities.

Where the Kingdom is advancing, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit burst into bloom like spring flowers. No wonder Paul said that all who take up this calling will find favor with God and be a blessing to their fellow men (Rom. 14.17, 18).

Like a growing stone, the Kingdom of God expands and grows within and through each one who has made the Kingdom turn (Dan. 2.44, 45). And its growth and progress in and through us is directly proportional to the effort we make in seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

Nothing more important

There is nothing more significant that you or I can do than seek the Kingdom of God. But oh, what challenge and struggle lie ahead for all who embark on this path! The obstacles are many; the enemy of our souls continues to prowl and stalk about; and even well-meaning friends, who claim to be Christians, are not convinced that seeking the Kingdom should be anything more than an article of faith.

But God means it to be a way of life, our primary pursuit while we are in this earthly tabernacle; and we do well to heed His Word and take our place in this glorious, all- transforming reality.

For reflection or discussion

1. How do you understand “the Kingdom of God”? What has the Kingdom of God meant or been in your experience as a Christian?
2. Why is seeking the Kingdom so important – the highest priority in every area of our lives?
3. Meditate on 1 John 2.8, John 1.5, Daniel 2.44 and 45, and Isaiah 9.6, 7. Why do some people have difficulty believing that the Kingdom of God is advancing in the world? Do you believe this?
4. Meditate on Romans 14.17, 18. What do you suppose would be happening in your Personal Mission Field if the Kingdom of God were advancing more consistently there?
5. What are your goals for this study? What do you hope to learn about seeking the Kingdom of God?

Next steps: Suppose a young believer asked you about this matter of “seeking the Kingdom.” What would you tell him? How would you counsel him to get started in this most important priority? Share your thoughts about these questions with a Christian friend.

Prayer:

2 Violently Seeking?

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.”
Matthew 11.12

Turf war

Christians are called to seek the Kingdom of God as their highest calling and primary pursuit in life. “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of heaven” are interchangeable terms, focusing, respectively, on the source (God) and orientation (heaven) believers must look to if they are to fulfill their calling in this life.

But seeking the Kingdom is not an easy road; Jesus did not exaggerate when He used the term, “violence” to describe the progress of the Kingdom in this world. Like the Sharks and the Jets in Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*, the citizens of the Kingdom of God are engaged in a turf war of cosmic proportions with the citizens of this world and the dark forces that shape their worldview and way of life.

So if we want to seek the Kingdom, we’d better get ready to rumble.

An ongoing struggle

Why is this? Why should believers have to struggle so hard to realize Kingdom progress here and now? Particularly when, as Jesus promised, “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12.32)?

It pleases God to give us His Kingdom, but it pleases Him also that we should have to strive to obtain it. Shortly after making so wonderful a promise, Jesus said that it is necessary for us to “force” or to “press” our way into the Kingdom of God (Lk. 16.16). And the reason for this is that the resistance to Kingdom progress is so constant and, yes, so violent.

There are at least four reasons why advancing the Kingdom is a struggle.

To discover the *first*, we need only look within ourselves, where the law of sin continues to mess with our minds, corrupt our affections, and confuse our priorities in this world (Rom. 7.21-23). Our “natural” inclination is to avoid discomfort and turmoil. A voice within us whispers, “Following Jesus is sweet; following Jesus is an easy road; you shouldn’t have to struggle to know more of the grace of God.” Whenever we hear that voice, encouraging us to deny the struggle and warfare which come with seeking the Kingdom, we can know the receiver dial of our souls is tuned to the father of lies, and not the King of Heaven.

Second, we are engaged in an aggressive spiritual warfare with spiritual powers of wickedness in high places. The devil and his minions will do anything to distract and dissuade us from taking seriously Christ’s call to seek His Kingdom. They’ll even allow us to indulge what we believe to be *good* in the Christian life, as long as we don’t take seriously the pursuit of what is *best*.

Third, the course of this world runs contrary to the Kingdom agenda of Christ. The believers in Thessalonica were rightly accused of standing against the spirit of their age by insisting that Jesus alone is King and must be followed and obeyed above all earthly protocols and priorities (Acts 17.1-9). The world of work, diversions, even family responsibilities, and worldly wisdom will try by every means to keep us from seeking the Kingdom of God in every aspect of our lives. And each of these can throw up stiff resistance as we come, seeking the Kingdom, on that particular bit of turf.

