

THE PRESENCE OF
THE KINGDOM
KINGDOM PRESENCE (2)



Within, all throughout, all around.

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The Presence of the Kingdom
Kingdom Presence (2)
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The Presence of the Kingdom

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The Presence of the Kingdom

Welcome to *The Presence of the Kingdom*

Having examined the character, condition, and consequence of the Kingdom of God—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—we turn now to consider where we might expect to find such a presence.

The short answer is: within, throughout, and all around.

Every believer in Jesus.

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Presence of Mind

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

Therefore He says:

“When He ascended on high,
He led captivity captive,
And gave gifts to men.”

(Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) Ephesians 4.8-10

“You are Mine!”

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke one of the most unbelievable, astonishing, and altogether beautiful of all truths: “I have called *you* by your name; *You are Mine*” (Is. 43.1).

As we have seen, God has *called* us into His Kingdom, for His glory—into a new realm of light and life where we are making God and His glory known as fully and as far as we can. As God sees us, we belong to Him—lock, stock, and barrel. Yet this is no slavish confinement; rather, it is a liberation from the darkness of sin and the fear of death into the light of truth, the beauty of the Lord, and a life of increasing righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We are not our own. God has called us by name, and He intends to use us—all of us, every aspect of our lives—to bring glory to Himself by filling our world with Jesus Christ.

Like I said: unbelievable, astonishing, and altogether beautiful. We are not our own, to stumble around in our own best ideas, our misguided desires and corrupt loves, and our flighty values and priorities. We belong to God. We have been conveyed into His Kingdom. We are increasing in Christlikeness by the indwelling power of the Spirit of God. And through us righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are flowing to fill our world with Jesus.

The presence of the Kingdom in this world—real and increasing, on earth as it is in heaven—begins in each believer, in our soul and into the space and time of our lives by all our words and deeds. This Kingdom presence is real and increasing wherever believers give all diligence to make their calling sure and are seeking the Kingdom as the defining priority of their lives.

And this glorious transformation begins in our mind.

The mind of Christ

The Scriptures teach that our understanding of ourselves—who we are, what we’re here for, what we should be doing—plays a large role in what we actually become (cf. Prov. 3.5; 14.33; 16.9; 23.7). How we think about ourselves becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of what we will be. Living the Kingdom presence in every aspect of our lives begins in how we *think*; it begins in the mind.

As John Stott wrote, *Your Mind Matters*. This being so, we must give more attention to our mind, to understand and use it as God intends.

The mind is that facet of the soul that receives, processes, stores, recalls, and employs information. With the mind we think, understand, compare and contrast, sort, analyze, decide, plan, and much more. Before we were conveyed into the Kingdom of God our minds were “darkened”, to use Paul’s apt phrase (Eph. 4.17, 18). We could not perceive things truly, and we were captive to the lies of the devil. We were “in the dark” about everything, and mostly didn’t even realize it. This affected all our thinking, including how we think

about ourselves.

But when God sent His Spirit into our soul, empowering us to hear and believe the Gospel and making us new creatures in Christ Jesus, He brought with Him the mind of Christ. Now, every believer has the mind of Christ, at least in rich potential, with which to think our way into the presence of God's Kingdom (1 Cor. 2.16).

We have the mind of Christ! We must learn to think like Jesus does, to think His thoughts after Him, so to speak, so that, increasingly, we take *all* our thoughts captive—just as Jesus has taken *us* captive—so that our thinking is obedient to Jesus and His Word in every aspect and function of our mind (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

This is a tall order, I know. But think of the promise learning to think with the mind of Christ portends. Think of the new ways you'll see the world, the fresh and bright ideas you'll begin to think, the deeper understandings of God's Word you'll acquire, the new dreams and visions you'll nurture, the big plans you'll make, and the wise decisions and actions you will take. When we think with the mind of Christ, we realize the presence of His rule in this most foundational aspect of our soul, where He Who is making all things new makes our minds new with the righteousness, peace, and joy of His Kingdom.

Not our own: Praise the Lord!

We are not our own. We belong to Jesus. He intends to own our minds, to renew our understanding, refurbish our outlook, restructure our thought processes, rewire our decision-making, and set us squarely on the golden path of His purpose and will, so that we might follow Him in all His ways (1 Jn. 2.1-6).

The presence of the Kingdom begins in our mind. But we must give all diligence to fill our mind with Jesus' thoughts, Jesus' agenda, Jesus' way of living, and Jesus' goals and objectives. To do this we search the Scripture, calling on the Lord to renew us in our mind, so that we stop thinking and planning like people in the world do and we devote *all* our mind to knowing, loving, and serving Jesus and seeking His Kingdom in all our thoughts (Rom. 12.1, 2).

