

The Present
& Millennial

Kingdom

of God



COMPANION

Study Companion & Discussion Guide



The Present
& Millennial

Kingdom
of God

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Introduction

Heaven and The Kingdom of God

SUMMARY

In declaring the good news of the Kingdom of God in the Gospels, Jesus announces a future reality that is beginning to be experienced and established right now. In other words, heaven's reality is already here, being experienced in many ways, but not yet fully manifested. For Jesus and the New Testament authors, "Heaven" and the "Kingdom of God" are communicated not as a vague idea, but as a concrete reality that is meant to redeem our broken past, transform our present way of life, and draw us into a future hope with powerful expectation.

“(Jesus) calls us to experience this Kingdom now on earth and even within ourselves.”

The "Kingdom of God" is the dominion or reign of the King. This means our relationship to Jesus' leadership should be the central focus of our life here on earth. This is why we want to explore what the Bible and modern authors have to say about the King and His Kingdom, both theologically and practically. It's going to touch every area of our existence—past, present, and future. Throughout this study, we will dive into the specifics of what we have to look forward to in heaven, what things from our past might still be influencing and hindering our experience of the Kingdom, and how we can make the most of our present life to prepare for what's coming.

Before we dive into Chapter 1, let's take a look at your personal beliefs and feelings about heaven and the Kingdom of God. This will help you to recognize and be honest about your starting point and where you would like to grow from here.

What Do You Really Believe?

Check any of the following statements about "heaven" and the "Kingdom of God" that closely reflect your own thoughts or feelings up to this point in your life. Don't overthink these, just mark honestly with your first impression.

- I think about heaven often.
- The Kingdom of God feels like a future reality that has little impact on my daily decisions or priorities.

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- I believe in heaven, but don't think about it much.
- The Bible's promises about heaven have been an important part of my spiritual formation and daily walk with the Lord.
- I try not to think too much about standing before God one day. I'm not sure if I'm ready or what to do about it, so I prefer not to think about it.
- The rewards and consequences related to heaven matter greatly to me, and I've spent much of my life preparing for that reality.
- I believe heaven is real, but the details don't seem like they impact my daily life. It'll all work out when I get there.
- I only think about heaven when other people talk or teach about it.
- My take on the "Kingdom of God" is that it's something Jesus puts in place when He returns.
- I have this deep sense that there are relational problems and character issues that need to be made right before I die.
- Mostly I imagine heaven as a distant place of beauty and perfection where people dressed in white robes spend most of their time worshipping, playing instruments, and talking.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What do you think the Kingdom of God will look like in heaven after you die?

2. In what sense can you experience the Kingdom of God now?

3. Are you ready to experience heaven now, or are there things you would like to see fixed (redeemed) before you go there?

4. In the Introduction under the section titled “Part One - The Future” are a number of bullet points that summarize an end times preview. What ideas listed there were new to you? Are you willing to consider new ideas that have some basis in God’s Word?
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BACK TO THE WORD

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Luke 17:20-21 *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”*

Matthew 6:9-10 *This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Matthew 21:43 *Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.*

1 Corinthians 4:20 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

HEAVEN

2 Peter 3:11-14 *Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;*

Revelation 3:12 *The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.*

Revelation 21:1-3 *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his*

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*people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (See **Isaiah 65:17-25** where the “new heaven and new earth” are first prophesied in detail.)*

END TIMES PREVIEW

John 16:13 *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

Proverbs 25:2 *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*

1 Corinthians 2:10-12 *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

PART ONE

The Future

Chapter 1

What Is Heaven Like?

SUMMARY

While it may seem overwhelming at first to think about the end time worldwide disasters and Great Tribulation, the Bible gives us a detailed picture of how we can be prepared to overcome through these trials and cooperate with God to usher in the fullness of the Kingdom of God—new life on a renewed earth.

“(The Bible) reveals that all of the bad stuff is actually what the saints have been seeking for two millennia—the final judgment for sin. It leads to new life on a renewed earth.”

