

KINGDOM CITIZENS

A Weekly Guide to Walking in Radical Devotion

Week 1: Introduction

It's been said that the problem most Christians face is that they still have not decided to truly follow Jesus. I think that's true, true for me anyways. But I don't think that works anymore, not for me, not for you and not for a community of people called the Church. 2020 has been a year most of us will be happy to see fade into the twilight of history. The global pandemic set off a series of events that has affected every person on earth. Every system has been challenged, every idea has been contemplated and every effort has been made to get back to normal. Yet we continue not to know what the future holds, and as of this writing, no cure or fix has been found.

Another way to see 2020 is as the year God pulled back the curtain and revealed how fragile our world really is. As COVID-19 poked holes in the utopian dream of human progress, God also showed us how much we need Him. We have made so much progress, and it's still not enough. We are also facing one of the most contested presidential elections ever seen, and Americans are deeply polarized over their politics. Everything seems to be political, and politics seems to be everything.

For Jesus people, this is the world that Jesus has put us in, the time when the Father pre-ordained for us to live. God is not surprised at how chaotic the world feels to us. In fact, it is in the midst of that chaos that Jesus says to us these words from Matthew's Gospel:

But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

I think this is one of Jesus' most important promises, and one we rarely take Him up on. If we seek His Kingdom before everything else we set our hearts on, above everything else we set our hopes on, beyond everything else that we place our security in, He promises to provide everything we need and give us those things as well.

Kingdom Citizens is more than a series we're preaching through as a church this fall. It is the identity of every single follower of Jesus. It is your right, your privilege, your passport and your agenda on earth. The Church is the one place in the entire world where Jesus' Lordship, His kingly rule and reign over our lives and all things, is supposed to be uncontested. The world we live in is broken, fallen and groaning for its full redemption through Christ. The powers and authorities of darkness are directly opposed to Jesus and His Kingdom. At every turn there is denial and disregard for Christ, but *in the Church?! We are the one place where we celebrate Jesus as our King and worship Him rather than oppose Him.*

What is at stake when the very people who call themselves by the name of Jesus have still not decided in their hearts to follow Him? Well, nothing good. The sad truth is we seek something else, someone else, anything else, because we are seekers at the core, and once we find that lesser thing, we put our hope, security and essentially *faith* in that thing.

The end result is a church that doesn't look much different than the world around us. We talk the same, think the same, treat each other the same, disagree the same and are the same.

Only we are NOT the same. We have been transferred into the new Kingdom. We have

been given a new allegiance and a new way of being human that looks like Jesus, talks like Jesus and loves like Jesus, because it is Jesus who enlivens us by His very own Spirit and empowers us to seek Him above everything else.

That is what this guide is for—to revive our affection for Christ and to embolden us to live radical lives seeking Jesus and His Kingdom first, and banking all our hopes on His promise to give us everything we need.

Each guide has a short thought and a few days' worth of Scripture passages to study. It also includes prayers you can pray.

This guide is a supplement to our Sunday messages, and it is meant to be discussed and prayed through with another person or two. While we can't gather like we once did, I want to encourage you to continue to gather. It doesn't matter how you do it—online, on the phone, in person if you're feeling ok with that—the point is to go through this with another brother or sister in Christ. We were made to be on this journey together. We are Kingdom Citizens, plural not singular, and we need each other. So reach out to someone before you start. Ask if you can connect to pray together, talk about what you're learning and most importantly seek the Kingdom together, believing and hoping in the King who has already won the victory and will complete the good work He has started in us.

-Pastor Rick

Turn around, the Kingdom is Here

We often talk about what Jesus came to the world to *DO*. We know He lived a perfect life, died as a substitution for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day. But before all of that, Jesus came to the world to *SAY* something. He came to teach us something. What He taught us was the most complete picture of what it means to be a new kind of human on earth with a unique set of values, a distinct perspective on most everything and a particular vision of life in relationship with the Father, Son and Spirit. He called it the Kingdom of God. His message was pretty simple...

Turn around and quit going the wrong way because the Kingdom of God is here....

That is my paraphrase but it's pretty close to the actual Greek...

The word "repent" in English, and the word "metanoia" in the Greek, essentially mean *to turn around*. The word carries with it moral, intellectual and emotional implications, so it's not just about what direction to go.

There is a reason Jesus chose the word metanoia/repent. He knew something about how far off-course we are prone to go, and He knew that His Kingdom and His ways would be a radical departure from the way of life most of us are accustomed to living.

It was radical then. It is radical now. The invitation to follow Jesus and embrace His Kingdom way leads us into a whole-person life change. When we follow Jesus, it changes the way we think. Our own perspectives and the political ideas we thought were best are called into question because of what Jesus has to say.

The call to the Kingdom is a radical departure from what we are used to emotionally as well.

The way we thought and talked about people we disagree with or people we don't like is radically different from how Jesus tells us to think about and treat them. In fact, it is so radical that the Jesus way seems upside down to our thinking. Where we have felt justified in ignoring certain people at best, hating them at worst, Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for them.

The Kingdom Jesus brings us into also requires us to repent (turn around) from the way we have understood God and salvation as well. It turns out God doesn't favor the people who have it all together, but the ones who are weeping, mourning and a complete mess. He calls blessed, joyful and fulfilled. The Kingdom of Jesus saves the best seats in the house for those who aren't invited to most of the shows the world puts on.

This is one thing we know for certain as we listen to what Jesus said when He came to earth. We can't even begin to understand what He is talking about until we turn around and quit going in the wrong direction. We start with repentance because this act of humble obedience actually turns the key that unlocks the door to the Kingdom of God.

This Week's Scripture Passages:

Consider each passage and reflect on what it means to hear and obey God's voice through His Word.

Matthew 4:17 "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

Matthew 6: 28-34 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Colossians 1:13 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."

1Thess 2:11-12 "For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."

Philippians 3:20-21 "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Reflection

Take some time this week in prayer to reflect on these questions and answer them honestly before God and another brother or sister in Christ, inviting Jesus to change us through the Holy Spirit.

- How would you describe the Kingdom of God to someone who asked you what it was?
- How does this description of repentance as “turning around” differ from what you may have previously thought of repentance?
- If Jesus is saying these words to you, what do you need to repent of in order to move towards Jesus and His Kingdom? Think of three areas:
 - In your thinking
 - In your feelings
 - In your spirit/faith

Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

You do not delight in sacrifice,
or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

Psalms 51:1-4, 11-12, 16-17 NIV

Prayer Points

- Pray for God’s Church to awaken to our true identity as Kingdom citizens.
- Pray for God’s Kingdom to break in through His people in our city in a way that honors Jesus and displays His love and power.
- Pray for our church pastors and leaders—for their strength, health and spiritual perseverance in this season
- Pray for those who are hurting and grieving loss during this time—those who lost loved ones, those who have lost homes, those who feel lost in such a challenging time.
- Pray for the peace of our city to break in with power, and for hearts and minds to be filled with mercy and grace toward one another.