We also devote our mind to discovering the works and glory of God in the world around us, as He is continually revealing Himself there for us to discover, know, and love (Ps. 19.1-4; Prov. 25.2). The more of our mind that becomes captive to Jesus, the more our thoughts will be true, pure, and Kingdom-focused. The presence of the Kingdom in our mind is the starting-point and touchstone for the increasing Kingdom presence which God calls us to know.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean for you to know that you have the mind of Christ?
2. How do you practice taking all your thoughts captive for obedience to Jesus?
3. What can you do to improve the way you seek to grow in the mind of Christ?

Next steps—Preparation: What new discipline can you take up to help in surrendering your mind to Jesus? Begin doing so today.

2 Presence of Heart

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”
Ezekiel 36.26, 27

... for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Philippians 2.13

Mind and heart

The soul—or spirit—is that spiritual entity, unique to each human being, which provides the compass and power for life. Put another way, the choices, decisions, and actions we take each day are not, in the first instance, outwardly determined. They arise from within us, from what we think, what we desire, and what we value.

As we have seen, when a person’s mind is clouded with darkness, the light of truth cannot break through. Thus, all the rest of the soul suffers light-deprivation, and the signals that come to the body from a darkened mind, heart, and conscience will not be such as bring glory to God.

All who believe in Jesus have the mind of Christ. The light of His truth bathes their mind and shines through to enliven all the other aspects of the soul, thus fitting and shaping them for living a Kingdom presence in the world.

But God leaves nothing to chance when He conveys a person into His Kingdom. Not only does He give them the mind of Christ, but He replaces their stony, dead heart, with a living, growing “heart of flesh”, a heart He is able to shape to follow the mindset of Christ into a life of holy desires and God-honoring affections.

The Kingdom presence which begins in the mind also floods the heart as the Spirit of God makes Himself at home in all the soul, bringing the presence of the Kingdom with transforming power.

The heart of the matter

In *A Treatise on Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards explained the role of the Spirit of God in the new heart He gives all who believe: “The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as His proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action.” The Spirit of God, dwelling in the new heart of a believer, brings Kingdom power to receive the insights and understandings of the mind of Christ and focus them on new and living affections which express the heart of Jesus Christ.

Edwards continued: “The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit, not only as moving, and occasionally influencing, the saints, but as dwelling in them as His temple, His proper abode, and everlasting dwelling-place. And He is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that He becomes there a principle or spring of a new nature and life.”

We recall that the Spirit of God is the *Holy Spirit*; therefore, the power He unleashes in the heart is *holy* power, *Christlike* power, *spiritual* power to transform what we desire, hope for, and love into what is compatible with the mind of Christ and the pleasure of God. The more the Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit becomes a pervading presence in our mind, the more our heart will glow with the warmth and light and love of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

As important as the mind is in helping us realize a Kingdom presence, the heart is the heart of the matter.

The Presence of the Kingdom

Wrong, misguided, or underdeveloped affections can lead us to ignore the Kingdom thoughts of our mind, choosing instead to long for the leeks and garlic of our old way of life. Paul explained that this was what caused the churches in Corinth to become so bogged down in worldly strife: “You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections” (2 Cor. 6.12). They *desired* the wrong things, *loved* what they should not love, *coveted* the esteem of the ungodly, and *resented* their brethren in the Lord.

Paul spoke to the *hearts* of the Corinthians, exposing and rebuking their wayward affections, renewing their minds in the glory of Jesus, and reminding them that selfless love must be the defining and controlling affection of their hearts.

Kingdom affections

We are all moved to action by the affections that rule in our heart. If those affections are primarily self-centered, then what we love, desire, long and hope for, will always be directed at what we consider to be best for us. But when our affections are informed by a true understanding of the Kingdom of God—when righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit are the soul-shaping affections in our new heart of flesh—then we will love and desire and have compassion like Jesus did, outward toward others. Thus our affections line up with the pleasure of God, and we become vessels of grace in a world that desperately needs His love.

A renewed mind is essential for understanding righteousness, peace, and joy. But unless the heart inclines to these, goes out toward them, seeks earnestly to possess and prosper in these, the presence of the Kingdom will continue to elude our soul. We can know that our heart is experiencing a Kingdom presence when we desire the good pleasure of God—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit—above all things.

Edwards argued, “true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections.” And the holy affections we must primarily seek to nurture are love and joy—love for God and Jesus Christ, and joy in doing His pleasure (Ps. 16.11)—together with love for our neighbors and Kingdom joy in serving them well.

