

# OUR DEFINING PRIORITY

KINGDOM PRESENCE (1)



One priority defines all we are and do.

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*A ReVision Study from*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Our Defining Priority*

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Kingdom Presence (1)  
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*Our Defining Priority*

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*Our Defining Priority*

Welcome to *Our Defining Priority*

Jesus taught that His followers must be guided, shaped, and at work according to one overarching priority: Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

But what does that mean? And can we be sure that God has actually called us to this? What is the Kingdom of God? How can we begin to realize more of its presence, promise, and power?

These are the questions we will explore in this series on *Kingdom Presence*, beginning with this first installment, “Our Defining Priority.”

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Called to the Kingdom

*You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory. 1 Thessalonians 2.10-12*

*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1.3, 10, 11*

*A life-changing call*  
“Dad, it’s for you.”

I’d heard the phone from in the den, where I had just sat down to relax a bit before supper. I was exhausted. It had been a long and not particularly fruitful day. I just wanted to put my head back and do nothing.

“Dad! Dad, did you hear me? The call is for you.”

At Ashley’s insistence, I gathered myself up out of my chair and went to the kitchen, taking the phone from her hand. “Hello?” I asked, not very enthusiastically.

“Hello, my name is Charles Colson, and I work for a ministry called Prison Fellowship.”

I literally pulled the phone away from my ear and looked at it curiously. The voice continued, “A friend suggested I call you, because I’m looking for some help.”

We talked. I agreed to drive over to Reston to visit with him. And that began 26 years of an exciting, highly satisfying, far-ranging, and life-changing friendship and ministry, one that continued through Chuck’s death ten years ago into the work God has given Susie and me to do today.

Chuck called out of the blue. He didn’t know me, nor I him, except by his reputation, of course. But his warmth and sincerity, and the possibility of serving Jesus with Chuck, piqued my interest.

I’m glad I answered that call.

*Called by God*

How much more exciting, satisfying, far-ranging, and life-changing is it to hear God calling us to Himself! You may not know Him all that well, but He knows you, and He is calling you. If you are a believer in Jesus, you have heard His voice. At some point, He turned the lights on in your soul, enlivening your heart, illuminating your mind, resorting your values and priorities so that you saw Jesus for Who He is, what He did for you, the promises He makes, and the forgiveness, joy, hope, and life He offers. You *heard God calling* you to Jesus.

And you came when you were called.

Do you remember that time? Was your heart strangely warmed? Your mind thrilled with new possibilities? Your soul disburdened and relieved? And did you feel the rush of the Spirit into your soul, and hear your own voice crying, “Abba! Father!” as you, by the power of that same Spirit, answered God’s call to come to Jesus?

And have you found that call to have been true and reliable and everything you’d hoped it would be in

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knowing Jesus and His salvation?

God called, and you heard, and it was glorious! And I have some good news for you.

God is still calling. Calling *you*. Calling continuously, with the promise of greater righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit than you have ever known.

*God is calling*

Paul is clear in 1 Thessalonians 2.12 that God calls continuously to His children. There is no verb here, just a participle, *καλοῦντος* (*kalountos*)—"calling". This word describes God. He is the calling God. God is calling. He is calling *you*. He is calling you to His Kingdom and glory, and He is doing so every day, at every moment, for every aspect of your life, all your time and strength and possessions and skills. God wants to glorify Himself in you by bringing you ever-deeper in His Kingdom presence.

The overarching, overriding call on our lives is to the Kingdom and glory of God. We are called to live within His dominion, under His rule, and in every way to honor and serve Him. Whatever else we do in life, whatever vocation we pursue, however we use our time, answering God's call to His Kingdom and glory must be our defining priority.

We must be daily renewed in this high and holy calling because we are prone to drift and wander from it. Thus Paul urged and charged and encouraged the Thessalonians to walk and live always in a manner that reflects and refracts their Kingdom-and-glory calling from the Lord.

Ever-increasing glory awaits at the end of God's calling, and it can accrue to us throughout our journey with Him. But we need to make that calling *sure*. Whatever God wants, however He is calling us to serve Him, we must answer His call so that we can know His Kingdom presence in all we do.

I am certain that God is calling you today. Calling you to His Kingdom and glory. In everything. At every moment. With promises and blessings of glory and rejoicing such as are greater than you have ever dared to ask or think.

I am sure God is calling you. Will you make that calling sure?