Finally, even in the Church there will be those who will try to temper our zeal, dissuade us from becoming

“fanatical” in our walk with the Lord, and assure us that Jesus loves us just as we are. For the sake of a comfortable faith, many “believers” today are denying their Kingdom citizenship, and they will not hesitate to urge us to walk with them along their path of false assurance and easy-believism.

Forcing our way in

If seeking the Kingdom is to become the first priority in every area of your life, then you need to get ready for some hard knocks and bitter struggles.

Jesus said we’ll have to force our way into the Kingdom, to exert a kind of spiritual violence in order to gain that which the Father wants earnestly to give us. If you aren’t ready for a struggle in taking up pursuit of the Kingdom of God, then you need to consider whether you have actually made the Kingdom turn, and are really in the same Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and brought near.

But if you are ready for such a struggle, and you anticipate having to engage it every day of your life, well, you won’t be disappointed.

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “spiritual warfare”? Of what does this consist? How does it affect us? Is this a kind of “violence”?
2. What is it about our own “natural” inclination that makes seeking the Kingdom so difficult? How should believers help one another in this matter?
3. What are some ways you might prepare, each day, for the struggle to lay hold on the Kingdom of God?
4. What can we expect if we refuse or neglect to prepare for this struggle?
5. How can you know when you are beginning to engage this struggle? What will this struggle look like as you take it up each day?

Next steps: Try to identify the points in your life where you expect you’ll have to struggle most to make progress in the Kingdom of God. Share these with a Christian friend, and ask him or her to pray for you.

Prayer:

3 A Compelling Vision

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Matthew 13:44

Worth the effort

People are motivated by compelling visions. Show us something big, something really desirable and worth whatever it takes to get it, then assure us that it can be ours, and we'll go all out to attain it.

Jesus understood this. That's why we find Him, in so many situations, casting a glorious and compelling vision of the Kingdom of God for His hearers. He commanded us to seek the Kingdom, and He enticed us in that pursuit by powerful images suggesting the beauty, majesty, greatness, and infinite value of the Kingdom of God.

In Matthew 13 the Lord piled parable after parable, image upon image, and metaphor on metaphor to convince His disciples and followers that seeking the Kingdom, while a struggle, is well worth the effort we will put into it.

Jesus began this litany of vision-casting parables by saying that the Kingdom of God has the potential to multiply the fruit of righteousness in those who receive it (vv. 18-23). Like a small and seemingly insignificant seed, the Kingdom of God can grow and flourish and become a haven of rest and spiritual nourishment for us and many others (vv. 31, 32).

He continued by saying that the Kingdom's mysterious power can transform that which is unpalatable into something wholesome, delicious, and good (v. 31).

He explained that, like a treasure hidden in a field, the Kingdom of God is more valuable than everything we could ever own (v. 44).

Like a fisherman's net it gathers up people from every walk of life for the purposes of the King (vv. 47, 48).

He concluded by saying those who embrace and seek this Kingdom gain a mastery over the Word of God that enables them to minister from every section of the Scriptures (v. 52).

Wheat and tares

Most compelling of all the parables in Matthew 13 is that of the wheat and the tares (vv. 24-30, 37-43). In many ways, this is Jesus' most important parable. It covers all of history from the first preaching of the Gospel to the end of time. It addresses all the nations and peoples of the earth. And it hints at the struggle for primacy of place that must ensue between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world.

Jesus envisioned the world like a wheat field, where the Master of the field expects to reap a bountiful harvest at the end of time. According to Jesus, the world is not a weed field, waiting to be burned, but a wheat field, set to be sown, cultivated, guarded, and harvested in His time. For now, the Lord's enemy, still determined to do what he can to thwart the Master's project, sows the seeds of unbelief, temptation, wickedness, corruption, and deception wherever the seed of the Gospel has taken root – including in your heart and mine.

But when the Master returns to gain His harvest, He returns to a wheat field, invaded by weeds, and not the other way around, as so many “left behind” Christians would have us believe.

Dark days?

The Apostle John got this vision. He wrote – from a state of persecution and exile – that the Light of the Kingdom of God is advancing, rolling back the darkness and bringing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit to nations and peoples everywhere (1 Jn. 2.8, 17). John did not allow his circumstances of exile and confinement to dissuade him from pursuing a compelling vision of the advancing Kingdom of God. Nor should we.