When the Kingdom of God is making its presence known in how we think and what we love, we are well on our way not only to *knowing* the presence of the Kingdom but to *being* that same presence in all the time and places and with all the people in our lives.

The question we must ask ourselves is: Are we *willing* for this to be so?

For reflection or discussion

1. What are “affections”? Why do they matter so much?
2. How do the mind of Christ and the new heart of God’s Spirit work together in the soul?
3. How can you tell when “wayward” affections are operating in your soul? What should you do then?

Next steps—Demonstration: Pay attention to the affections that well up from within your heart today. Are they Holy Spirit affections or wayward ones? Offer all your affections to the Lord in prayer whenever you are aware of their operating in you.

3 Presence of Conscience

... *how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* Hebrews 9.14

...*for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.* Romans 2.14-16

Mind, heart, conscience

The greatest and most important work to which our mind and heart may be devoted is that of seeing Jesus, exalted in glory (Col. 3.1-3; Eph. 1.15ff). As our mind and heart perceive the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4.6), we realize His Presence and are, by the power of the Spirit, transformed into His likeness (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We pray with David,

One *thing* I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple (Ps. 27.4)

In the presence of that gloriously beautiful vision, we say like Peter on the Mount, “It is good for us to be here!” (Matt. 17.4)

Thus the presence of the Kingdom—the rule of King Jesus—becomes more firmly established within us.

But for this to happen, the vision of Jesus and His righteousness, peace, and joy must be our highest value and priority (Matt. 6.33). That is, we must *treasure* the vision of Jesus, *choose* to focus on and embrace Him, and *will* to be made like Him.

The mind and heart will only function in this way when they are bridled by a clean conscience.

A good conscience

The Kingdom of God will be present within us to the extent that we maintain a clean and good conscience. The conscience is the valuing center of the soul. It holds the priorities which serve to clarify and direct both the mind and the heart for Kingdom presence. As thoughts or affections stir in the soul, the conscience reads the Law of God, which is written on the heart and settled in the mind (Rom. 2.14, 15), and engages the will to act in line with the vision of Christ and the counsel of His Word.

At the same time, the mind and heart—thinking and affections—inform and shape the conscience. The more we think with the mind of Christ and love with the new heart of flesh the Spirit is shaping within us, the stronger our conscience becomes to confirm and preserve those values and priorities. The Spirit of God at work within us labors constantly to “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9.14). Thus, when Christ is the focus and the Kingdom of God is the goal, the righteousness of God—together with His peace and joy—will shape the facets of the soul for a Kingdom presence in the believer.

What is the key to knowing the Kingdom presence in our conscience?

The Spirit and the Word

Only the Spirit can keep our conscience clean so that it always wills what is good and true. The mechanism

He employs to do this is *conviction*.

Conviction is that sense of sudden awareness, disturbance, troubling, or heightened sensitivity that rises in our soul. The Spirit convicts us by unsettling our mind, provoking us to reflect, wonder, inquire, or seek more insight or understanding about a matter. At the same time, the Spirit stimulates our affections, whether of concern or alarm or perhaps of some new possibility for delight or joy. His aim in convicting us is to guard against or to expose and expunge sin; direct or renew us in righteousness; and equip us with sound judgment that we might return to or remain in or make more progress along the Kingdom path (Jn. 16.8-11).

Our part is to yield to the Spirit by being continuously filled with Him (Eph. 5.18-21). We may quench the Spirit's efforts to provoke us for greater Kingdom presence in our soul (1 Thess. 5.19). Worse, we may grieve Him by some choice or action (Eph. 4.30). We must listen for the still, small voice of the Spirit as He speaks to us concerning everything we think, say, or do, that all might be invested for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31).

This requires time *listening* for the Spirit (Ps. 139.23, 24), *waiting* on the Spirit (Ps. 27.14), and especially *being instructed* by the Spirit, beginning in the Law of God and all His inspired Word (Ezek. 36.26, 27; 2 Tim. 3.15-17). What the Spirit seeks above all to do in teaching us God's Word is to reinforce the vision of Jesus (Jn. 5.39; 15.26), so that the vision of Jesus, ordering and delighting our soul, may flow out from us, like rivers of living water, to refresh the people in our lives with the Presence of Christ and His Kingdom (Jn. 7.37-39).