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do you remember about when God first called you to Himself? How did you "hear" Him calling?
2. Would you describe yourself as open to God's calling at every moment of your life? Explain.
3. What does it mean to make God's calling *sure*?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend time in prayer, mostly listening for the Lord as you think about the God Who calls. How does He call? To what is He calling you? Listen and wait, then give Him thanks and praise for continuing to call you to His Kingdom and glory.*

## 2 Sure about His Calling?

*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1.3, 10, 11*

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1.13, 14*

### *Entrance to the Kingdom*

God has called us to His Kingdom, to dwell in His Presence in a holy spiritual realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). There, seeing His glory in the face of Jesus continuously (2 Cor. 4.6; Col. 3.1-3), we reflect and refract that glory through our words and deeds, thus expressing and extending the rule of King Jesus—His Kingdom presence—into every place we go with everyone we meet.

We have been called to the Kingdom and glory of God, and all who believe in Jesus, all to whom the Spirit has brought new life, new hope, and new faith, have heard that call and have become citizens and ambassadors of God's Kingdom.

Yet God continues calling us into His Kingdom and glory day by day, reminding us that there is more to know of His holy and righteous and good Law, more to experience of His Presence with us always, more to express of His fruit and power, more to do in making His Good News known, more for us to achieve in realizing the presence, promise, and power of His Kingdom, and more in the way of thanks and praise to spring up to God because of the grace He shows us day by day (2 Cor. 4.15).

God calls us continuously into a wider entrance and greater realization of His Kingdom presence. But if we would realize that end, we must give all diligence to make that calling *sure*. That is, we must be sure of that calling in ourselves, and we must make sure that our calling is reflected in our lives. Being *sure* about this calling to the Kingdom and glory of God doesn't just happen. We must, as Peter wrote, "be even more diligent" at whatever enables us to be sure about it. There are "things" to do that will help us gain ever deeper and more glorious entrance to the Kingdom of God, and that keep us from stumbling along the way in our desire to possess this realm to which God continues to call us.

### *A strange and glorious new existence*

One of my favorite scenes in all film is when, in *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy steps out of her storm-tossed, ruined, black-and-white home into the technicolor splendor of Oz, and says to her dog, Toto, "We're not in Kansas anymore."

Imagine what she must have felt! Surely she was filled with wonder and perhaps some trepidation. Step by step she left her old world behind and began to venture forward into the new and wondrous world around her. The more she learned, the more of it she longed to know, and the greater entrance to it she hoped to achieve, even risking her life to get to the very heart of that glorious realm, there to go even beyond it to her highest hopes and aspirations.

She was sure she was in a new and wondrous place, and she gave all diligence to be even more sure of it.

Are you sure you have been called to the Kingdom and glory of God? Are you *sure*? Are you giving all diligence, taking up all those necessary disciplines and walking the yellow brick road of daily obedience to make your calling and election *sure*?

## *Our Defining Priority*

Many of us, I fear, are like the wicked witch on whom Dorothy's home landed after the tornado carried it away. We're in the new Kingdom, sort of, but we're buried under the burdens and baggage of our former life. We're only "mostly dead" (*The Princess Bride*), but we're hardly enough alive to even know that we have been conveyed into a whole new realm of existence.

And that lamp-lit path where the light of God's Word directs us into a deeper, richer Kingdom experience? Well, we hardly ever consult it, so busy are we trying to get out from under our daily challenges and make sense of the detritus of our lives.

*"Are we...in the West?"*

*Night Crossing* (thanks to our daughter Ashley for digging out this title), a film from 1982, related the true story of how a group of East Germans escaped to the West in a hot air balloon. When they landed, they weren't sure where they were, so they asked those who rushed up to their balloon, "Are we...in the West?"

Happily, they were.

What about us? Are we in the Kingdom of God? Does your life feel like you're in the Kingdom of God? Like the world around you glistens with the prospect of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit? And you are on an adventure taking you deeper and more completely into the rule of King Jesus day by day? Is your life filled with wonder, love, and praise at the new world unfolding before you? And are you seeking to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of that Kingdom as the defining priority of every aspect of your life?

Are you *sure* about that?

Three reasons can keep us from enjoying and flourishing in the Kingdom presence to which God has conveyed us in Jesus Christ. First, we've landed with a holy thud—like Dorothy when the wind died down around her home—but we have not ventured out to see where we've arrived. We know some strong Wind of God has blown us into a new world, but we prefer to sit in our black-and-white ruined-but-familiar home and wait to see what happens.