We may think we're living in dark days, that things are going from bad to worse, and there's no end in sight. But the truth is just the opposite. Satan is back on his heels, bound and reeling; the rulers of this world are deceived and deceiving; the Church is complacent, at least in the West, but always a spiritual tinder box, ready for a new spark of the Spirit; and the Kingdom of God is advancing wherever men and women cling to Jesus' compelling vision and seek the Kingdom of God as their highest priority in life.

If you've made the Kingdom turn, seek that vision of the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed. Then take up the daily pursuit of that vision with all your soul and all your strength.

For reflection or discussion

1. What are some reasons Christians today might be reluctant to believe that the Kingdom of God is advancing on earth, as it is in heaven?
2. What evidence would you point to in order to demonstrate the progress of God's Kingdom in our day?
3. See if you can write a one-sentence, compelling vision of the Kingdom of God, based on what Jesus taught in Matthew 13. Complete this sentence: "The Kingdom of God..."
4. How should this vision factor into the Church's work of evangelism? Of making disciples? Of raising children?
5. Do you think having a compelling vision of the Kingdom should affect our prayer lives? Explain:

Next steps: Talk with a few church leaders. See if you can find out what your church is doing to project a bold and compelling vision of the Kingdom of God for its members.

Prayer:

4 Pray for the Kingdom

*“In this manner, therefore, pray:
Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.”* Matthew 6.9, 10

Praying for the Kingdom

Seeking the Kingdom of God begins in prayer. Prayer is the point of departure, compass, and vessel of our pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

Abraham Kuyper, the great 19th century Dutch statesman, educator, and theologian, wrote, “Personally it is our repeated experience that in the depths of our hearts, at the point where we disclose ourselves to the Eternal One, all the rays of our life converge as in one focus, and there alone regain that harmony which we so often and so painfully lose in the stress of daily duty. In prayer lies not only our unity with God, but also the unity of our personal life.”

Prayer, in other words, has the great benefit of providing an opportunity for us to refocus, reorient, and refuel our lives, in every aspect, for the pursuit of God’s Kingdom.

In Jesus’ instruction concerning prayer we can identify three qualifying criteria for using prayer as the starting-point and context for seeking the Kingdom of God.

Three criteria

First, prayer for the coming of God’s Kingdom must be continuous and expectant. The prayer that Jesus gave us in Matthew 6 is meant to be a pattern for all our prayers. In Luke’s account of this prayer Jesus begins by saying, “When you pray...” The Greek word, *hotan*, means literally, “whenever” or “as often as.” Thus Jesus intends that we should make prayer for the coming of God’s Kingdom part of *all* our prayers. And when we pray, seeking the Kingdom of God, we should pray expectantly. That is, our prayers should be infused with Kingdom vision, which should shape the way we pray about particular areas of our lives, as we seek more of the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit for everything we do, all day long.

Second, Jesus’ teaching about prayer counsels us specifically to request the coming of the Kingdom on earth, that is, here and now.

In your morning prayers, as you pause for a “prayer break” during the day, or when you are seeking the Lord in prayer for any particular activity, be sure to frame that prayer in a Kingdom context and toward the realization of your Kingdom vision. Acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus over everything concerning which you are praying. Plead with Him to bring to mind some portion of His Word to guide your thoughts and actions. Call upon the Lord to supply the power of His Spirit to enable you to be a conduit of righteousness, peace, and joy in all you do. Seek specific “next steps” that will find you in pursuit of the Kingdom in all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Remind yourself before the Lord that you are not your own; you were bought with a price, and your desire is to glorify God in all your activities (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

Finally, Jesus provides us with a standard for seeking His Kingdom: that it might come into our daily lives and activities as a reflection of the way saints and angels carry out their submission to King Jesus in His heavenly

court.

You'll want to ask the Lord to keep you focused on His throne, submissive to His Word, and in an attitude of worship in all you do. Make Kingdom-advancing plans for every activity of your day. Ask the Father for specific Kingdom prompts in every situation, and commit yourself to instant and complete obedience, just like the angels in heaven. Review every activity, every day, in silent meditation before the Lord, looking back to discern the ways He made – or might have made – His Kingdom presence known in that situation.

Without ceasing

Kuyper continued his meditation on prayer by saying, “Movements in history, therefore, which do not spring from this deepest source are always partial and transient, and only those historical acts which arose from these lowest depths of man’s personal existence embrace the whole of life and possess the required permanence.”

