

2022 DNA Global Forum

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Presentation by Dwight Vogt
Tuesday, October 18

Note: This is an expanded version of the presentation I shared at the Global Forum presentation, which needed to be shortened due to time constraints.

If you wish to dialogue with me about anything I've written, I would be happy to do so. My email is dvogt@disciplenations.org.

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The first principle we will look at this week is, from my perspective, an overarching principle that captures the theme of the week – *Foundational Principles for Flourishing Nations*.

The first principle is:

Principle

God works in history to fulfill His redemptive purpose to redeem people and bless the nations.

He grants us the privilege of participating in carrying out His purposes in this world.

God's purpose is to redeem and bless the nations. This blessing includes helping nations to experience God's shalom. This word *shalom* is a Hebrew concept mentioned over 200 times in the Bible. It is commonly translated peace or rest but means completeness, soundness, well-being, or all things and relationships functioning in harmony. In our Forum theme we use the word "flourishing" to convey this comprehensive Hebrew concept in the Bible. Furthermore, we (you and I) have a role to play in this "blessing" work of God. That is, to help nations function in alignment with the way God created mankind to live –which leads to God's shalom or flourishing.

Scripture support.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” -- Genesis 12:2-3 (ESV)

God’s intention is to bless Abraham, and then, through Abraham, to bless all others.

Today, we directly benefit from this blessing. We know that the blessing of Abraham ultimately came through Jesus, the anointed one, the Messiah, the liberating King, who came through Abraham’s lineage. Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection redeemed the world and is reconciling all things to himself.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
--Colossians 1:19-20 (ESV)

In Colossians 1:20 we understand that the reconciling work of Jesus extends to include “all things.” If we reflect on this, we realize this is truly amazing. Jesus’ reconciling work includes everything in life! Yes, it includes our relationship to God. But it also includes our relationship with one another, every part of our lives as body, soul, and spirit, and every part of creation. All is included in God’s work and purpose of reconciling all things to himself.

This word “reconcile” in the original Greek language means to bring something back to a former state of harmony. Or, to change something to make it conform to some standard. It is to bring something into alignment with what a standard. Picture a carpenter using a level to straighten a wall or a physical therapist working to help a body part to function as it should. The point of Jesus’ reconciling work is to conform “all things” to the way he created them to be and purposed them to function. In Genesis chapter 1 God gives words to what this reconciled state looks like. You will recall that when he finished all of his creative work God stepped back and said, “This is very good!” In other words, this is exceedingly good, this is shalom, this will flourish in an amazing way.

When we think of Colossians 1:30 and Jesus dying to reconcile all things to himself, the standard was set by him at creation in Genesis 1:31. This standard is to reconcile all things into alignment or harmony with the “very good” way that he created them to be and function.

Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul says that Jesus, the Christ (the anointed liberating king), reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. That is, we are now to implore others: “Be reconciled to God.” Yes, this reconciliation starts with our relationship to God himself, but it comprehensively extends to include all things, i.e. all aspects of our life and

culture. God's purpose is that all of this function in alignment with his "very good" design for people and the world.

Contrasting Principles

One of the effects of sin is that alongside God's true principles for flourishing nations there are distorted or fallen principles in place that do not lead to flourishing. For example:

From the materialist worldview: All of life and mankind is evolved from matter. We alone are the rulers of our own destiny and fate. There is no real or transcendent purpose for human life – other than the meaning we create ourselves.. ☞ *Fatalism or Arrogance or both.*

From Pantheism and Hinduism: Everything is part of the universal one. Everything is god. Ultimate reality is spiritual not material. Life is on the wheel. We are born from dust -- we live a few years -- we return to dust. History is not going somewhere. It has no purpose. If we reincarnate, we do not control this state either. ☞ *Fatalism*

From the Animist and Folk Religions: Fate and spirits play the dominant role in all of nature and life. Fate or destiny, not purpose, determines the state of individuals and societies in this life. Some people are destined to suffer. Our purpose is to live in harmony with this world, to appease the spirits, to not mess with mother nature. ☞ *Fatalism*

From the sacred/secular divide (what Darrow Miller refers to as Evangelical Gnosticism in which some vocations or activities or physical things or viewed as higher/spiritual and other things as lower/physical): God only values the higher things not the lower things. The world is getting more and more evil. God's purpose is to save mankind out of the world for heaven and then destroy the world. The role of the Christian is to get people saved for heaven. In this Evangelical Gnosticism context, God's promise of blessing is only a spiritual blessing -- divine forgiveness and a restored relationship with God. It is not a physical or tangible blessing in the present world. ☞ *Fatalism with respect to life on this earth.*

Practical Outworking of Principle #1

We lead people to the good news of Jesus' life, atoning death, resurrection and giving of Holy Spirit as the way to be reconciled relationally to God. But, we do not stop here. We also let people know that the good news of Jesus' salvation is comprehensive. It touches *all things* in our life and world. All is to be reconciled to God's good purposes and plan.

By means of the indwelling Spirit we are enabled to increasingly live this reconciled life.

We disciple (teach/encourage/influence) others to do the same. Aligning our lives and communities with God's very *good* purposes and plans leads to God's promised shalom (flourishing).