Or, second, we're not sure where we've landed now that God has conveyed us into a new realm. We don't know what to look for, where to turn, or how to make progress in this new existence. We're in "the West", but we don't know what to expect because we don't know what we're supposed to do.

Or, finally, we may *think* we have come into the Kingdom of God, but we're only there by association, and not really. We have Christian friends, we go to a Bible-believing church, and we're even active in some of the life of our congregation. But the Kingdom isn't real to us, and we're not aware of being daily called to a deeper experience of it because we've never truly entered the Kingdom in the first place.

For all three of these reasons we need to take a closer look at what we mean by the Kingdom of God.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. If you heard God calling you deeper into His Kingdom, to what would He be calling you?
2. To what "things" are we supposed to "give all diligence" so that we can be sure of our entrance to the Kingdom of God?
3. Where do you seem to spend most of your time, in the kingdom of this world or the Kingdom of God? Explain.



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*Next steps – Preparation: What tells you that you are living in the Kingdom of God? How does your experience of the Kingdom show through in your life? Devote a special time of prayer to meditating on these questions, listening for the Lord to answer and guide you.*

### 3 The Great Reset

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.* Colossians 1.13, 14

*Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.* Romans 4.17, 18

*Unsure about God's calling?*

We said there are three reasons why we might not be sure that God has called and is daily calling us to enter more deeply His glorious Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Either we still have not shed the familiar surroundings and comforts of our former life; or we're not sure how to proceed in this wondrous new environment; or we've never actually responded to God's call, but are merely playing at faith in the Lord.

Whatever may be keeping us from flourishing in our calling to God's Kingdom, we must not ignore Peter's challenge to "be even more diligent to make your call and election sure" (2 Pet. 1.10). If you are not sure that God has delivered you from the power of darkness and conveyed you into the Kingdom of the Son of His love, then you must not simply do nothing. Hoping one day you'll feel like you're really in the Kingdom is no substitute for being diligent to make your calling sure.

If you have truly believed in Jesus, a great reset has taken place in your life—of soul, priorities, values, delights, aspirations, hopes, and daily experience. If you're not experiencing this reset, but you long for it to be so, then there are some things you can do to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

*The kingdom of darkness*

We should begin by making sure we know the difference between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. Let's look more closely at the former.

In the kingdom of darkness, the light of God barely shines; and where it does shine, because of the grace of God for lost sinners, it is not acknowledged as such. God's everywhere-abounding-goodness is taken for granted. He is rarely thanked, except in the most superficial of ways. People in the kingdom of darkness insist that they are the source of their boon and blessing; but they're always ready to blame God when it suits their purposes.

In the kingdom of darkness, the basic question motivating the behavior of lightless citizens is, "What's in it for me?" "What am I going to get out of this?" "How could he do that to *me*?" "Who's going to pay attention to *me*?" "Do for *me*?" "Feel sorry for *me*?" People in the kingdom of darkness have forgotten what Augustine wrote on the opening page of his *Confessions*, that God has made us for *Himself*. Our fullest happiness, greatest satisfaction, and most abiding joy and purpose are in giving ourselves to God in all we do. In the kingdom of darkness, life, people, work, things, diversions, and more are all sought for the *self*, which regards itself as the one true God.

In the kingdom of darkness, words are cheap. We say what we think we need to on any occasion or in any situation to keep good vibes flowing toward us. We lie and stretch the truth, equivocate and exaggerate, and deceive and mislead, scarcely without a qualm. After all, keeping good feelings in our own soul is what matters most, so we do what we must.

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In the kingdom of darkness, everyone lives this way, and thus people tend to be suspicious of one another and mostly unwilling to care about others' needs, except when doing so either feels good or looks good.

In the kingdom of darkness, people aren't too exercised about the truth. Truth is what you make it. That is, truth is whatever I must believe or do to keep feeling OK and getting what I want, if only mostly. Truth, as they see it, makes them just happy, decent, and friendly enough to get by. But getting by does not describe a full and abundant life.

In the kingdom of darkness, God either doesn't factor or, if He does, it's only within a certain niche—and a not very important niche, either, except insofar as occupying that niche meets the subjective needs of those who enter it. Where God should be the supreme focus and goal of every aspect of life, things and experiences serve as idols, promising—but rarely ever delivering—the happiness and meaning people seek.