For now, our immediate goal—and the thing we are looking forward to—is heaven. John the apostle describes heaven in great detail in the book of Revelation, giving a lot of attention to the rewards Jesus will give to those who overcome in this life. More than just vague ideas, the descriptions and rewards of heaven are meant to motivate our faith and excite our hope, especially in the midst of trials that would tempt us into compromise and threaten to sink our faith.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Where is heaven?

2. How will heaven be different than life on the present earth?

3. Do you think certain things in heaven will be familiar or similar to life now?

Describing Heaven from Different Perspectives

There are different approaches to describing heaven, using both the conservative, literal Bible-based approach, as well as allowing Scripture and biblically compatible principles to fuel our imagination. We explore both of these approaches safely in light of the Word and sound doctrine.

Randy Alcorn

H. A. Baker

Mary Neal

“Present” heaven is “paradise,” a temporary state awaiting new heaven and new earth.

When we die, we are escorted by angelic guides, pass through first and second heavens, and are given a white garment.

Heaven is a reality where we are without pain and reconciled in all relationships, being with God and loved ones forever.

Believers will give an account of their life and righteousness will be rewarded.

Our resurrection bodies radiate with glorious light and we are adorned with countless jewels.

Eternity isn’t infinite linear time, but all of time—past, present, future—being experienced in each moment.

There is continuity between the “Present” heaven and our present, earthly lives in terms of physical characteristics, memory, relationships.

The heavenly Jerusalem is three cities in one, suspended above each other, making a cube, or a pyramid, with God’s throne in the highest plain of the uppermost level.

Eternity begins with a “life review” that provides invaluable learning, purpose, and compassion, leaving each person with the belief that love is the most important aspect of life.

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We will communicate with God and others and be aware of and praying for what is happening on earth.

Each city or level contains paradises of mountains, valleys, plains, lakes, trees, animals, buildings, mansions, all of indescribable beauty and glory.

Life review reveals how each event of one's life affects so many others, always resulting in something of beauty and worth, causing a shift from vague hope in God's goodness to complete trust.

We will be continuously learning and growing.

Orphaned children have their own places and treasures.

Thinking about heaven and hearing others' testimonies should take us from simply pressing on in hope that God's promises are true to absolute trust that God is good and really will "work all things together for the good..." (Romans 8:28)

Human history does not end at Christ's return, but continues forever to the glory of God.

Saints live in mansions of glory corresponding to spiritual attainment.

4. After reading the ideas and testimonies of Alcorn, Baker, and Neal, what do you agree with? What do you take exception to and why?
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BACK TO THE WORD

HEAVEN

Luke 23:43 *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

Revelation 21:1-4, 10-14, 22 *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for*

the old order of things has passed away.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

ETERNAL REWARDS

Daniel 7:27 *Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.*

Matthew 25:21 *His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”*

1 Peter 1:6-9 *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Revelation 2:7 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION ABOUT END TIMES & HEAVEN

Daniel 12: 4,9 *“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” And he said, “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

John 16:13 *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

2 Corinthians 12:1-4 *It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

Chapter 2

How does the Millennium relate to End Times and Heaven?

SUMMARY

In Revelation 20, John the apostle writes about a future age when the saints who have been part of the first resurrection “will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” This is by far the most detailed description of this thousand-year period we call the “Millennium.” It offers unparalleled insight into *what* and *when* this Millennium age might be. Outside of John’s visions in Revelation, we have only a handful of Old Testament references to help us piece together this largely mysterious time in God’s plan. But as Daniel prophesied (12:9) and John taught (John 16:13), it’s God’s intention to reveal more about His mysteries as we approach their fulfillment.

Using Scripture as our final authority, we want to look at the timeline and purpose of the Millennium from a fresh perspective and pay attention to other time-tested, Spirit-filled authors who are weighing in on this subject. While many believe the new heavens and new earth are formed after the Millennium, there is biblical support for another, less popular interpretation that may help to resolve many of the perplexing questions and problems related to the traditional view.