Now may the Lord of shalom himself give you shalom always in all ways.
The Lord be with all of you. - 1 Thessalonians 3:16

Introducing the Kingdom of God

I referred to Principle #1 (above) as an overarching one, and indeed it is. Likewise, the message of Colossians 1:20 is an all-inclusive reconciliation that we benefit from and participate in.

Yet, there is another biblical concept that will help us frame and connect not only these two important truths but all others as well. This concept is the *kingdom of God*.

For a number of years, my wife and I were privileged to teach the Bible each week to a group of young boys living in a foster group home in Phoenix, Arizona. Most of them had never traveled out of the state and some had spent all of their lives in the city. To help them understand and connect to different Bible stories, I would often project google maps on to the wide-screen TV and then zoom the view to the house where they lived and then zoom out and around to the Middle East and then zoom down to the place or area where the story took place..

The biblical concept of the kingdom of God serves a similar purpose. It zooms us out to the overarching framework (story) of the Bible that starts in Genesis 1 and ends in Revelation 22. The kingdom of God ties together the Old and New Testament. It weaves together the purposes and activity of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It connects to Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection and his sending of the Holy Spirit. It gives context to the role of the Church in God's kingdom plan. It ties together and helps us make sense of the many other concepts in the Bible such as heaven and earth, sin and judgement, atonement and reconciliation, sanctification, and all the principles we will unpack this week.

So, I'd like to take time to look at the kingdom of God.

There is much that could be said about the Kingdom but I would like to highlight four things.

1. The kingdom of God **is the Gospel** that Jesus preached.
2. The kingdom of God **is the story of God's rule** coming to earth. It is the connecting thread that begins in Genesis 1 and ends in Revelation 22.
3. The kingdom of God – God's rule on earth – **is evidenced in** God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). It is **evidenced in** God's righteousness being done on earth.
4. The kingdom of God **is inseparable from** the role of the Spirit of God.

1. The Kingdom of God is **the Gospel** that Jesus preached.

The proclamation of the Gospel is central to the Evangelical church. On any given Sunday you will hear this term "Gospel" used multiple times in my church. The proclamation of the Gospel was also central to Jesus' teaching. In fact, the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed was the theme of his ministry.

What catches our attention is that when Jesus proclaimed the Gospel, he was talking about the gospel of the Kingdom.

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God**, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:14-15 (NKJV)

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom** and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. Matthew 4:23 (ESV)

(Jesus speaking) "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John came; since that time **the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached**, and everyone is forcing his way into it. Luke 16:16 (NASB)

(Jesus speaking) And this **gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed** throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14 (ESV)

When Jesus proclaimed the Gospel, he proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God was Jesus' main message.

(Again) And he went throughout all Galilee, ... **proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom**
(Matthew 4:23 (ESV))

When the crowds learned it, they followed him, and he welcomed them and spoke to them of **the kingdom of God**. Luke 9:11 (ESV)

Even after his resurrection Jesus talked about the kingdom of God.

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about **the kingdom of God**. Acts 1:3 (ESV)

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. He said:

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. **Your kingdom come,**
your will be done, Matthew 6:9-10 (ESV)

Jesus gave his followers many commands but there was only one thing he told them to seek above all else, to seek first.

But seek first **the kingdom of God** and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

Jesus said the kingdom was at hand. It was near. It was among them. One English translation says, "it was now *very near*."

"From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand.'" (Matt 4:17 and Matt 3:2)

"But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then **the kingdom of God** has come upon you. (Matt 12:28)

Other English translations render this: "it has already come upon you" and "has arrived among you."¹

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he asked Jesus about his being a teacher come from God, but Jesus went straight to his message of the Kingdom.

¹ Matthew 12:28 (GNT and TLB respectively)

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see **the kingdom of God.**” John 3:3 (ESV)

Jesus told his followers to proclaim the kingdom of God.

And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:60 (ESV)

Out of the 40 parables that Jesus taught, 18 were specifically about the kingdom.

You get the point. When Jesus proclaimed the gospel – it was the gospel of the kingdom. The kingdom was Jesus’ main theme.

However, I am fairly confident that when your pastor uses the term “gospel” on a Sunday morning, he is referring to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross to atone for our sin and to make us right with God.

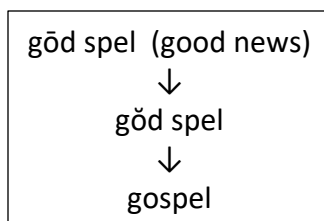
Does this mean there are two different gospels? One, the gospel of the kingdom that Jesus proclaimed and the other, the gospel of the cross that Paul writes about?

In the Greek the word for Gospel is euangelion (εὐαγγέλιον). Euangelion occurs 130 times in the New Testament as a noun or verb. It literally means good message. However, it is not referring to just any good message or news. It’s not a message like the price of gas has gone down. Rather, it is the picture of the town crier proclaiming that something very significant has happened that will change the course of life. For example, a new king has been born. The emancipation proclamation is signed. The war is over. In other words, the euangelion is life-altering news for everyone.

By the way, euangelion is where we get the English word “evangelism” – which means to proclaim good news.