Paul instructs us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17), to nurture and maintain an attitude of prayer in everything we do, all day long. When that continuous effort is linked with the vision, desire, and expectation of Kingdom progress in your life, according to the standards of Kingdom obedience in heaven, you can be sure that the Lord will hear your supplications and grant your request, often in surprising and powerful ways.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you explain the relationship between praying for the Kingdom and the progress of the Kingdom in your life?
2. In what ways will you begin to improve your prayers in order to make them more “Kingdom-seeking” in nature?
3. How might believers help to bring a greater focus on the Kingdom into the prayers of groups in which they participate?
4. Meditate on James 4.2, 3. Relate this to the progress of the Kingdom in your own life:
5. How would you counsel a new believer to make praying for the Kingdom a central component of all his or her prayer?

Next steps: Begin praying for the Kingdom of God more consistently in your life. Do you find that doing so makes you more mindful of “Kingdom-seeking” opportunities? Do you see more evidence of the Kingdom advancing in your Personal Mission Field? Share your thoughts about this with a Christian friend.

Prayer:

5 Resist the Spirit of the Age

“...and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king – Jesus.” Acts 17.7

A peculiar people

To their contemporaries, the first Christians were a most peculiar breed.

They didn't participate in the diversions and activities that everyone else did in order to satisfy certain lusts of the flesh (1 Pet. 4.1-4). They publicly and at no small cost repudiated cultural activities or artifacts that represented a worldview contrary to the teaching of Christ (Acts 19.18-20). They didn't keep their religion to themselves, either; in fact, Jesus Christ was so much a part of their everyday conversation that their unbelieving neighbors took to calling them the “Christ-ones” (Acts 11.26). And in the hard areas of life – such as refusing to acknowledge civil government as the last word on what one could say or do – they stood firm for the confession of Jesus as their only King and Lord (Acts 17.7; 5.29).

They were a peculiar people, indeed, because they had made the Kingdom turn and were pursuing an order and rule that was making all things new.

All things new!

The first Christians knew that they could not seek the Kingdom of God as long as they, in any way, held on to friendship with the world spirit of the age (Jms. 4.4; 1 Jn. 2.15-17). They could not love the world and all things in it and love the Lord Jesus at the same time. They were seeking a new social order, following a new ethic, committed to a new King, and drawing on a new power according to a new worldview which, increasingly, they learned by hearing and obeying the Word of God.

The Kingdom of God, by the Light of the Gospel, is making headway against the darkness of unbelief and sin (1 Jn. 2.8, 17; Dan. 2.44, 45). And while the tares of wickedness continue to crop up everywhere, the citizens of God's Kingdom know that they are called to a mission of sowing and cultivating the truth of God in every area of life.

And as they do so, they encounter the spirit of the age, and know that this spirit must be denied and ejected for the Spirit of the Kingdom to come in power.

At odds in every way

Thus, all who pursue the Kingdom of God must expect that, in many and various ways, their way of life will put them at odds with the prevailing worldviews of their contemporaries.

Our manner of conducting relationships will be based on self-denying love, rather than self-serving calculation.

We will do our work in an attitude of thanksgiving, and with diligence, excellence, and efficiency, never grumbling or complaining.

Our conversation will fill the air with the sweet melodies of the exalted Christ, and we will utterly refuse to participate in anything scurrilous, vulgar, deceitful, or mean-spirited.

Our tastes in culture will be of a decidedly higher order, and, while we will appreciate all the gifts of God, wherever He manifests them in the cultural activities of our day, we will demonstrate in the way we participate in culture that we serve a most noble, holy, and worthy Being, rather than our own lusts.

All our ethical behavior will be grounded in “This is what the Lord says” and not whatever the temper of the times – what Schaeffer referred to as “the spirit of the naturalism of the age” – dictates or allows.

Make no mistake about it: As we force ourselves further into the Kingdom of God, we will find ourselves increasingly at odds with the world spirit of our age.

Make up your mind!

But we will make little progress in convincing our neighbors that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is at all meaningful and significant apart from the comprehensive manifestation, in every area of our lives, of the newness and power of the Kingdom of God.

Make up your mind that following Christ and pursuing His Kingdom will mean that every day, if only in some small way, you need to be prepared to resist the spirit of the age.