### *The great reset*

The Christian has left this dark, self-centered, uncertain realm behind. The Christian recognizes that this kingdom is in ruins. It cannot long survive, and all who insist on dwelling there are likely to unravel right along with it when the jig is finally up and nothing can be made to make sense anymore.

Christians have been reset into the Kingdom of God, where righteousness, peace, joy, and power in the Holy Spirit are making all things new in our lives, and where we are on a mission and have a calling to restore to God's glory and bounty the world Jesus has reconciled to the Father through His life, death, and resurrection (2 Cor. 5.18-20). Everything we do all day long has the potential of expressing and extending the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31). Nothing that we have is our own; it's all from, through, and unto Jesus, our King, that we might know, love, and serve Him better day by day.

The Kingdom presence into which we have been conveyed is brighter, more full of hope and promise, and more fraught with power and potential than we could ever completely ask or think. An illuminated path of daily bricks leads us ever more deeply into the Kingdom presence, as we increase in the likeness of and follow Jesus, redeeming all our time for His glory, and offering ourselves as living sacrifices for His glory.

Are you sure about this great reset? Have you experienced it? Are you giving even more diligence to make it sure?

### *For reflection or discussion*

1. What does it mean for you to give all diligence to make your calling sure?
2. How would you describe your experience of living in the kingdom of darkness?
3. Have you been reset into the Kingdom of God? How did that occur?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend time in prayer listening for God to call you more deeply into His Kingdom. What do you expect to bear? How will you respond?*

## 4 The Kingdom of Righteousness

*Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.* Romans 14.16-18

*If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.* 1 John 2.29

### *Children of light*

The apostle Paul reminds us that all who have come to faith in Jesus Christ have undergone a great reset: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Eph. 5.8). We once occupied that kingdom of darkness, the character of which we have briefly considered. We embraced and followed lies, rather than the truth that is in Jesus. We sought meaning and happiness in things and experiences; and, since none of those ever quite satisfied, we made it our business to pursue more of them, or different ones, hoping to find the golden needle we sought in the haystack of stuff and fun.

But, out of the infinite enormity of His love, God chose not to leave us there. He has conveyed us, by grace through faith, into the Kingdom of His dear Son, the Kingdom of light. Now therefore, Paul continues, our calling is to “Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord” (Eph. 5.9, 10).

What is *not* acceptable to the Lord is that we should continue living in the darkness in a self-centered existence where God has, at best, a marginal role. We are no longer subject to the power of darkness, for God has delivered us from it (Col. 1.13). We are children of the light and of the day; we are not of the night or the darkness (1 Thess. 5.5). The apostle John warns us, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn. 1.6). We have been given a presence in the Kingdom of God, and that Kingdom presence means an altogether different way of life.

Thus, leaving behind our old life, we step out into the wondrous, spiritually enriched, glorious, and fraught-with-promise-and-power world of the Kingdom of God. In that realm, Jesus Christ is making all things new. He has made us new creatures, has given us His indwelling Spirit and Word, and is about the business of refashioning us into His own image (Rev. 21.5; 2 Cor. 5.17; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The first order of business for our King and His Kingdom is bringing righteousness to earth, just as it exists in heaven, in and through those He has conveyed from the darkness into the light.

### *The nature of righteousness*

But what is righteousness? Can we define righteousness concisely, so that we may then begin to patch its various features and facets onto our lives? That seems superficial—more like a way we might have sought to transform our lives while we still lived in the darkness.

Righteousness is not, in the first instance, a characteristic, attribute, or trait. Righteousness is a Person: Jesus Christ *is* righteousness, as John explained: “He is righteous”. Paul reminds us that the Good News about Jesus reveals the righteousness of God in Him (Rom. 1.17). The entire Law of God points to Jesus as the standard of righteousness (Rom. 10.4). Jesus became incarnate that we might see and know what the righteousness of God is (1 Cor. 1.30). If we want to know what righteousness is, we need only look to Jesus.

God has imputed the righteousness of Jesus to everyone He is pleased to save. That is, Jesus and His righteousness are *credited* to us by God as part of that instantaneous process whereby He gives us grace to believe in Jesus, deposits His Spirit in us, and conveys us into His Kingdom. If you were born in the United

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States, you were a full-fledged citizen of this great nation, enjoying all the rights and privileges of our freedoms and heritage, from the moment you first drew breath. Of course, while you enjoyed good standing as a citizen, you would have to grow into the many benefits that standing offers; you would thus realize more of your citizenship the older you became, the more you understood, and as you lived as a citizen.