What is so interesting about this word euangelion is that it is translated in the English bible sometimes as “good news” and sometimes as “gospel.” Some translations prefer one term over the other, while other translations interchange the two terms – in one place using “good news” and in the next place “gospel.”

Why two words? Because when William Tyndale first translated the New Testament into English in the early 1500s the English term for good news was gōd+spel (long o). In both spoke and written English this word “gōdspel” evolved into the modern English “good news.” The exception was in the translation of the Bible. The English Bible translators retained “gōdspel” but replaced the long ō with the short ɔ as in “God” and created the word “gospel.”



Why do I bring this up? Because I believe this word “gospel” can actually limit our understanding of the Gospel.

These are not two gospels or two sets of “good news.” Jesus proclaimed the good news (gospel) of the kingdom of God knowing full well that his work on the cross would also be good news (gospel), because his atoning work would be central to the outworking of the Kingdom.

The “good news” of the cross made possible the “good news” of the Kingdom.

It is like the good news of an antibiotic that makes possible the good news of a healing. It is like the good news of victory on D-Day on the beaches of France made possible the good news of victory in Europe a year later.

To fully understand the significance of the cross we need to fully understand the kingdom.

We need to understand the the breadth and depth of God’s good news (his gospel). To do this we need to understand and connect the good news of the cross with the good news of the Kingdom of God.

So, if you’re like me, and unconsciously give more weight to the word “gospel” then to the expression “good news,” do this when you read your English Bible. When you see the word “gospel,” think “life-altering good news”. When you see the words “good news,” think “gospel.”

<p>2. The kingdom of God is the story of God’s rule coming to earth. It is the connecting thread that begins in Genesis 1 and ends in Revelation 22.</p>

<p>The story of the Bible ☞ is the story of God’s rule on earth ☞ is the kingdom of God</p>

The story of the Bible is the story of God’s rule on earth, is the kingdom of God.

The story of God’s rule on earth – the kingdom of God – is the connecting thread and organizing principle of the Bible. It begins in Genesis 1 and culminates in Revelation 22. It begins with God establishing his rule by creating the heavens and the earth and everything in them. It culminates with the throne of God and of the Lamb established in

the city of God on the new earth and with all of his servants serving him and reigning with him for ever and ever.

God's rule on earth – his kingdom – is marked by some important points.

First, his kingdom rule is evidenced by being “very good.”

I have already touched on this, but it bears repeating. The greatest and most pernicious lies in the world appeal to mankind because they promise something very good, and yet in the end lead to diminishment, decay, destruction, despair, despondence, depression, deterioration, denial and death. In contrast, God's kingdom, his will and purpose for all of creation, is always and fully “very good.” This truth is incontrovertible or beyond dispute.

When God finished the whole of creation, he stepped back and said, “This is very good!” At that point in history every single aspect of God's creation was functioning perfectly according to its purpose. From the smallest cell to the magnificent creation of the male and female, made alone in God's image, nothing was askew. Truth, goodness and beauty, the transcendent concepts that originate in God alone, were all present. God's glory was fully on display. Because no sin or effect of sin was present, all was sacred; all was holy; all was set apart for God. God was present with his creation. His love and power prevailed in and over and through all. All was “very good.”

We see the same thing at the culmination of the kingdom in Revelation 21 and 22, only magnified 10 times. All is light. There is no darkness. All of creation is sacred. God's glory is fully on display in all of creation. The effects of sin are gone. All of creation is experiencing shalom.

God's kingdom rule is evidenced by being “very good.” If you or your neighbor need an incentive in this life for entering into God's kingdom – living under God's rule – consider this one.

Second, God's kingdom rule on earth is marked by something truly amazing.

God delegates to mankind the responsibility to rule over the work of his hands. God the creator-king reigns *over* all his creation, but he also chose to reign *through* his people. Adam and Eve – and all mankind – were commissioned as royal representatives of the king.

In Genesis 1:26-28 we see that God creates man male and female in the image of God (imago Dei) and commands them to have dominion over all the earth. Other translations say “rule over the earth,” “reign over it,” “govern.”

The psalmist reminds us of the same in Psalm 8:6

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet, Psalm 8:6 (ESV)

Other translations say you have made him *ruler* over the works of your hands, another says you have made him *to govern* the work of your hands.

Psalm 115:16 alludes to this intended responsibility and authority given at creation.

The highest heavens belong to the LORD,
but he gave the earth to human beings. Psalm 115:16 (ISV)

My colleague, Darrow Miller often says that God made us to be his vice-regents here on earth. He points to the first example of how this looked in real-life where God delegated to Adam the responsibility and authority to name the animals and then to underline the authority he had given to Adam, God says he himself will use the names that Adam gives them.

God's kingdom plan was that mankind would rule over the earth – the work of God's hands.

At the 2019 DNA Global Forum in Panama, Vishal Mangalwadi reminded us of this in a lecture he gave on Revelation 5:10.

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:10 (ESV)

Several English translations translate this:

And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."
Revelation 5:10 (NKJV)

We see this *co-rule* again in the very last chapter of the Bible.

"They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, **and they will reign forever and ever.**" Revelation 22: 5 (ESV)

Third, God's kingdom rule and plan for mankind and all creation, was marred by sin.