Pray without ceasing and struggle without growing weary, and you’ll find the Lord will be with you to strengthen, encourage, and take you one step further along in your quest to advance His Kingdom.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why does seeking the Kingdom put us at odds with the prevailing worldviews of the day? Can you give some examples?
2. Jesus said the world would hate us; Paul insisted that believers should expect to be persecuted. Do you think we should try to avoid this? Why or why not?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 4.29 and Colossians 4.6. How should believers respond to those who oppose our Kingdom-seeking lifestyle?
4. Meditate on Romans 12.21. Discuss what might be some very practical applications of this verse for seeking the Kingdom in your Personal Mission Field:
5. What are the greatest obstacles standing in your way right now as you think about increasing your own efforts at seeking the Kingdom of God? How might you overcome these? How can your fellow believers help you?

Next steps: Take one of the obstacles you identified in the question above. Work on overcoming that obstacle for the next several days. Share your struggle and progress in this effort with a prayer partner or friend.

Prayer:

6 Growing through Temptation

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1 Corinthians 10.13

Grow through or fall through?

Martin Luther is reported to have said concerning temptation, “You can’t stop the birds from flying over your head; but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair.”

All Christians can expect to be confronted with temptations of various sorts. Temptation is not sin. Temptation is part of the daily struggle of pursuing the Kingdom of God in a fallen world. When temptation comes, the goal is to *grow* through it into a stronger experience of Kingdom righteousness, rather than to *fall* through it into some spiritual or moral setback.

We need to be on the lookout for temptation, so that we recognize it when it comes.

But we also need to find the way of escape Paul mentioned as the key to growing through temptation.

Asaph on the way of escape

In Psalm 73 Asaph reported on a powerful temptation that almost snared him in sin. Here he was, a dedicated servant of the Lord, daily submitting to all manner of spiritual disciplines and rigors, and, so it seems, largely unappreciated for his work.

Certainly he wasn’t getting wealthy being a basically negative prophet in an age of great wealth and growing spiritual complacency.

When he looked around at the comforts the rich people of his day enjoyed, and at their cavalier attitude toward God and His Law, he was tempted to covet their ease and despise his calling. But at just the right moment, he recognized this temptation for what it was; and, in the process of maintaining his righteousness, Asaph shows us six places to look in finding the way of escape from temptation.

Six escape hatches

First, Asaph remembered that we never sin alone: He reflected that sin on his part would be a betrayal of the community of faith (v. 15). When we are confronted with temptation, we need to remember that others are looking at us, taking their cues from us. If we take sin into our souls it will affect not only us, but them as well. The demands of neighbor-love should help us to resist temptation and, thus, continue our pursuit of the righteousness of God’s Kingdom in our lives.

Second, though, Asaph took his temptation to the Lord (vv. 16, 17). By coming into His presence, undoubtedly through prayer, He put his own temporal circumstances in an eternal and heavenly perspective. He faced his temptation from the perspective of His Kingdom vision and calling. It would be hard for sin to control him as long as his heart and mind were fixed on and communing with the Lord.

Third, Asaph contemplated the effects of sin (vv. 18-20). Sin, he reflected, is a slippery slope. One sin leads to another, which leads to another, and so forth, until we’re so altogether miserable and burdened with sin that we’re no good for any Kingdom enterprise.

Fourth, Asaph expressed disgust with himself, that he would even contemplate descending into sinful behavior (vv. 21, 22). He became embittered in his soul to reflect that he was contemplating something more characteristic of brutes and fools than of a citizen and ambassador of the Kingdom of God.

Fifth, Asaph sought the counsel of the Lord (v. 24). He turned to God's Law so that he could see the ugliness of his covetous inclinations and nip them in the bud before they had a chance to bloom.

Finally, he lingered in the presence of the Lord, meditating on his longing for God, until once again he began to know the fullness of joy and pleasures forever more which are to be had there (vv. 25-28). Perhaps he sang some hymns or took in some of the glory of God in the creation around.

Our glorious overcomer

As you pursue Kingdom of God, get ready: temptations will come. When they do, you'll either grow through them or fall through. It all depends on finding the way of escape. All these ways of escaping temptation can make us stronger in the Lord, and keep us advancing against adversity in our pursuit of the Kingdom of God.

But above all, fix your eyes on Jesus, seated at the Father's right hand, and remember that, as He overcame temptation by the power of God's Word and the promise of His glory (Matt. 4.1-11; Heb. 12.1, 2), so we too, clinging to and abiding in Him, can resist the devil and all his tempting wiles to continue progress in the Kingdom rule of Jesus.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is temptation? How can we know when we're facing temptation?
2. Suggest some ways a Christian might become more sensitive to temptation.
3. Briefly outline the steps a Christian should take in responding to temptation:
4. What do we mean by "growing through" temptation as opposed to "falling through" it?
5. What does dealing with temptation have to do with seeking the Kingdom of God?