You have no possibility of realizing a good and clean conscience if time in God's Word and waiting on Him in prayer are not the joy and rejoicing of your heart (Jer. 15.16). If your reading, meditating, and study of God's Law and all His Word is merely casual, your conscience will fail you when temptation worms its way into your mind and sows its enticements into your heart. Like Jesus, we must be ready with the Word of God so that nothing will turn our soul from delighting in Him above all (Matt. 4.1-11). And the more we live this way, our conscience bearing witness to the Spirit's Presence in us and the righteous, peaceable, and joyous way of God's Word, the more the rule of King Jesus will prevail in our soul, and we will be ready to bring a vibrant Kingdom presence to our world.

The Kingdom, Jesus explained, is first of all *within* us (Lk. 17.21), in our soul. There it fills our innermost being with the vision of Jesus and the righteousness, peace, and joy of His Spirit. Let us thus keep a close watch on our soul, working every day to enrich and enlarge it for Jesus, so that His Kingdom may grow and flourish within us, continually making all things new in our mind, heart, and conscience.

For reflection or discussion

1. How does the conscience work in conjunction with the mind and heart?
2. How do the mind and heart help to shape the conscience to be clean and good?
3. What can you do to give more place for the Spirit of God to shape your soul for the Kingdom?

Next steps – Preparation: Is your soul in proper working order? Spend an extended season in prayer, asking God to give you better understanding of how in your mind, heart, and conscience you can realize more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God. Seek specific action steps for a greater Kingdom presence in your soul.

4 Presence of Time

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.* Psalm 90.12

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.15, 16

Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." Luke 9.59, 60

Following Jesus

To follow Jesus involves a complete turn, a translation into an entirely different state, orientation, context, quality, and direction of life. It is to move from darkness to light, fear to hope, and death to life.

Beginning within, in the soul of every believer, the Lord plants a new reality and presence which is increasingly characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Those who have been translated and conveyed into the Kingdom of God think with the mind of Christ. They receive a new heart with which to rebuild their affective and emotional life. And their conscience is purified and made ready for good works. The more they grow in grace and in the Kingdom presence, the more they are transformed into the likeness of Jesus, beginning in their soul (2 Pet. 3.18; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

The Kingdom of God stands in stark contrast to the dying age of sin, and is advancing into, against, and over it as the followers of Christ proclaim and "signify" (one of the senses of Jesus' carefully chosen imperative, *δι᾿ἀγγελῆ* *diangelle*, "proclaim") this new reality and realm by every possible means. We cannot signify and proclaim the Kingdom, ever seeking its progress and fullness, if we are anxious about and entangled in the things of this world. Of course, we must attend to our physical needs and those of our dependents. And we cannot escape the demands of participating in social and cultural life.

But if we are always considering such things as of first importance, as the man who was waiting for his father to die, we will never get about the business of proclaiming and signifying the Kingdom. Jesus' instruction is that the Kingdom and its advancement must define, shape, qualify, direct, inform, and rule every aspect of our lives here and now, so that in all things we are demonstrating, *at all times*, the reality of that new realm into which we have been translated as the sons and daughters of God.

Time for the Kingdom

Seeking and realizing the Kingdom of God *takes* time and happens *in* time. *All* our time. The gift of time comes to us from God so that in and with it we might seek the Kingdom and glory to which He has called us. We note that Paul mentions *the* time, rather than *our* time. We are not our own and neither is our time. All time comes from God as a gift to be used for His purposes. God intends His Kingdom to be established in the time of our lives, but this will not be possible until we learn to seek the Kingdom as the defining priority of every aspect of our lives, and not just one niche in a busy schedule of much else to do.

The Kingdom that is forming within us as a powerful presence of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit must overflow from us into the time of our lives—God's time—where the newness, freshness, and wholly-otherness of the Kingdom becomes apparent to all (cf. Acts 17.1-7; 1 Pet. 4.1-4). Every moment of time comes to us fresh from God; yet, as an aspect of a fallen creation, it comes stained with sin. Time must be redeemed. We must lay hold on time and put it wisely to work for establishing the Kingdom presence in all our time. We need the wisdom of God to think ahead to the time of our lives, that we may number our days for Kingdom progress, prepare for using our time to God's glory, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure in *all* the time of our lives.

The Presence of the Kingdom

All time is time for the Kingdom of God. How, then, can we make the most of the time God gives us to realize a more vibrant Kingdom presence in our lives?

The Christian vantage point on time

We must gain a sense of time that matches the Lord's sense, so that we can use the time He gives us as He intends, for His Kingdom and glory. One way to do this is to discipline ourselves to live in time from the perspective of a fourfold vantage point.