God is king, and he reigns over all creation. But mankind sinned and resisted God's rule. The shalom (the "very good") was shattered. The relationship between God and man was broken. Death and decay became the norm. Satan deceived Adam and Eve and they chose to disobey God. Sin entered this world with all of its devastating effects. In

so doing mankind lost their ability to rule over creation as God intended. Instead of ruling and reigning as God intended, mankind is now held captive to sin by Satan. Apart from God's salvation, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
1 John 5:19 (ESV)

However, the sin of mankind and its effects did not change God's plan. God did not step back and decide that the "very good" he had purposed for the earth and mankind was now lost forever and irredeemable. He did not decide to forever give up on the idea of his imago Dei co-ruling over the earth. Instead, God embarked upon a rescue mission to redeem mankind and restore them to the purpose he created for them. The Bible is a rescue story, but not about God rescuing people from a broken creation and taking them to heaven when they die. No, it is about God rescuing mankind from the power of sin so that they can engage with him in their original calling as imago Dei and in God's mission to reconcile all things which will culminate in Christ's return and a new creation.

God began his redemptive plan by choosing a people, Israel, and covenanting with them that they would be his people and he would be their God. He would lead them in his good way and make them a blessing to the nations.

God gave his word (Torah) to instruct his people how to rule and reign in this life. That is, God instructed them how to live in alignment with his will and design for every area of life.

For example, this is how you should:

- Live in relation to **God**: worship, fear, love, trust, gratitude.
- Govern your relationships with **one another**: don't lie, don't murder, put their well-being ahead of your own.
- Rule over **your own body and mind**: wash your hands, don't eat certain foods uncooked, guard your thoughts, don't commit fornication or adultery.
- Reign over **the rest of creation**: feed your ox when it's working, give it rest once a week, be industrious, plan ahead.

But, the people of Israel failed miserably in their ability to rule over life – to live as God commanded. Yes, there were some good kings and good days, but many bad ones. In the end, the people were hauled off to captivity and the temple (the place where God tabernacled with them) was destroyed.

Under the law (the Old Covenant), the people and leaders failed to live out the kingdom of God. At their best, they created a pale approximation of God's rule and order. At their worse they created a travesty of it.

But they also never completely lost sight of what God intended, but looked forward to a messiah, an anointed liberating king who would put all things right.

... and then came Jesus. A few people immediately recognized him as the messiah, the liberating king. Most did not.

The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. John 1:41-42 (NIV)

- Jesus lived out God's kingdom plan. He never sinned, he ruled over death, calmed the storm, healed the sick, fed the hungry, forgave sin, and loved others perfectly.
- Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God.
- Jesus overcame the two things that keep mankind from living as God designed -- sin and Satan.
- Jesus sent us the Spirit to empower us to live as he intends and to rule over all the work of his hands, as he purposed us to.
- Jesus will ultimately return to complete or consummate the Kingdom.

In Jesus, God's rule came to earth.

Through Jesus, Satan's power over sin and death was defeated.

Because of Jesus' atoning work on the cross, God now gives his Spirit to fully reside in and empower those who believe in him.

Mankind can now live out God's intentions and purposes.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (ESV)

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. John 14:12 (ESV)

Side note: I have often wondered about this last verse as when I look at my own life as a follower of Christ, I fall far short of doing the works that Jesus did, much less greater works. Yet, when I look on the body of Christ as a whole across the last 2,000 years, I see individuals and groups who have brought about war ending peace treaties, delivered thousands of tons of food to famine victims, build hospitals that have healed thousands, and ruled over pesticide and natural disasters, and preached the good news to millions.

This is the story of God’s rule coming to earth. This is the story of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is the connecting thread and organizing principle that unites the Bible.

When I was in college I took a class called the Kingdom of God. My notes from the class are long gone, but I kept the text book titled: *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church*. Here is a summary quote from the author.

“Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. ...The Bible is one *book*. Had we to give that book (the Bible) a title we might with justice call it *The Book of the Coming Kingdom of God*. That is, indeed, its central theme everywhere. In the New Testament, however, there is this difference: the Kingdom of God has become also the Kingdom of Jesus (the Messiah) and the Kingdom is actually at hand.”¹

John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*

3. This brings us to my third major point that looks at the question, what does the kingdom of God look like?

The kingdom of God is evidenced in God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10 (ESV)

It is evidenced in God’s righteousness being done on earth.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Matthew 6:33

Looking at Matthew 6:9 we must then ask, what is God's will for people, for creatures, for the land?

If the rule of God is synonymous with his righteousness in Matthew 6:33, we must ask what is God's righteousness?

Righteousness here means straightness, rightness, alignment.

To seek God's righteousness is to seek those things that are aligned with God's will; To seek that which is straight with his design; To seek that which is in line with his intentions.

Below: A craftsman makes sure his wall is "righteous," that is aligned vertically or straight -- using a plumb bob to determine this.



The Bible has 66 books and hundreds of commands and many important theological concepts. How do we begin to understand God's will from all of this or his righteousness?

I suggest we can simplify this by following the recommendation Abraham Kuyper, the influential Dutch Theologian in the early 1900s.