“Consider the scenario that the new earth is formed as part of the judgment by fire that accompanies the wrath of God at the end of the Great Tribulation. When the new holy city of Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to the new earth, it would mean that the New Jerusalem is part of the Millennium period.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Are you challenged by a scenario where the new heavens and new earth occur at the beginning of the Millennium? If so, why?

2. What Bible passages might support or contradict this interpretation?

3. What is the difference between the City of God (Heaven) and the renewed earth?

4. Do you think the judgment scenario depicted could happen?

5. Does the idea of Cities of Refuge seem plausible? If so, do you think that impacts your own life in any way?

BACK TO THE WORD

JUDGMENT

2 Peter 3:5-7, 10-12 *For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.*

Luke 10:12-15 *But I say to you that it will be more tolerable in that Day for Sodom than for that city. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works*

which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. (vs 15 refers to the people of Capernaum rather than a place.)

Luke 17:26-27 *And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*

MILLENNIUM

Isaiah 65:17, 19b-21, 25 *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. ...the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. “No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” says the Lord.*

Ezekiel 47:1a, 6-9, 12 *Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east... ⁶ He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. ⁷ When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. ⁸ Then he said to me: “This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. ⁹ And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. ¹² Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”*

Revelation 20:1-2, 4 *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years... And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

Revelation 22:1-5 *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.*

Chapter 3

The Purpose of the Millennium

SUMMARY

While it may seem theologically risky to think too much about what heaven and the millennium will be like, the Scriptures reveal that Jesus talked often about the future rewards and judgments of the age to come in order to motivate and encourage His followers to live different from the world. The judgments and rewards in the book of Revelation, for example, all hinge on obedience and faithfulness in this present life. The impact of our present choices on eternity makes it even more important to understand what our millennial and eternal realities might look like. It brings up questions like, how might our experiences in the millennium be altered based on our choices today? The answer helps to motivate and encourage us to think and live differently now.

The answer also illustrates the purpose of the millennium. Everything God designs has multi-faceted purpose. The millennial reign of Christ will have great purpose for earthly mortals, glorified saints, angels, and Jesus Himself. For us as glorified saints, a few of those purposes will be to develop and cement our character, further develop our love and absolute trust in Christ, provide divine do-overs for missed growth opportunities during our mortal life, and give us the joy of ruling and reigning with our King in an Edenic world as He intended.

“What is to keep us from falling prey to the sin of pride as did Satan who also is immortal and had unfettered access to God?”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What aspects of the Millennium scenario recap do you find intriguing? Hard to understand? Inspiring?

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2. Do you think it is harmful to consider scenarios that come from our Scripture-fueled imagination, as Randy Alcorn puts it? Do you think they can help us ensure we are being open to new revelations?

3. Do you agree that we have unique opportunities to develop character in the present life, then in heaven, and then on a renewed earth?

4. Can you see the progress you could make toward “sanctification” in each of these phases of life? Are there specific areas of behavior you would like to see change?

5. How does that affect your attitude toward the problems and trials you are facing in this life?

BACK TO THE WORD

2 Corinthians 5: 10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Hebrews 5: 8 *...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.*

Psalms 110 *The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit in the place of honor at my right hand until I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet." The Lord will extend your powerful kingdom from Jerusalem; you will rule over your enemies. When you go to war, your people will serve you willingly. You are arrayed in holy garments, and your strength will be renewed each day like the morning dew. The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow: "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." The Lord stands at your right hand to protect you. He will strike down many kings when his anger erupts. He will punish the nations and fill their lands with corpses; he will shatter heads over the whole earth. But he himself will be refreshed from brooks along the way. He will be victorious. (NLT)*

Matthew 25:31-46 *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Revelation 20:11-15 *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*

PART TWO

The Past

Chapter 4

Examining the Past

SUMMARY

“If I cannot change the past, it does no good to revisit it.” Many use that line of reasoning to justify sweeping pain and trauma from their past under the rug. The problem is that unreconciled hurts and trauma from the past live on in the present as hidden sins of bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness until they are identified, cleansed, and healed through repentance and forgiveness. Because the pain, fear, and rejection we experienced as children was unjust, usually from one or both parents, we grow up thinking of ourselves as victims.