First, we look *up* to Jesus, exalted in glory, where we have been seated with Him in heavenly places (Col. 3.1-3; Eph. 2.6). We want to see Jesus, with the eye of our heart, and the ways His rule is practiced around His heavenly throne (cf. Rev. 4 and 5). It will do us little good to pray that the Kingdom of God would come on earth *as it is in heaven* if we do not have some compelling sense of what that heavenly realm is like. The goal is to be able to say, with David, "I have set the LORD always before me" (Ps. 16.8). This is the work of prayer, meditation, and singing—all disciplines which every believer is charged to employ.

Second, we need to have a sense of the past and how the Kingdom presence was expressed in previous eras. We must develop the discipline of looking *back*, remembering the work of God in previous ages and times, and noting the ways the Kingdom advanced in those days. The exhortation to remember the works of God in times past frequently occurs in Scripture. We ignore or neglect this aspect of our vantage point on time to our detriment.

Third, we must look *ahead*, nurturing a vision of what the coming of the Kingdom should look like as we seek and advance it. Scripture offers much helpful guidance in this, as in Psalm 22.21-31, Psalm 72, Daniel 2 and 7, and many of the parables of Jesus. What are we looking for as we go seeking the Kingdom and righteousness of God? Scripture can help us to flesh out this aspect of our vantage point so that we redeem the time of our lives in line with the promises of God's Word.

Finally, we must look *around* and pay careful attention to our time. We want every moment of the time God gives us to be employed, as in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25.14-30), for the pleasure, purposes, and glory of God. If we're not careful about how we are using our time at any moment, time can slip away from us, be hijacked by deceitful notions, or simply go to waste.

Look up, look back, look ahead, look around: If the Kingdom is to realize a vibrant presence in the time God grants us each day, then we shall have to prepare for that time, be watchful and diligent in using it, and review it before the Lord at the end of each day. The more we practice these disciplines, the more we may expect to realize a Kingdom presence in the time of our lives.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is your approach to making the most of your time for Christ and His Kingdom?
2. Why do we need all four "looks" for a proper vantage point on time?
3. What can you do, beginning today, to realize more of a Kingdom presence in the time of your life?

Next steps—Transformation: Pay careful attention to how you use the time God gives you. Make a point of committing all your time to the Lord throughout the day and of reviewing your use of God's time after each activity.

5 Presence of Place

“Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Matthew 6.10

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 2 Corinthians 10.13

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1

Sent and called

Jesus came to earth with a singular mission: To proclaim the coming of God’s Kingdom and do everything within His power to bring that Kingdom to the world. It’s not difficult to see how, by His life, works, and teaching, He made the most of His brief time on earth to establish a beachhead, within a limited physical space, from which the Kingdom of God has expanded throughout the ages and the earth.

Though Jesus’ ministry was confined to a very small geographic, cultural, and personal sphere, still, His faithfulness and diligence, together with the model He gave His disciples, induced the others to imitate Him and continue the Kingdom work He began.

Paul is an excellent example. He consciously modeled his life and ministry after the Lord Jesus, seeking the Kingdom as the defining priority in everything he did, beginning in his soul and extending through him to the full range of the sphere God appointed for him. Paul was called to the Kingdom and glory of God and sent to a specific sector of the Lord’s field, that is, the Gentiles. Through his exertions he had many reasons to boast in the Lord about the Kingdom presence He established through Paul’s labors.

As the Father sent Jesus to the world, so He sends us, to embody and proclaim the Kingdom of God—to establish the Kingdom presence in our own sphere. And as Paul was so fruitful and effective in imitating Jesus, so he commands us to identify and own and work the *places* God has appointed for us, that the Kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven.

But how can we identify the sphere or the places God has appointed to us?

As you are going

Ask yourself: Where do I go on a regular basis? The answers should be obvious: To my home, my work, my church, in my neighborhood, to shop, among my friends, and so forth. We might describe these various places as the “as-you-are-goings” of your life. Yours, not someone else’s. The life God has appointed for you. The sphere within which you are called to the Kingdom and glory of God.

Jesus said that in the “as-you-are-goings” of our lives we are to make disciples (Matt. 28.18-20). This entails using certain kinds of disciplines. “A discipline,” Dallas Willard explains in *The Divine Conspiracy*, “is an activity in our power that we do to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.” By filling our time with specific disciplines, we can realize more of the presence of God’s Kingdom in our soul and in our places, a presence we cannot achieve or realize on our own. Thus, we must use our time and engage our places with disciplines such as *spiritual* disciplines—to prepare us soul and body; *relational* disciplines—that we may love our neighbors; and perhaps certain *vocational* disciplines—to help us in doing all our work unto the Lord (Col. 3.23, 24).