Kuyper observed that there are three relationship questions that ultimately define every philosophy and religion on the earth. Furthermore, the way a philosophy or religion answers these questions creates a unique worldview and every worldview results in a unique and discernibly different world.

For example, the answers from secular atheism form a worldview and creates the postmodern culture and world of the West today. The answers from Islam form a worldview and create the Muslim culture and world. The same with animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, etc.

The Bible also gives answers to these questions and forms a worldview and creates a culture. We can refer to this as a biblical worldview or a kingdom worldview, which creates a culture of the kingdom. What is unique about the biblical worldview is that it

fully comports with reality, both the reality of the world as God designed and purposed it to be and the reality of the Fall of mankind, the reality of sin and its effects. Furthermore, this worldview includes the reality of God's redemptive work in the world.

So, what are the three questions or relationships? I alluded to them earlier and they are:

Mankind's relationship

1. To **God**
2. To **mankind** (to others and oneself)
3. To **creation**



In the context of these three relationship areas we can ask and answer the moral question of what is right and wrong? We can ask why there is evil in the world, what went wrong? We can ask what is the solution? We can ask the telos or purpose question – where is it all going?

Because we are looking at the kingdom of God through the lens of “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” and the lens of “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” I will phrase the 3 questions this way:

What is God's will, what is God's righteousness regarding:

Mankind's relationship

To **God**

To **mankind** (others and oneself)

To **creation**

I'd like to pose several answers to these questions.

1. What is God's will, what is God's righteousness regarding mankind's relationship to God?

There are many ways to answer this, but as a starting point, I suggest God's will for how we are to relate to him includes:

- To worship him
- To love him
- To fear/revere him
- To trust and obey him

If I have to choose just one of the above, I choose worship. Because the God we worship ultimately frames how we view all of reality. If we worship a false God, we will end up worshipping a false reality. In contrast when we worship the God who created all reality, we are closer to the truth of this reality than ever before.

If you get the person or object of your worship right, you get everything else right.

To Worship – This command is foundational to the first 3 of the 10 commandments:

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make idols.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

To Love – This is the first and greatest commandment:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' Matthew 22:37

To Fear / Reverence – This is put forth as a beginning or starting point.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; Psalm 111:10

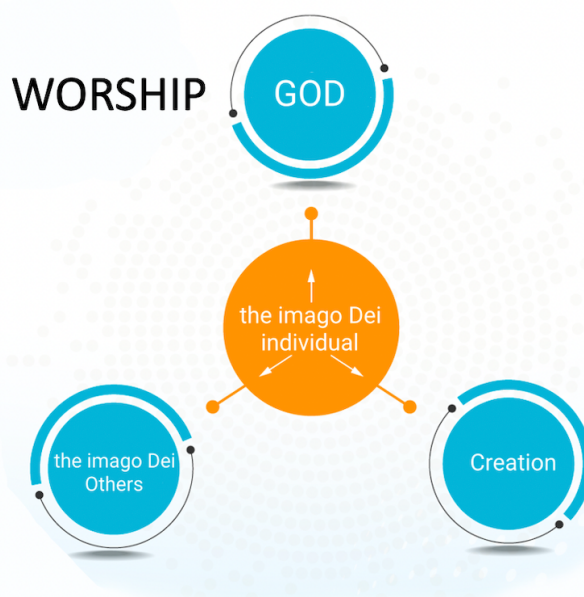
The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, Proverbs 14:27

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; Proverbs 1:7

To Trust and Obey

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

Again, all of these reflect the will of God or his righteousness in terms of our relationship with God. But, again, if I have to choose one defining word, I vote for worship.



The kingdom of God is where people worship the creator God.

2. What is God's will or what is God's righteousness regarding mankind's relationship to mankind – to others and the individual self?

You and I are image-bearers. We are imago Dei! Male and female are **made in the image of God**.

Every person is a unique individual human with agency – body, soul, spirit. 1
Thessalonians 5:23

Each person is **created uniquely** by God.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well. Psalm 139:14 (ESV)

Every person is **known by** God.

But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Matthew 10:30 (ESV)

Every person is individually responsible before God for the life and purpose they have been given. Each one is responsible to God to develop, steward and use their body, mind, spirit, abilities, to live out God's intentions for them – his design and will for them. No one is exempt.

Each person evaluated and held accountable by God
-- Revelation 20:12, Matthew 25:31-40 (parable of the talents)

Mankind's relation to one another: To love one another

Love = the irreducible minimum of God's commands.