“Though the sin of what someone else did to us in the past was a source of great pain in our lives, it is our own sin of bitterness, unforgiveness, and anger that empowers ungodly behaviors in our present.”

While we cannot change the past, we must be willing to investigate the pain of our past with three purposes in mind: 1) so forgiveness can be applied, both to past sins done to us and to our own hidden sins that have resulted, 2) so wrong thinking can be identified, renounced, and cleansed with the washing of God’s Word, and 3) so we can recognize missed opportunities and begin fulfilling God’s eternal purpose for our lives.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What reactions do you have when you think about examining past sins?

2. Do you have struggles with sinful behaviors and thoughts that keep cropping up? Do you think they might be tied to unresolved issues from your past, even from your childhood?

3. What are some thought patterns and paradigms you may have that don't line up with God's word? Prejudices? Carnal thinking? Expectations of a comfortable and pain-free life? Religious pride? What else?

4. Do you know what God's unique purpose is for your life, and are you confidently living that out? Do you think you have missed some opportunities to fulfill God's purpose for your life because of fears, disappointments, offenses, patterns of sin?

 **BACK TO THE WORD**

Matthew 6: 14-15 *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

Matthew 5: 23-24 *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Chapter 5

The Impact of Past Sins and Painful Events

SUMMARY

As both John the Baptist and Jesus said from the beginning of their ministries, recognition of sin and repentance is the first and most crucial step to experiencing the Kingdom of God, and we never stop repenting and receiving God's forgiveness during this life. When teaching His disciples to pray in Luke 11:4, Jesus said, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." This continual process takes us from glory to glory as we become more and more like the heavenly Father.

While we don't want to obsess over our sin and develop a sin consciousness that leads to self-condemnation, we do want God to help us identify hidden sin in our hearts so we can experience more and more freedom from the impact of the trauma and rejection we have experienced throughout our lives. This will allow us to fulfill our God-given purpose and receive great rewards in eternity.

This process involves looking at both intentional and unintentional wounds we received from the most important people in our lives, especially when we were children. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal how our unhealed reactions to those events have led to bitterness, self-righteousness, fear, and other defense mechanisms we use to keep from getting hurt in ongoing relationships today.

“While healing can happen quickly, when we have been in bondage to a fear for a long time, it is not unusual for the fears to return. Although we have dealt with the spirit of fear in a single scriptural act, we may still retain the attitudes that fear ingrained in us over all those years. The solution is to retrain our minds by washing them with the water of the Word.”

 **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. What is an example of how you hurt or offended someone recently? If you haven't already, ask God to forgive you, but first relive the details and think about how this impacted the other person involved.

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an incident from your childhood where you experienced *intentional* rejection or abuse from a close family member or caregiver. Can you see how that might have caused later unhealthy reactions or compensating behaviors?

3. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal an incident from your childhood where you experienced *unintentional* rejection or neglect from a close family member or caregiver. What related behaviors did that cause in your life today?

4. Give some examples of recent behaviors in your life that have grown out of the following root causes:

Bitterness (towards another, even God): _____

Self-Righteousness: _____

Defensive Walls: _____

Fear: _____

5. Pray that God will shine His light of truth in each of these areas and then repent of your sin and ask forgiveness. What else is He calling you to do to walk in health in each area?

BACK TO THE WORD

2 Corinthians 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

Matthew 5:23-24 *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Matthew 18:35 *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”*

Mark 11:24-25 *Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.*

Hebrews 12:15 *...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;*

Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*

2 Timothy 1:7 *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*

James 1:22-25 *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

Psalm 139

Chapter 6

Patterns of Wrong Thinking

SUMMARY

Thought patterns from our past can lead us astray. These preconceptions about ourselves, how to interpret scripture, and what we think about life, relationships and the world, can all be formed and influenced in different ways. Some come from wounds received while we were being raised, some from teachers and leaders responsible for our education, some from our own selfishness and pride, and some through demonic influence.