The same is true with righteousness. When we were born again into the Kingdom of God, we were declared to be righteous because God stamped the righteousness of Jesus on our spiritual birth certificate. He conveyed us by the new birth into a holy spiritual realm where righteousness is the ambiance and aim of Kingdom life. Now Jesus calls us to seek His Kingdom *and righteousness* as the defining motif and highest aspiration of our new lives in Him (Matt. 6.33). Not just the first in a list of new priorities, but the defining priority, the present-in-every-priority priority. We who believe have been plunked down out of the darkness into the glorious Kingdom of light, and now it is our privilege and duty to seek that Kingdom *and its righteousness* as the ambiance and aim of all we do.

### *See Jesus*

So how do we do that? In short, we see Jesus. All Scripture is about Jesus, so the more we read Scripture, looking for Jesus, the more we will understand what righteousness is and how we may imitate that righteousness like the apostles did (Jn. 5.39; 1 Cor. 11.1). Our desire is to increase in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, so that we might glorify Him in all we are and do (2 Pet. 3.18). All who have been conveyed into that realm of light and life where Jesus rules will set their minds on Him, looking to discover in Him all that pertains to the righteousness which He *is*, which has been *imputed* to us, and which we are called to seek as *the* priority of all we are and do (Col. 3.1-3; Ps. 16.8).

This means we must use every resource at our disposal to help us see Jesus, beginning with the Scriptures, but looking also to our Christian heritage of hymns and other music, art and literature, the example of our Christ-like forebears, the testimony of others who know Him, and the witness Christ daily expresses through the things of creation (Heb. 1.3; Ps. 19.1-4).

We want to see Jesus, to have a clear image and sense of Him in our minds, what He's like, how He thinks (1 Cor. 2.16), what He loves and desires, and how He might act in any situation. We want to increase in the likeness of Jesus and His righteousness because this is our Kingdom presence in this world, a presence of righteousness that points beyond us to Jesus. The more we see Jesus, the more we will know what righteousness is, and the more the Spirit and Word of God will transform us into that very image and likeness, thus confirming and expanding our Kingdom presence in the world.

Righteousness describes the character of the Kingdom and of all those who are seeking it as the defining priority of their lives.

### *For reflection or discussion*

1. As you think about Jesus, how does He lead you to think about righteousness?
2. How would you describe what comes to mind when you hear the word "Jesus"?
3. What can you do to increase the clarity and constancy of your vision of Jesus?

*Next steps – Preparation: Review your approach to knowing Jesus—through Scripture and other means. What can you do to focus more continuously on Jesus in your prayers, reading of Scripture, appreciating the creation, and so forth?*

## 5 The Kingdom of Peace

*Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. Romans 14.16-18*

*And His name will be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His government and peace  
There will be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,  
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
From that time forward, even forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9.6, 7*

### *An unworldly peace*

In the kingdom of darkness, lasting peace is an elusive commodity. In all kinds of situations—homes, workplaces, nations, international forums, schools, therapists' couches, places of worship—people are seeking peace, that sense of overall wellbeing that drives away worry, dispels doubts, and leaves one feeling safe and secure.

In the kingdom of darkness, just enough of peace can be realized to make the citizens of darkness know that it exists and desire it more and more. But the peace of the world is typically fleeting, easily dissipated, and never fully satisfying.

The world is unable to realize lasting and true peace; “the way of peace they have not known” (Rom. 3.17). All kinds of voices hold out the promise of peace and safety to the world (1 Thess. 5.3); yet fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and despair continue, and new drugs, more spectacular vacations and escapes, more outlandish political promises, and a never-ending flood of new products and gadgets cannot deliver the peace this world desperately seeks.

What the world cannot realize by its most ardent and energetic exertions, Jesus promises to give to all who enter His Kingdom: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16.33).

Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and peace is the condition which arises from righteousness wherever the Kingdom presence is established. Where righteousness abounds, peace obtains. Peace is the normal condition and set of the soul of those who know the Kingdom's presence in their lives. And only Jesus can give us the peace that overcomes the fears and troubles of the world, so that His Kingdom citizens may “be of good cheer” in all they do, come what may.

### *A peaceable Kingdom*

The Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of peace. The citizens of that Kingdom, devoted to righteousness and increasing in Christlikeness, are not free from troubles, difficulties, disappointments, and hardships. We have our daily struggles, just like the people in the kingdom of darkness.