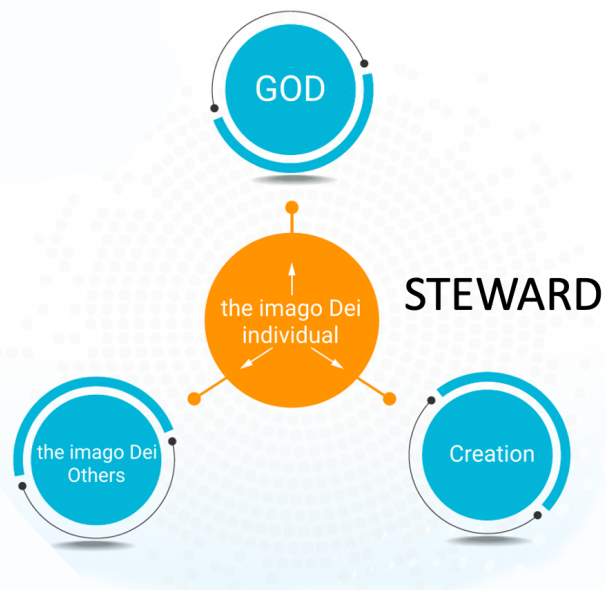
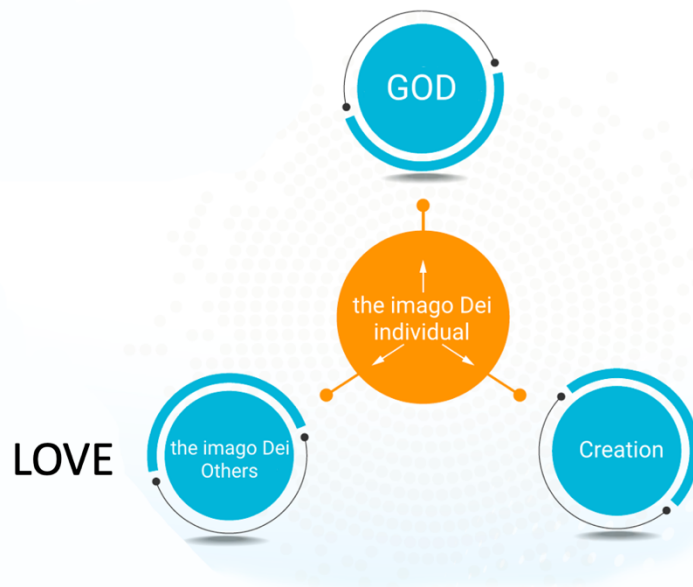
For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
Galatians 5:14 (NIV)

Love = to consistently will and choose the good of the other -- Thomas Aquinas

Good = that which moves a person towards God's intention – Bob Moffitt.

The kingdom of God is where people recognize themselves and others as imago Dei. It is where people recognize the equal dignity and value and uniqueness of every person. The kingdom is where people develop, steward and use their body, mind, spirit, abilities, to live out God's intentions for them.

If I have to choose a couple of words for this question of God's will for mankind in relation to others and to one self I would choose "love" and "steward."



3. What is God's will or what is God's righteousness regarding mankind's relationship to to the rest of Creation?

Creation defined: Everything that is not God.

This means our relationship to every other part of life and includes eating, sleeping, working, the clothes we wear, exercise, entertainment.

God's will is for people to rule over the works of God's hands by living and working in a way that aligns all of life with God's intentions.

You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet. Psalm 8:6 (NIV)

This has been discussed in the previous section, but here are a few more thoughts about this command of God.

1. To rule over the "work of God's hand" **includes everything**. It includes our relationships with one another, our work, play, the food we eat, our sleep, thoughts, emotions, entertainment, and daily activity. It includes the places where we live, the institutions we form, the nations we are a part of. We are purposed by God to rule over, govern, reign over all of this!
2. Today, the words **rule, reign, dominion, and govern are viewed as negative**. They are words laden with emotion and convey oppression of people, suppression of human potential, denial of rights, the absence of freedom, and injustice. Picture the prison guard over the prisoner, the dictator over the dissident, the cruel boss over the worker.

But, this was never the meaning behind the command to all mankind in Genesis 1:26, 28; and Psalm 8:6, to rule over what God had created.

Yes, the intended authority and power was inherent in this command from God, but the purpose and desired outcome was completely different. God intended for humans to rule in a way that would allow all of the "very good" God had put into his creation to be released and realized. This intent applied not only to the created potential of plants and animals, water and land, but even more so to every human being.

I saw this type of kingdom rule demonstrated in my daughter with her newborn son. She had no choice but to exercise *total dominion over him* during his formation in her womb and did this with great care by eating, exercising, and resting on his behalf. After he was born, she was even more active in *ruling over* him, doing everything she could to make sure he was properly nourished, rested, protected, and nurtured in every important way so that he can develop and grow healthy. As our grandson matures, she will *continue to rule* as a mother

exercising love and kindness, training, and discipline, all the things that a mother does to enable her child to become a happy healthy independent person.

So, if like me, you react emotionally to the strength and authority of the words “rule” or “have dominion over” picture the self-sacrificing rule and dominion of a mother over her child.

3. **God’s command to rule and reign is for every single person** born into this world. It is not for a chosen few human beings. This command is not just for the strongest or the smartest, the wealthiest or healthiest, or the person in recognized authority. God has given the command and authority to “rule over the works of his hands” to every human being irrespective of their status and place in life. This includes the person struggling in poverty or with weakness or diminished abilities.
4. **To rule over all creation is to rule over oneself as well** – as we are a part of creation. I appreciate the following quote by the Christian statesman and Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius in the 1600’s.