These preconceptions often lead us to defend our own sense of “normal” instead of being open to new ways God is speaking and moving in our generation. In many cases, preconception leads to deception. The antidote, however, is to trust God’s promises and goodness, to cry out for understanding, and to thank Him in the midst of trials. We need to recognize and renounce preconceptions, even about how to interpret the Word of God, and instead be open-minded, humbly seeking the Lord with absolute trust. A few good examples of this approach are Simeon and Anna from Luke 2 and the Bereans who listened to the Apostle Paul in Acts 17:10-12.

“How do we handle interpretations of Scripture or even purported revelations that do not seem to fit with our preconceptions of biblical truth? This gets to the heart of knowing the letter of God’s Word versus the Spirit of His Word...”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Our worldview is how we evaluate information in forming opinions and making decisions. As Christians we are supposed to have a godly (Christ-like, heavenly) perspective. Have you consciously thought about whether your worldview is godly?

2. What are examples where you have consciously or unconsciously not exercised a godly worldview?

Use the following categories to jog your memory:

- Preconceived ideas from my upbringing or teachers, or family/denominational traditions that I've taken for granted as truth, such as my position on the rapture or not drinking wine. Do any of these hit home, or are there other examples?

- Choosing not to recognize the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in my life, like when it comes to speaking in tongues, the baptism in Holy Spirit, and asking for or looking for His help with daily Bible reading, devotions, and prayer. Do you struggle with the Holy Spirit's role in any of these ways?

- Pride and selfishness in areas such as expecting a comfortable life, expecting to have a well-funded retirement, or being surrounded by electronic devices. Are these familiar, or are there other ways you're stuck in pride and selfishness?

- Demonic influence that causes you to tolerate or enjoy lust (pornography), violence, explicit language, manipulation of other's lives, or controlling behavior. Are these familiar, or are you experiencing other demonic influences in your life? (night terrors, outbursts, paralyzing fears, perverted thoughts, addictive behaviors)

3. What are some of your (or various churches') long-held religious traditions or interpretations of the Word that perhaps should not be taken as doctrine?

4. What are examples of such traditions that Jesus exposed during His first coming? What were the results?
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BACK TO THE WORD

John 9:41 *Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.*

Acts 5:39 *but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.*

Acts 7:51 *"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.*

Acts 11:15-18 *And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."*

Acts 17:10-11 *Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

Acts 18:24-26 *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*

Acts 19:1-7 *And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism." Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*

Chapter 7

Missed Opportunities

SUMMARY

As past sins and painful events are healed and wrong thinking is transformed, we are able to start learning from missed opportunities in the past without being paralyzed by guilt and regret. Instead of trying to forget these missed opportunities, our sense of being forgiven, loved, and accepted by God allows us to move forward and see God take what the devil meant for harm and use it for good. This new perspective helps us to be more proactive in discovering and fulfilling God's purpose for our lives.

Knowing our purpose does 2 things. First, it gives us confidence that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, regardless of what others say. Second, knowing our purpose allows us not to feel condemned if we are not as skilled or fruitful in areas deemed more important by others.

“One of the best ways to make up for missed opportunities is to move on and intentionally embrace areas of past pain and sin. Recognize any momentary lapses or tendencies to fall back into old patterns and correct it immediately with repentance.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. What regrets do you have about your past behaviors where you have been hurt and then have intentionally or unintentionally hurt others?

The Present & Millennial **Kingdom of God**

2. How can you use those feelings to move towards those you have hurt? Remember, hurts are not always doing or saying something, but can also be withholding or withdrawing from the other person, even from God.

3. Are you critical or dismissive of certain types of people who don't think or behave the way you have been taught? How can you see them differently?

4. Have you asked God to reveal your purpose in this life? Regarding your...

- Ministry to Him and others: _____

- Relationships with family members:

- *Parents and siblings:* _____

- *Spouse and children* _____

- *Grandchildren* _____

- *Extended Family* _____

- Work: _____

- Hobbies and Entertainment: _____

- Support of Charitable Causes: _____

5. When has God surprised you with a new revelation or direction for your life? Is He prompting you today to consider doing something different? How should you respond?