But, since we have been conveyed into the Kingdom of the Prince of Peace, we know that peace is available to shield, refresh, and comfort us even in our most trying times (Phil. 4.6, 7). Peace is the condition that every believer knows increasingly because Jesus ever lives to grant us His peace, a peace we cannot fully understand but that we may truly know. To know Jesus and His Kingdom presence with us is to live in peace—with

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God, in ourselves, with our neighbors, and despite all the turmoil of our troubled times. The citizens of the Kingdom of God know true peace, know how precious and comforting it is, and thus seek to increase in it that we may build-up one another in the Lord (Rom. 14.19). The peace we know in the Kingdom of God arises from the hope which accompanies righteousness, the hope of everlasting life, the hope of glory, the hope of living forever in peace with the Prince of Peace, our Savior.

Such peace comes only from Jesus Christ (Eph. 2.14). He is our peace as He renews our soul, binds us back to God, and empowers us to live at peace with one another. So precious is the peace of Kingdom presence that all who know it truly work hard to maintain and preserve it throughout the peaceable Kingdom of the Lord (Eph. 4.3).

Peace is what the yet-unbelieving John Wesley longed for amid a terrible storm at sea, as he observed a group of true believers gathered in prayer and singing before the Lord. Wesley was terrified because all the onboard conditions robbed him of his peace and threatened his life. The lives of those Moravian believers were also in jeopardy, yet they sang and prayed in perfect peace. Only when Wesley's heart was "strangely warmed" by the true peace that comes from knowing Jesus would he understand what he observed during that storm at sea.

#### *Peace to the world*

Peace is the message we proclaim to the world—peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 6.15). The troubled hearts and tormented minds of those still trapped in the Kingdom of darkness can be relieved, renewed, restored, and made to rejoice in the peace that Jesus gives. The citizens of the Kingdom of God, as we increase in the righteousness of the Lord, pursue the peace of Jesus with all the people in our lives (Heb. 12.14), for we understand that "the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (Jms. 3.18).

We pray and work, therefore, that our peace may be multiplied—in us and among all who have entered the Kingdom of God (1 Pet. 1.2). We eagerly seek the peace of Jesus by seeking Jesus Himself, Who *is* our peace (Eph. 2.14). The more we can say with the psalmist, "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps. 16.8), the more He will be at work within us, shaping us unto righteousness and filling our souls with peace.

For the peace we have in and from and with Jesus does not come from outward trappings or circumstances. This is how they seek peace who yet dwell in the kingdom of darkness, by acquiring things, or having all their relationships to be just so, or by avoiding troubling conditions or circumstances. But peace does not come from outward things, which are fleeting, deceitful, and elusive. Peace comes from within, where the Prince of Peace, Who rules *in* peace and *unto* peace, makes us new people as we gaze upon His beauty and are immersed in His river of delight (Pss. 27.4; 36.8).

Righteousness is the *character* that comes with a Kingdom presence, and peace is the *condition* such a presence engenders.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. When do you experience the peace of Jesus?
2. How is the peace Jesus gives different from the peace people know in the kingdom of darkness?
3. How is peace related to righteousness? How may we pursue peace in every area of our lives?

*Next steps – Preparation: Seek the peace of Jesus in prayer. Then prepare to take the peace of Jesus into every area of your Personal Mission Field where the Prince of Peace leads you today.*

## 6 The Kingdom of Joy

*Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.* Romans 14.16-18

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* Hebrews 12.1, 2

### *The consequence of the Kingdom*

The word “consequence” typically has a negative connotation, as the *Oxford Dictionary of English* observes in its definition: “A result or effect, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant”. The origin of the word is from the Latin *consequentia*, which means “following closely”.

From this we can see that not all consequences are necessarily negative. Blessing follows closely to obedience. Peace follows closely to righteousness. And joy follows closely to righteousness and peace, as the unfading consequence of life in the Kingdom of God. Where righteousness is the ambiance and aim of our lives, peace abounds; and where righteousness and peace are present, joy is close at hand by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

Joy is the ultimate form of happiness, so ultimate, in fact, that it is a qualitatively different affection from happiness. Both happiness and joy are dependent on external circumstances. But the external circumstances that bring happiness are fleeting, fading, and frequently false. The external circumstances that bring joy are eternal, true, fixed, and unmovable. For joy is anchored in Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, the Prince of peace, and the Ruler of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus promised His disciples that, as they held fast to His Word, His joy would remain in them, and their joy would be full (Jn. 15.11). David reported that, in the Presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy (Ps. 16.8). God stands ready to fill us with all joy as we continue to believe in Him and pursue His calling (Rom. 15.13). Joy is a primary fruit of the Spirit’s indwelling work in our lives (Gal. 5.22). So strong and powerful an affection is joy that it can sustain us through trials, even so that we rejoice and give thanks for them (Jms. 1.2).