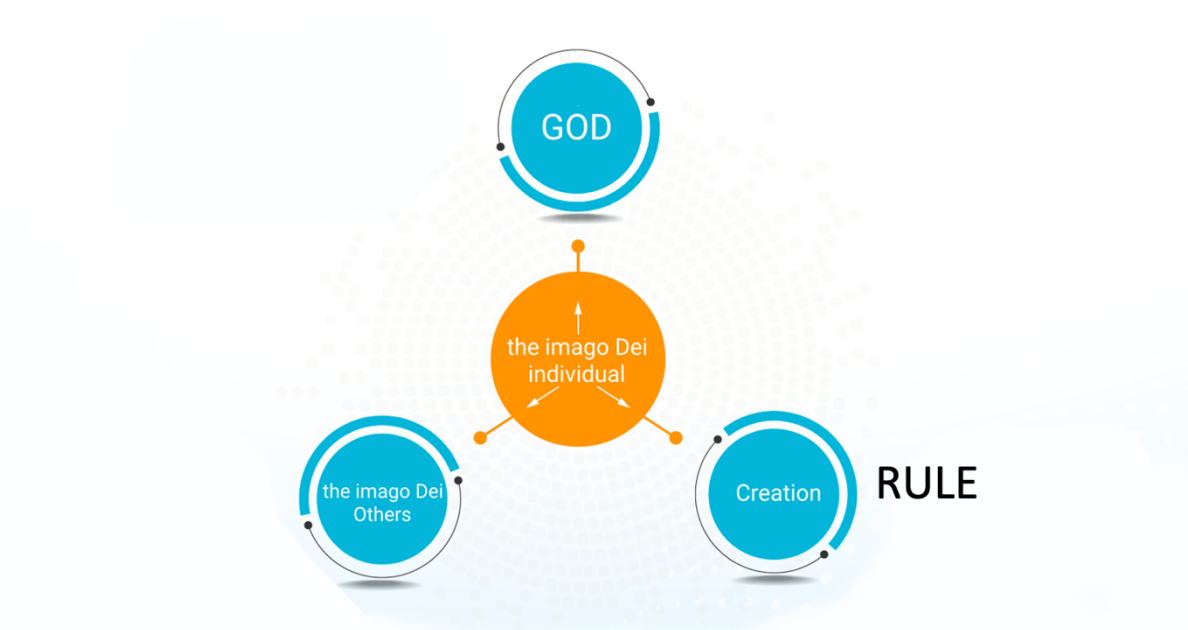
A man cannot govern a nation if he cannot govern a city; he cannot govern a city if he cannot govern a family; he cannot govern a family unless he can govern himself; and he cannot govern himself unless his passions are subject to reason. – Hugo Grotius

5. Implicit in God’s command to rule **is to develop and steward the body, mind and spirit that God has entrusted to each person.** This command is the foundation for all types of learning and education, for developing self-discipline, for exercise, good nutrition, etc

Not the children of the rich or of the powerful only, but of all alike, boys and girls, both noble and ignoble, rich and poor, in all cities and towns, villages and hamlets, should be sent to school. Education is indeed necessary for all,....
– John Amos Comenius

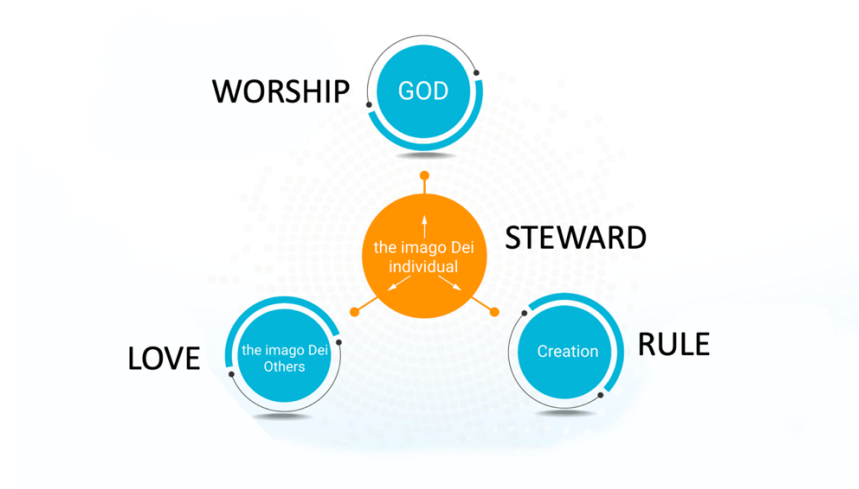
All this to say that at creation God’s “kingdom plan” – his plan for ruling over all the earth – was that the human beings made in his image, male and female, would rule over it on his behalf in full alignment with God’s intentions

The kingdom of God is where people rule over all of creation in a manner according to God’s will and good purpose.



What does it look like when God's will is done or his righteousness is present on earth as it is in heaven?

- We see people worshipping the one true God.
- We see people living as imago Dei, stewarding all aspects of life, valuing and loving one another.
- We see people ruling over life as God intended to reconcile / bring all things into alignment with God's will and intentions.



My fourth and final point about the kingdom of God.

4. The kingdom of God is inseparable from the role of the Spirit of God.

We tend to be clear in our minds about the role of God the Father in the kingdom of God. God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it. He owns it all. It is ultimately his kingdom.

We are clear on the role of God the Son. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is the one who and through his death and resurrection made atonement for our sin and defeated Satan. He now sits at the right hand of the Father with all authority and power.