Next steps: Talk with some other Christians about how they deal with temptation. Share your own thoughts about how you might help one another in this important Kingdom-seeking discipline.

Prayer:

7 Put on Jesus

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
Ephesians 4.20-24

Sanctification

Christians are called to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as their highest priority and primary pursuit in life.

The Kingdom of God itself is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, as we have seen. It makes sense, therefore, to believe that wherever we are laying aside the ways of the world and putting on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, there the Kingdom of God is being found and is advancing, and we are becoming that peculiar people who walks in the Spirit of God rather than the spirit of the age.

This process is called, “sanctification,” and it is a work of grace. God, by His Word and Spirit, works within and through us to make us increasingly fit for His Kingdom (Phil. 2.13).

But while sanctification is a work of God, it’s one that we must engage as well, “working out our salvation”, as Paul put it (Phil. 2:12), in fear and trembling before the Lord.

The disciplines of sanctification

Sanctification is the heart of our pursuit of the Kingdom of God. The harder we work at this, in every area of our lives, the more we will find that our outlook, attitudes, priorities, and practices begin to reflect the very character of Jesus. Through sanctification we are actually “putting on Jesus” and, as we become more like Him – as He increases in us and our old self decreases (Jn. 3.30) – we reflect more the reality of the Kingdom of God to the watching world.

What, then, does the process of sanctification involve on our parts?

Put another way, what must we be careful to attend to each day, so that God, Who as at work within us, can advance us along in the Kingdom turn, shaping and transforming us into children fit for His Kingdom?

Sanctification begins in the Word of God, where, through reading, meditation, and study, we submit our minds to be formed by the worldview of Scripture, open our hearts to the searching scrutiny of the Spirit, and dedicate our consciences to following the Lord’s agenda rather than our own. If we will not make reading and study of God’s Word the bulwark and launch pad of each day, then how shall we expect the power of that Word to do its work in or through us (Heb. 4.12)?

As we read the Word we must seek the Lord in prayer, that He will hide His Word in our hearts and bring forth the fruit of it in our daily lives. Also in prayer we praise and glorify the Lord, thus reinforcing our vision of Him and His Kingdom, and bring out lives before Him, so that they might be oriented for Kingdom-seeking during the day ahead.

Sanctification also involves being silent before the Lord, listening for Him to prompt us to action, disclose any previously hidden sins, or guide us in specific paths of repentance and renewal. This waiting on the Lord in prayer, staying silent before Him, is very hard to do. But we will have a hard time hearing the “marching orders” of our King if, in our time together with Him, we’re always jabbering on about what matters to us.

Reading and study from Christian writers of the past and present can also help us to learn what the righteousness of Jesus requires in our families and marriages, how we must exercise stewardship of our treasure and our lives at work, in a community, as citizens of this nation. Reading and study take time, time we'll have to plunder from some other activities in our lives – such as watching too much television.

Too much TV, or too much time spent in video games and Internet surfing, won't sanctify and fit us for service in the Kingdom of God. And if we are going to take up the task of seeking that Kingdom, then some of these familiar hindrances will have to go.

Serious business

Seeking the Kingdom of God is serious business. But it's also extremely rewarding, immensely satisfying, and wholly exhilarating to know that God Himself – even our King, Jesus Christ – is at work within us, willing and doing of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13).

If you can see the Kingdom – if you will nurture a compelling vision of what it is and what it looks like in its coming – then you can pursue it in all the ways we have been considering. Seeking the Kingdom of God will utterly change your life and fill you with new vision, joy, hope, and strength to fulfill your calling as a citizen and ambassador of Jesus Christ's eternal realm.

If you've made the Kingdom turn, the pursuit of the Kingdom and glory of God is now your full-time calling.

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you describe the present state of the work of sanctification in your life?
2. Do you think your time in the Word of God is as focused on your sanctification as it could be? Can you think of any ways to improve it?
3. How might you make better use of your prayer life for your sanctification?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from these studies in seeking the Kingdom of God?
5. How do you plan to make that lesson more a working part of your walk with the Lord?

Next steps: Meet with a prayer partner or other Christian friend to discuss and pray about ways you can help one another in pursuing the Kingdom of God.

Prayer:

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 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.