What is joy? How do righteousness and peace give rise to joy? Why has God reserved such unfading and unfailing joy for us?

### *Joy*

If peace is that comforting and reassuring sense that all is well, secure, and safe, then joy is the exuberant gladness that emanates from such a condition, making us want to sing, leap about, and cry with laughter. Think George Bailey, in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, weeping with joy and shouting “Zuzu’s petals!” as he realized how greatly he had been blessed of God. When we are in touch with joy, no amount of suffering, trial, or want can rob us of our happiness, for the circumstances to which our joy is anchored are greater than any evil we could endure.

Habakkuk gives us a glimpse at how joy overcomes even the worst case scenarios of life (Hab. 3.17-19):

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labor of the olive may fail,*



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*And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—  
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation.  
The LORD God is my strength;  
He will make my feet like deer's feet,  
And He will make me walk on my high hills.*

This is how joy works. It holds fast to the Anchor of righteousness and peace, rejoicing in the LORD and taking joy in belonging to Him, acknowledging His unfailing strength and His certain Presence with us. As long as we are fixed on these unalterable circumstances, we can know joy, whatever life may throw at us.

Just as Jesus did, hanging on the cross. As He bore the sins of the world, Jesus saw the joy that was set before Him in the coming of the Kingdom of God, the worldwide expansion of God's rule, the showers of blessing that would come to the faithful and needy, and the multitudes who would worship the Father and receive Jesus because of His redemptive work. Even in the darkness of brutal, undeserved, and horrible death, Jesus rejoiced (cf. Ps. 22.21-31).

And the joy Jesus knew followed closely on—was the consequence of—His righteous life and peace-bringing mission for the sake of the Kingdom and glory of God.

*Joyful joy-bringers*

Like the angels who rejoiced at the birth of Jesus, all who know the Kingdom presence of God know the joy that nothing in this world can stifle or suppress. That we tend to access it inconsistently and infrequently does not make the availability of that joy any less true. God has called us to His Kingdom and glory so that we might know joy, so that, in every temporal circumstance, we might hold fast to the righteousness of King Jesus, bask in the peace He bestows, know the joy of His salvation to the very depths of our soul, and rejoice and give thanks and leap for joy.

We have been saved for joy, the joy of knowing God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. And God has appointed us as joy-bringers to the world. The more of God's joy we experience, the more that joy will overflow our lives to bring hope and joy to the people around us.

Life in the Kingdom of God is a joy-ride of eternal purpose and pleasure. Joy is what follows closely to entering the Kingdom of God. And joy increases to the extent that we devote ourselves to realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of God's Kingdom in every area of our lives.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. When do you experience the joy of Jesus?
2. How would you explain joy to an unbelieving friend who was desperate for happiness?
3. How is joy related to righteousness and peace? How may we know the joy of Jesus more deeply and more consistently?

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend time meditating on Jesus' work of redemption—His incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, death and burial, resurrection, ascension, rule at the Father's right hand, and soon return. Give thanks and praise for each aspect of His ministry, and wait on Him to fill you with His joy.*

## 7 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

*Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* 2 Peter 1.10, 11

*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.* 1 Corinthians 6.19, 20

### *Citizens and ambassadors*

Having purchased our salvation by His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. There, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high and was given an eternal Kingdom over which to rule (cf. Ps. 110.1, 2; Heb. 1.1-3; Dan. 7.13, 14). Jesus has bestowed that Kingdom on “the saints of the Most High” by translating all who believe in Him out of the kingdom of darkness into His own glorious Kingdom of light (Dan. 1.18; Col. 1.13; 1 Jn. 2.8). Now we are citizens of a new, glorious, and eternal realm which has come and is coming more and more day by day. We are ambassadors of that Kingdom, appointed to seek, represent, and proclaim righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in all we are and do.

We who believe are not our own. We have been bought with a price by the King Who now calls us to His Kingdom and glory, to be His witnesses, make all the nations disciples, build His Church, and restore for the goodness and glory of God the world He has reconciled to the Father (1 Thess. 2.12; Acts 1.8; Matt. 28.18-20; Eph. 4.11-16; 2 Cor. 5.14-21). Compelled by His love, we long to be daily and increasingly employed in His project of filling the world with Himself (Eph. 1.22, 23; 4.7-10).