Our continually traversing the ground of this sphere, these places, allows us to use the time God gives us for making our unique contribution to the Kingdom presence on earth as it is in heaven. By seeking the Kingdom in all our time and in every place to which God sends us, using the disciplines we learn from God’s

Word, we will be much more likely to bring the light of Christ to bear against the darkness of unbelief and to see the Kingdom presence steadily increasing in the as-you-are-goings of our life (1 Jn. 2.8).

We might think of the as-you-are-goings of our lives as a mission field, a Personal Mission Field, because it has been personally prepared for us as our field of endeavor in seeking the Kingdom and glory of God. Every day Jesus sends us out into our Personal Mission Field with the gift of time so that we may answer God's call to His Kingdom and glory by embodying and proclaiming the reality of the Kingdom, percolating within and overflowing from our soul.

Step by step

But the Kingdom does not come into our space or sphere in some full-blown manner. Like everything else in the life of faith, it comes little by little (cf. Is. 28.10; Ex. 23.30; Deut. 7.20). The light of the Kingdom glows; it does not blare, blinding and hurting people and turning them away. It glows with an attraction that makes them want to gather around it, to consider and enjoy it, and perhaps to seek more of it.

Many believers today are concerned that the tide of secularism is about to wash over and wash away the last remnants of true faith. And indeed, many wrong-believing people are making a sincere effort to keep Christianity out of public places. In the latter years of the twentieth century, many people feared the same about the plague of Soviet Marxism that had infected Russia and Eastern Europe. They feared that nothing could stop its relentless and ineluctable advance. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was not one of those people. Two quotes from his writings teach us how to face the darkness of secularism and what to do in seeking the Kingdom of God in our sphere. In his Nobel Lecture on Literature, Solzhenitsyn wrote, "The simple act of an ordinary brave man is not to participate in lies, not to support false actions! His rule: let *that* come into the world, let it even reign supreme—only not through me."

No room in our soul and no time and or place for lies, deceit, or mere self-centeredness.

And in his chapter, "As Breathing and Consciousness Return" (*From under the Rubble*), Solzhenitsyn counseled anyone who wished to live in freedom to "take a single moral step within his own power" and to do so daily, in whatever space and time is available to him.

Or, as Solomon put it, "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them" (Prov. 28.4).

The Kingdom of God is coming. The light has dawned, and the disappearing darkness cannot prevent its continuing to glow and grow. The Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit is advancing like a growing stone to overcome all opposition and fill the world with Jesus (Dan. 2.44, 45; Eph. 4.7-10). And it is advancing in the time and throughout the places of individual believers like you and me.

Seek the fullness of the Kingdom for the entirety of your soul. Devote your time and sphere to realizing more of the Kingdom's presence, promise, and power. Then take up the disciplines you will need to employ all your words and deeds for Kingdom presence throughout all the as-you-are-goings of your life.

For reflection or discussion

1. How can you keep yourself from falling victim to lies, half-truth, deception, and wrong belief?
2. What will it require for you to take a "single moral step" in the places of your life today?
3. If we don't faithfully work our Personal Mission Field for the coming of God's Kingdom, what can we expect in the as-you-are-goings of our lives?

The Presence of the Kingdom

Next steps—Preparation: Be sure you have mapped out your Personal Mission Field (watch [this video](#) and download the worksheet). Pray for the people in your Personal Mission Field and work little by little for Kingdom progress in it every day.

6 Presence of Deeds

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. 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. Ephesians 5.8-10

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5.14-16

The Presence of Jesus

As the Kingdom light of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit floods our soul, affecting all the operations of our mind, heart, and conscience, the Spirit will transform us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). We will still be ourselves, of course, with all the distinguishing features of personality, habitual practices, quirkiness, and mannerism that define us as unique beings; however, the light of Jesus will shine within us so that even those features that make us uniquely ourselves will be purged of all darkness and made radiant with the Presence of Jesus.

In the time and places of our lives, therefore, we should expect—and seek and pray and work for—the Spirit to bring Jesus to light in and through us, filling our little world with Kingdom presence. And that can happen in ways we might not even plan for or be aware of.

I think of an illustration Keith Miller provided in one of his early books—one of the first Christian books I ever read, now more than fifty years ago. A man who worked downtown always caught the train to take him to his home in the suburbs. One day, running late, he dashed into the station and down to the railyard, looking to the last platform to see if his train was still there. As he saw the conductor pick up the portable step and heard him call out the final “All aboard!”, he began to run toward his train. As he did, his briefcase bumped a little boy who was holding a box, knocking the box out of his hand and spilling his puzzle pieces all around on the platform. As the man ran past, he looked back to see the little boy and his spilled puzzle. He turned to look at his train, then, setting down his briefcase, came back, knelt in front of the little boy, picked up the pieces of his puzzle, put the lid on the box, and, as his train pulled away, gave the box to the boy, with a smile and a little pat on the shoulder.