BACK TO THE WORD

Proverbs 20:5 *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

Proverbs 29:18 *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-18 *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*

PART THREE

The Present

Chapter 8

The Mystery of Our Spirit, Soul and Body

SUMMARY

As the past heals and we look forward to future rewards and adventures on a renewed earth, we continue to wrestle with the difficulties and mysteries of this present life. It is easier to understand the Father's purpose for our present lives when we understand how we are made and how He sees us. Made up of three parts—spirit, soul, and body—we are perfect, eternal spirits (our “raw identity”) expressing ourselves through broken souls that are carried around in temporary bodies. God in his infinite wisdom allows for this continued weakness of soul and body in order for us to experience His grace and forgiveness. Walking this long path of reconciliation and healing allows us to choose to love and trust Him over and over throughout our lives, which ultimately produces human beings who choose him forever with a love that not even the angels can fathom.

“Heaven is the divine university where we begin to see more clearly the mysterious principles of the created universe and the character of the Creator. Our spiritual eyes are open to see example after example in our own lives and the lives of other believers of how it looked like undeserved pain brought us to deeper fellowship with the Father and with one another.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Do you agree with the statement below about how salvation affects the spirit, soul, and body? Why or why not?

But when we are saved, we become a new creation. I believe at that moment our identity, our spirit, is transformed by the Holy Spirit. It would be like our bodily DNA being reconstituted to no longer have any disposition toward disease. In this Spirit-driven transaction, our raw identity is actually recreated to no longer have a sin

nature. It is truly made new because of Christ's blood and His atoning work on the cross. While this happens in our spirit, our body and soul are not totally transformed. The body is vulnerable to disease, and the soul is troubled by past memories and fears. But we have our new spirit that can partner with the Holy Spirit to bring about restoration and healing even of body and soul.

2. Do you think your weaknesses and failures make you less likable or less likely to be chosen or accepted by God? Do you see your failures as obstacles that keep God away from you, or are they opportunities to be forgiven and more in love with Him?

3. Do you feel you are doing a good job of listening to the Holy Spirit throughout each day?

4. Do you think you have an eternal destiny? Are you willing to ask God about it? Or do you feel unqualified in some way?

BACK TO THE WORD

2 Corinthians 12:9 *And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Romans 8:14-17 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our*

spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Luke 7:47 *Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”*

1 Corinthians 13:12 *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

2 Corinthians 3:18 *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

1 Peter 1:12 *To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.*

Ephesians 1:4 *...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,*

Ephesians 4:20-24 *But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

EXTRA DISCUSSION

1. Ephesians 2:20 says that God has prepared you for certain works and gifted you to do them. Do you know what those certain works are? What is stopping you from stepping out more confidently into these works and giftings?

- Have you listened for specific instructions about God's will for your life and obeyed those instructions diligently? YES NO
- Do you at times doubt that you're hearing from God or doubt that you're qualified? YES NO
- Have you let fear keep you from taking steps of faith towards what God has shown you? YES NO
- If God has already spoken to you about your calling, have you delayed or put things off? YES NO

Chapter 9

How the Kingdom Works

SUMMARY

Mentioned over 150 times in the New Testament, the *Kingdom of God* is not only approaching and very near but is actually within the believer, in our hearts and minds. It is helpful to think of the kingdom in three ways, or dimensions:

1. The **literal** dimension of the Kingdom in Jesus' dominion in our daily lives—His reign over our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
2. The **unseen** dimension of the Kingdom in the realm of the Spirit, which includes the activity of spiritual beings who influence us.
3. The **fruit** dimension of the Kingdom as we learn to walk in the fruit of the Spirit. As we cooperate with Jesus' reign in our lives and learn to deal with the influence of the unseen realm, we are able to apply faith and trust to develop the fruit of the Spirit, the maturity of God's character in our lives. This growth causes us to act more like our heavenly Father, which is the multiplication of His Kingdom in and through us.