We are not our own. We have an all-defining mandate from Him Who bought us and delivered us to the Father, that we should seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness above all, in and through all, first and always (Matt. 6.33). At any moment, we are either completely surrendered to and engaged in fulfilling that mandate, or we are straying from the path of the Lord which He has pioneered (1 Jn. 2.1-6; Heb. 12.1-3). We cannot serve King Jesus *and* anything else. We must serve Him *only* and *only* on His terms. For of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things, to Whom alone be glory now and forevermore (Rom. 11.36).

It is thus incumbent upon us, as citizens and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God and Christ, to give all diligence to make our calling and election *sure*. For only as we are sure of this calling will we be sufficiently sure-footed in our daily journey to undertake whatever is necessary to fulfill our calling day by day.

### *Sent like Jesus*

Of course, we know that any effort we make to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God will be imperfect, at best. This should not deter us, however. While we strive for excellence and the glory of God in all we do, we embrace Chesterton’s belief that “anything worth doing is worth doing poorly” (*What’s Wrong with the World*).

And realizing more of the Kingdom presence in our world is certainly worth doing, though all we ever manage, despite our most earnest and energetic efforts, be but a poor representation of it.

Like Jesus, we are sent to the world to bring the Good News of the Kingdom to people living in the darkness of wrong-belief and sin (Jn. 20.21). We are not likely to give much effort to this mission until realizing the Kingdom presence becomes a more vital and transforming aspect of our daily experience. We must seek the

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righteousness of the Kingdom, to dwell increasingly in its peace, and to know and express its joy by all the power and means the Holy Spirit can provide. As the character of the Kingdom becomes more consistently our character and its peaceable condition the defining ambiance of our lives, and as we increase in the joy of the Kingdom and the hope of glory that joy radiates, we may expect to see the Kingdom of light overcoming the darkness of sin as far as our active will can reach (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*).

We are called to God's Kingdom to live for Jesus and His glory, and we are sent to the world to proclaim this new reality by all our words and deeds.

What will it take for us to begin realizing and asserting a richer and more enduring Kingdom presence in our lives and times?

#### *Sure and sure-footed*

We must make our calling and election sure if we would know a deeper and more all-engulfing presence of the Kingdom in our lives. This means understanding the roots of the Kingdom of God, both in Scripture and God's plan and in our own lives.

It will also entail a more complete effort to realize the Kingdom presence in every aspect of our lives, beginning in our soul and working out into all the spaces and times of our walk with and work for the Lord.

Realizing the Kingdom presence will mean greater clarity and consistency in prayer; taking actions consistent with the character, condition, and consequence of the Kingdom; and joining with fellow Kingdom citizens for mutual encouragement and edification.

And it will require that we focus, as fully as possible, on the final and glorious coming of the Kingdom which even now is unfolding in, through, and around us. We must have the glorious vision of the new heavens and new earth directing our thinking, enthraling our affections, and keeping our values and priorities set on that which Jesus Christ is even now preparing for us.

Realizing a greater Kingdom presence—on earth as it is in heaven—is not just going to happen. Earnest longing and wishful thinking won't bring it about. Only devout and faithful prayer, informed and zealous living, and working together for the Kingdom and glory of God will help us to make our calling and election sure and give us the Kingdom sure-footedness that will enable us to realize more of its presence, promise, and power as we are going.

#### *For reflection*

1. How do you express the fact that you are not your own, that you have been bought with the blood of Jesus?
2. In what ways would you like to realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom in your daily life?
3. Share the studies in this series with a friend. Encourage your friend to subscribe to *ReVision* ([click here](#)) and seek a greater "Kingdom Presence" with you.

*Next steps – Preparation: Spend time in prayer asking the Lord to prepare you, soul and body, for a fuller experience of His Kingdom. Make this your daily prayer.*

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*For reflection or discussion*

1. What can you do make your calling to the Kingdom sure and sure-footed?
2. What is the *character* of the Kingdom? How should you seek this first and always in your life?
3. What is the *condition* that Kingdom character spawns? How does this make a believer different from those who don't know the Lord?
4. What is the *consequence* of righteousness and peace? How does that encourage us to hope more fervently for a greater realization of the Kingdom of God?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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