The boy looked at him in something like amazement and asked, “Mister, are you Jesus?” At which, the man realized that, for just that moment, he was.

The Presence of Jesus can shine through us into all the time and places of our lives, on all kinds of people in all kinds of ways. But we must make ready for this to be so.

Kingdom works

Jesus said that our light must shine through the good works we do for the people to whom God sends us each day. Indeed, Paul insisted, God has saved us for this very purpose, that the light of Jesus and His Kingdom might glow with arresting power through the good works God has prepared for us (Eph. 2.10).

But we must approach the time God gives us and the places to which He sends us with the mind of Christ, the heart of His Spirit, and a commitment to doing good for God’s glory as our highest value. In the book of Titus, Paul was emphatic about the role of good works in the life of faith and every believer’s calling to let Jesus shine through in their works.

This is why Jesus died for us. He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2.14). Jesus did not live, die, and rise again merely so that we could go to heaven when we die. He was not primarily concerned about our not

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having troubles or worries anymore. And He especially did not suffer, die, and rise again so that we could become happy and wealthy. Jesus gave Himself to create for Himself a people “zealous for good works.” In the Kingdom of God we have work to do, and the work we’ve been given to do is greater than the job at which we work. The work of the Kingdom—seeking righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit in all the time and places of our lives—is our reason for being saved. And we must be *zealous* for this work—eager and ready and adept at it, so that we will be like Jesus to all the people in our lives.

We must, Paul continued, “be ready for every good work” (Titus 3.1). This means study and preparation, intense and consistent prayer, thoughtful planning and taking initiatives. Only if we are ready for good works will we be likely to do them as the opportunity arises. And we “should be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3.8), doing them to meet the needs of others and bearing all the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3.14). As often as we have opportunity, Paul wrote in Galatians 6.9, 10, we should do good works of love to let the Kingdom light of Jesus shine and the glory of God radiate in even the most ordinary and everyday of our activities (1 Cor. 10.31).

Making Jesus make sense

People will be more likely to believe the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom if they see the reality of it in how we live before them. Are we zealous for good works? Eager to be helpful or encouraging? Ready to listen, sympathize, share, and go out of our way to refresh and renew others? Genuinely loving and compassionate?

C. S. Lewis explained why he found Christianity to be so utterly and reliably true: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else” (“Is Theology Poetry?” in *The Weight of Glory*). Whatever we say to people or try to explain or share about Jesus and the Christian life, whatever they observe in us that they wish they had more of in themselves, whatever want of hope or joy they may wish to fill, they will be more likely to find such matters resolved in Jesus when they see Jesus consistently lived in us.

Let the Sun of God shine with His glorious and warming light through all the works of your hands, and not only will people see those good works, but they will see by them the reality of Christ and His glory. Be zealous, be ready, be consistent, and be sincere in loving others and caring about their needs. Thus will the light of the Kingdom shine through you for the glory of God and Christ.

For reflection or discussion

1. We’re not saved by good works, but we’re not saved without them. Explain.
2. What can you do to make sure that you are “ready” for good works when the opportunity arises?
3. What do our good works contribute to our being witnesses for Christ?

Next steps—Demonstration: What opportunities for doing good will you have today? Are you ready for these? Zealous for them? Eager to do and maintain them?

7 Presence of Words

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... 1 Peter 3.15

Let *your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.* Colossians 4.6

... we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—... Ephesians 4.14, 15

Ready to speak

It's surprising how many times the Bible speaks about the use of the tongue. God understands the rich potential of words—He sent His own Word for our salvation—and He wants those He has called to His Kingdom and glory to reflect the presence of His Kingdom in their speech.

The reason we remain in this world, after all, is that we might be agents of the grace of God, sowing, distributing, and spreading the Good News of His grace to everyone for all of life. Grace is that divine disposition of favor—of lovingkindness—which God communicates to His people so that they may have the will, strength, and presence of soul to share His grace with others. For when the grace of God is flowing fast and freely, people are blessed, worship results, and God is glorified (2 Cor. 4.15).