“Jesus is saying that we are to ask the Kingdom to come so we can experience and live in the Kingdom now, in our current earthly lives.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. How are you doing in each of these 3 dimensions of the Kingdom?
 - Allowing Jesus to reign as King in the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of your daily life:

- Learning to discern and handle the influence of invisible spiritual beings:

- Developing the fruit of the Spirit: _____

2. How do you feel about this statement? “The model (for the Kingdom of God) is a loving king reigning over his dominion who doesn’t control every detail of his subjects’ lives, even though he knows what is best for them. He wants them to understand that truth and to come to him for wisdom and guidance throughout every day of their lives. And if they don’t? Well, there may be consequences, but even those are lovingly designed to bring them back to what is best for them.”

3. How has your own upbringing and education influenced the way you feel about and imagine the way Jesus reigns as King?

BACK TO THE WORD

Luke 11:2 *So He said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’”*

Luke 17:20b-21 *The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, “See here!” or “See there!” For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.*

Philippians 2:3-11 *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of*

the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

John 13:12-15 *So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*

Matthew 20:25-28 *But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Chapter 10

Living in the Kingdom

SUMMARY

Allowing the kingdom to have dominion in our thoughts, emotions, and behavior begins with how we pray. Effective prayer should be roughly organized along the lines of the Lord's Prayer, customized for our daily lives, and include the following:

- Praying out loud
- Praying with others in agreement
- Praying with understanding (in our native language)
- Praying in the Spirit (in tongues)
- Praying in faith (fervent, trusting)

“As distractions come throughout the day, we can ask the Holy Spirit about them, listen for His immediate response, and obey. This habit of conversation with the Lord helps us to walk out His dominion moment by moment throughout each day.”

God's dominion also means dealing with other people in the right way. Even though many do not have the same understanding or discipline to allow God's dominion in their lives, we can see the good in them and help point them towards God's purpose in their lives. Here's what it looks like practically:

- Choosing to ignore unkind and thoughtless words and actions.
- Asking the right questions to point them in the right direction.
- Assuming the best about people by taking their words at face value.
- Staying innocent in our attitude towards others while keeping healthy boundaries where needed.
- Listening well and encouraging any positive words and behavior.
- Praying for direction and insight as we are in conversation with them, listening for what the Holy Spirit is saying about their destiny so that we can pray for them and encourage them toward that purpose.

 **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. In addition to the Bible, do you have a daily devotional you read and meditate on? How does it help you?

2. When and how do you typically pray each day?

3. Does the example prayer have aspects you would like to incorporate in your daily routine?

4. Do you hear the Holy Spirit speak to you? In what ways?

5. Do you ask God about the details? If not, why?

6. In dealing with others, which of the points from the bullet list above stands out to you? When and how can you apply it?

BACK TO THE WORD

1 Corinthians 14:15 *What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*

1 Corinthians 1:10 *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

Romans 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Philippians 4:6-7 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

Colossians 3:12-15, 18-21 *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*

James 1:19 *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath...*

James 5:7-9a *Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned.*

1 Peter 2:11-12 *Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

1 Peter 3:8-9 *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*

Jude 1:17-23 *But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.*

Chapter 11

This Present Light

SUMMARY

The second dimension of the Kingdom is the invisible spiritual world, which is actually more real than our visible, physical world (2 Corinthians 4:18). Jesus often dealt with demonic spirits of various kinds. We have the same spirits working to influence and torment us today, and Jesus has commanded us to take authority over them just as He did. Demons influence Christians both legally and illegally.

Legally - We can give access to the devil through ungodly thoughts, words, and actions according to Ephesians 4:25-27. Any simple action that is not reconciled quickly can open us up to demonic influence, whether it is bitterness and unforgiveness toward someone who betrayed us, a willful vow that causes us to rely on our own strength and pride, or participating in demonic practices. We must discern what is going on, repent and ask forgiveness for our sins, then renounce it and cast it out if necessary.