However, I think we are less clear on the role of God the Spirit. The role of the Spirit is indispensable to and inseparable from the kingdom of God.

In my Christian circle there is widespread understanding that the Spirit of God was active in creation, and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is understood that the Spirit is active in giving us new life – that is life in Christ, the life of the eternal God. We understand that the Spirit seals us for the day of redemption – the Spirit is the safeguard of our salvation. We know that the Spirit is active in revealing the word of God to us. Finally, we know that the Spirit is active in the “sign” gifts – praying in tongues and the interpretation of this pray, healing, and the casting out of demons.

What I hear less preached and talked about is the role of the Spirit in enabling people to live the Kingdom life. That is to live and function as God purposes us to as his people in his kingdom now. That is, to live lives of worship, love, stewardship and dominion in this broken world. To live lives that are co-ruling with God in his work to reconcile all things to himself.

This is the inseparable role of the Spirit of God in the Kingdom.

Paul was well aware of the challenge. In Romans 7 he wrote:

“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.
Romans 7:15

...

Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am!

Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

Romans 7:21-25

In Romans 8 he gives the solution.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2 (NIV)

The mind governed by the flesh is death,
but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.
Romans 8:6 (NIV)

We see the Spirit active in empowering people in the Old Testament. This is not just a New Testament phenomenon.

Bezalel, leader of the temple craftsman.

“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. Exodus 31:2-5

Joshua

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the **Spirit of wisdom** because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites obeyed him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. Deuteronomy 34:9

[The Spirit of wisdom is the Spirit of the Lord. Isaiah 11:2]

King Saul had two really good days. Both due to the Spirit of God on him.

And **the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul** when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. ...**And they,...struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day.** ... So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly. 1 Samuel 11:6,14,15

David

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. **And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.** 1 Samuel 16:13

Daniel

This dream I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw. And you, O Belteshazzar, tell me the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation, **but you are able, for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.**"

Daniel 4:18

In the New Testament we see the Spirit active in the life of Jesus the Son.

Jesus is anointed empowered by the Spirit of God

Jesus is conceived by the Spirit

Matthew 1:18

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.
And **the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,**
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Isaiah 11:1 -2

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,
"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
...And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
Luke 4: 17, 18, 21

The Spirit rests on Jesus

Then John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and resting on Him.
John 1:32

Jesus – full of the Holy Spirit

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Luke 4:1

Jesus empowered by the Spirit

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. Luke 4:14

The power and presence of the Spirit of God in Jesus enabled him to carry out his ministry – his kingdom work.

We human beings especially need the Spirit of God to live Kingdom lives. It is impossible otherwise. The Spirit of God is inseparable from living the Kingdom.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God (through His Spirit) has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. Romans 8:2-3

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

The Spirit of God empowers and enables us to live Kingdom lives.

In closing, I would like to leave you with four passages about the role of the Spirit in the kingdom of God.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put my Spirit in you and move you
to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.
Ezekiel 36:26-27

God will put his Spirit in you and move you to do the right thing, to live in alignment with his good will and ways. How great is that?!

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.
They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.
Isaiah 44:3-4 (NIV)

What an amazing promise to claim for our children and grandchildren! We may fall short as parents, but the Spirit of God will make them like the fruit trees by the river.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out,
 “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.
 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said,
 ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
 Now this he said about the Spirit,
 whom those who believed in him were to receive,
 for as yet the Spirit had not been given,
 because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37

How clear this is! Not only does Jesus promise to give the Spirit, but in turn, the Spirit will flow out of us to others and into this broken world like rivers of living water.

Ezekiel 47

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.

As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. He asked me, “Son of man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Ezekiel 47

This lengthy passage gives us a dynamic picture of how the Spirit of God brings life and flourishing to and through people into this world.

The increasing depth of the river. This speaks of a greater presence and work of the Spirit over time. Plus, a greater presence of the Spirit through the ever-expanding church.

Wherever the river flows, everything lives. The Spirit brings life, it brings flourishing to every aspect of life. It's not just a spiritual impact!

The tree of life growing on both banks of the river. Jesus is that tree of life, but when we receive him, we become the flow of the tree of life to the world around us. [For more about people with fruit and leaves by flowing streams in the Bible, see Psalms 1 and Jeremiah 17]

The fruit never fails and the leaves never wither because the stream of the Spirit flowing to the tree. We are called to be fruitful in Genesis 1 and John 15.

All kinds of fish -- all kinds of fruit trees. This speaks of people redeemed from all ethnic groups and all nations who are now bearing good fruit and bringing healing to the nations.

Revelation 22

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

Revelation 22

What strikes me here is the same river and trees we saw in Ezekiel 47 only now fully realized in the coming of Christ.

The phrase that again catches my attention is that the trees are continually fruitful and the leaves are for the healing of the nations.

In closing, we know from Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13 that there will be good seeds who are the people of the kingdom and there will be weeds or people of the evil one. Both will increase in this world.

The question for the good seed is will it yield good fruit for the nurturing and flourishing of nations? Will it have leaves that do not wither and are for the healing of the nations? The answer is only by taking in the living water, the Spirit of God, that flows from the throne of God and of the lamb. This is the kingdom of God.