Just as it is important that everything we are and do communicate the grace of God, so it is also with our speech. As the rule of King Jesus pervades and transforms our soul, that Presence will manifest itself in our words. But we must work at it. We must give all diligence to make our Kingdom calling sure by bridling our tongue and directing it in the ways of grace (Jms. 3.1-12). Paul says that our words must always be “with grace, seasoned with salt,” that is, with the purposes of Christ and His Kingdom.

This is a tall order and a difficult challenge, as James acknowledged. Nevertheless, we must devote ourselves to making sure that the words we use are effective means of conveying Kingdom grace to the people with whom we speak.

Guidelines for the tongue

Here is not the place for a full-blown exposition of the Bible's teaching about the tongue. We can, however, note some parameters within which we may begin shaping our speech—all our speaking—for the Kingdom of God and His glory.

We should use our tongues to *gather information*—about the world, people and their interests and needs, the Lord and His will, and much more. Typically, the way to do this is to ask questions, lots of questions, and to listen carefully. Strange as it may seem, the first rule of gracious speech is sincere listening: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (Jms. 1.19). Being an attentive and sincere listener is like cutting a swath through the jungle. It creates a path along which conversations can develop and people can journey together.

As we're listening, we should use our tongues to *affirm and edify* (Eph. 4.29). Here we must guard against mere flattery. Flattery is a form of deceit (Ps. 5.8-10). People know when they're being flattered, and they know that some ulterior motive is driving that flattery, something not intended for *their* good but to benefit the person with whom they're talking. Flattery is insincere praise, given out of mere self-interest. Affirmation is honest and admiring appreciation, and edifying speech aims at strengthening and encouraging others. Let our speech always be for edification, for then we will “impart grace to the hearers.”

A third general guideline obligates us always to *speak truth* with others and to *do so in love*, to show the love of Jesus in our speech. True speech reflects the teaching of Scripture and the character of Jesus Christ. Loving speech is not only affirming and edifying, but also thoughtful, appropriate, and true to God's Word. We all remember Bambi's friend Thumper recalling his mother's advice, "If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all." But speaking the truth in love goes far beyond this. If we can't speak truthfully to or about others, and if we can't do so as representatives and agents of the love of Jesus, then we had best simply hold our tongue until God gives us just the grace we need to speak truth in love.

Other appropriate uses of the tongue will accomplish the communication of grace if we use them within this framework: careful listening, ready affirmation, words of edification and encouragement, and speaking the truth in love. Those other uses include teaching (Col. 3.16), stimulating others to love and good works (Heb. 10.25), informing and explaining (Acts 17.16-31), reasoning about and proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 28.23), relating our own experience of grace (Acts 26.4-23), comforting and consoling (2 Cor. 1.4), confronting (Gal. 2.11). We must guard against all speech that is scurrilous, vulgar, misleading, gossipy, or merely vain. Friends will often enjoy times of banter, raillery, friendly jesting, story-telling, and other forms of *bon mot*; and as long as these are engaged in within the framework we have outlined, they can accomplish one or more of the ends of gracious speech.

Prayer and the tongue

How can we prepare to help ensure that our tongue will only ever be used as an instrument of grace and edification? Prayer is the place to bridle the tongue; and if we use the psalms to guide our prayers, then we'll have the Word of God shaping our speech to God Himself, and this will help to discipline our tongue to spread the grace of God throughout our Personal Mission Field.

Pray often. Pray out loud. Pray the very words of a psalm, or paraphrase a psalm as you pray it. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Not only will these help to shape your speech, but they appeal to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21), Who is the power for making our speech and all things reflect the Kingdom presence of Jesus Christ.

Commit your tongue to the Lord first thing every morning, asking Him to season your speech with grace. Think about the opportunities you will have during the day to use your tongue for the grace and Kingdom of God, and call on the Lord to make His Presence known in all your speech.

We must not allow our tongue to become captive to the temper of the times—self-interested, crude, hateful, bitter, deceitful, complaining, and mean-spirited. Our speech can be a powerful source of grace and the Kingdom presence in this world, but only if we give all diligence to use our speech as God intends.

For reflection

1. How can you tell when your speech is being shaped more by the world than by the Word of God?
2. What can you do to improve how you use your tongue for the grace and Kingdom of the Lord?
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: Be sure to spend time in prayer at the beginning of each day, getting your tongue ready to serve the Kingdom purposes of Christ.

The Presence of the Kingdom

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by a “Kingdom presence”?
2. How can we work to make sure our soul is set for seeking the Kingdom each day?
3. What do we mean by “Personal Mission Field”? How does this relate to the presence of the Kingdom?
4. How would you counsel new believers to make sure their deeds and words are gracious and true?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?

For prayer:

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