Illegally - Demonic spirits may also try to plant ungodly thoughts, lies, and temptations, which we are to discern and resist immediately. This is why it is critical to have a firm foundation in the Word of God so we will know the difference between God's voice of truth and the enemy's voice.

“No matter the reason for the demonic intrusion, we are to recognize and deal with it and then replace that influence with the truth of God’s Word and constant communion with him.”

 **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. To what degree do you feel the influences of the spirit world around you?

2. What is an example you have experienced of illegal demonic influences?

3. What about an example you have experienced of a legal demonic influence?

4. What did you do, or should you have done, in each situation?

5. What are the roles of God's angels in your everyday life? Do you ever sense them?

 **BACK TO THE WORD**

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Ephesians 6:12 *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Ephesians 4:25-32 *Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

James 4:7-10 *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

Matthew 18:10 *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

Luke 10:17-20 *Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*

Luke 11:24-26 *"When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."*

Mark 3:22-30 *And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebub," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons." So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. "Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation"— because they said, "He has an unclean spirit."*

John 8:44 *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

1 Peter 5:8-9 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

Chapter 12

Back to the Garden and the Word

SUMMARY

The third dimension of the Kingdom is developing the fruit of the Spirit. It's something in which we are all commanded to grow and mature as we fulfill our purpose and eternal destiny in God's plan. Just as man tended the fruit trees in the Garden of Eden, so we are for eternity going to mature in the Spirit's fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

How can we, like Adam and Eve, be good stewards of this garden of our hearts that is supposed to be filled with fruitful trees?

1. **Till the soil** by breaking up the hard ground and removing buried rocks and weeds of past hurts and unforgiveness. Repentance re-sensitizes our hearts and helps us to be receptive to God's Word and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Plant the seed** of the written and revealed Word of God, receiving it into our hearts, paying attention to it, and obeying it.
3. **Water and fertilize** the ground through communion with God in prayer and community with others in Christian Fellowship.
4. **Prune the branches** of all the "good" things we can do by focusing on the specific things He has called us to do. These are tough choices, but by recognizing and developing our unique potential we will fulfill our purpose.
5. **Wait** on the Lord to do what only He can do. Recognize that it's not about the end result, but growing in trust, obedience, and intimacy with our Father.
6. **Reap and enjoy** the fruit by living in abundance and sharing what we have on the inside with others.

"As we walk all of this out, we need to remember that God's written Word is His gold standard for all truth."

All prophetic revelation must be tested and measured up against God's eternal, written Word. We need to be aware of major Old and New Testament prophetic passages dealing with end times and open to a variety of ways those passages could be fulfilled. And finally, we need to remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to bring us into contact with the resources and materials He wants us looking into as we study and ask for more revelation on the days in which we are living.

 **WHAT DO YOU THINK?**

1. What fruit of the Spirit, or character qualities, are you most needing at this point in your life?

2. Look at the list above. Which of the steps in tending the fruit of the Spirit needs more attention in order to grow God's character in your life?

3. How do you read and study the Bible?

4. When do you seem to get the most out of the Word?

5. What can you do to be more open and receptive to the Holy Spirit as you read and study the Bible?

6. Another takeaway from Revelation 22:21 is that we must always acknowledge the kindness and favor that the Lord shows to us by being with us through the Holy Spirit. Do you feel His kindness and favor deep down inside?

7. What are two things from these Kingdom sessions that have impacted you?

8. What have you resolved to change?

BACK TO THE WORD

Matthew 7:20-21 *Therefore by their fruits you will know them. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

John 15:1-17 *"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.*

Mark 4:1-20, 21-25 *And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: "Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came*

and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” And He said to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that

‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.’

And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” Also He said to them, “Is a lamp brought to be put under a basket or under a bed? Is it not to be set on a lampstand? For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.”

Luke 13:6-9 *He also spoke this parable: “A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, ‘Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.’ ”*

2 Peter 1:19-21 *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. (experiences give us even greater confidence in the Word)*

Revelation 22:20-21 *He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*