

## **Watch**

*Refer to this viewer guide as you watch video session 6.*

The church is God's mechanism to hold back the forces of evil that would seek to devastate a community, a culture, and a group of people.

The church is the unity of God's people to form God's agency in the world to reflect His presence in history collectively.

The role of the church is to legislate from heaven to history. We are God's legislative body.

The way you know your church is His church is that hell is losing and not winning.

If God is your problem, only God is your solution.

The keys of the kingdom are to unlock heaven's answers to earth's issues through the church.

If we're not making disciples, it's not the church.

The job of the church, as it builds disciples, is to infiltrate and affect the community and the culture in which it is situated.

Our job as salt is to be so influential in the culture that we make people want to take a drink of Living Water.

You are to display the influence of being ruled by the King.

A good work is a biblically authorized thing for which God gets the credit.

*Discuss the video with your group, using these questions.*

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14. Why does God always start with His people and not with governments and ruling authorities to bring about change?

Read Matthew 16:18 and 1 Peter 2:5. What did Jesus mean when He referred to the church as a rock?

Dr. Evans said the Greek word for *church* denotes “more than just information and inspiration; it includes the concept of legislation.” In what ways is the church God’s legislative body to bring His rule to culture?

Read Matthew 6:10. When we pray this in the Lord’s Prayer, what are we asking God to do?

Read 2 Chronicles 15:3-5. What problems are you facing that you’re looking for a government to solve instead of God? How can we apply verse 4 today?

Dr Evans said, “The keys of the kingdom have only been given to the church.” Why is it so tempting for us to use political, social, economic, and psychological keys instead of the kingdom keys God has given us?

On the other hand, why do so many Christians wish to stay in their huddle and never enter the game?

How did Dr. Evans describe the job of the church in this session? How was that job description different from the way you’ve thought about the church in the past?

Read Matthew 5:13-16. What do the images of salt and light teach us about how the church is to function in the world?

How can your church become a preview for the coming kingdom of Christ?

## *Personal Experience*

### **Kingdom Disciples Together**

As we've discovered, discipleship is the growth process by which Christians learn to bring all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. This growth doesn't happen overnight. Even though your salvation is complete the moment you trust Christ for salvation, becoming a disciple is a lifelong process. But it's also a process that shouldn't stop with you.

That's why discipleship includes a developmental process in the local church by which Christians are taken from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity so that they can reproduce the discipleship process with others. The Bible calls this process being "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom. 8:29).

In other words, the process of discipleship by which believers become Christlike is designed to be repeated again and again until Jesus has many brothers and sisters who look like Him. The local church is one of the primary locations where this discipling process occurs.

You and I can't participate in this process if we're living as isolated Christians. God placed us in a body of people called the church so that together we can accomplish the mission of discipling other believers. The church is God's place to produce disciples who will then influence our communities. As kingdom disciples think, talk, and act like Jesus, the world is influenced as well.

As we finish our time studying the overarching, comprehensive role of discipleship in the lives of believers, let's look at how discipleship is to be carried out in the local church, what your part is in that process, and how discipleship can affect a community.

## *Day 1*

### **The Church's Role**

Do you enjoy microwave popcorn, particularly while watching a good movie or football game? What always amazes me about popcorn is the complete transformation of once hard, coarse seeds into soft, delectable puffs of popcorn. This metamorphosis occurs because the microwave heats the moisture inside every seed until it turns to steam. Once the moisture becomes steam, the pressure becomes so great that the shell can no longer contain it, and an explosion occurs. What was once inedible and indigestible is now tasty, edible, and delicious.

Environment is everything. When the microwave performs its intended function, the seeds of corn are transformed.

What a microwave is to popcorn, the local church is to Christians' growth as kingdom disciples. The local church is the context and environment God has created to transform Christians into what we were created and redeemed to be: fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

**Read the following verses and summarize the way each of them applies to the local church.**



**Matthew 16:18-19**

**Ephesians 1:22-23**

**Ephesians 3:10**

**1 Timothy 3:14-15**

A kingdom church is:

A group of believers who covenant together to disciple their members in order to model and transfer heaven's values in history

Like a foreign embassy that officially represents the homeland, the church is to serve as God's embassy on earth that represents heaven. An embassy is a location in a foreign land where the laws and regulations of the homeland apply. It's a little bit of the home country a long way from home.

**How is the concept of an embassy similar to the way the church is to represent the kingdom of God (see 2 Cor. 5:20)?**

**How does your church reflect God’s values in all it does? In what ways could your church reflect them more clearly?**

The purpose of every local body of believers is to become a kingdom church making kingdom disciples who are having a kingdom impact individually and corporately in the world. In fact, I believe so completely in this goal of the local church that when we founded our church in 1976, I drafted our mission statement to read: *Discipling the Church to Impact the World*.

If a restaurant isn’t producing great food, it has failed, no matter how good the building or the kitchen looks, because what the restaurant produces determines its legitimacy. Similarly, if the church isn’t producing disciples, it has failed. God’s goal is for people to be disciplined through His church, and the only proof that people are being disciplined is that they’re changing into the likeness of Jesus. If they aren’t changing and maturing in their spiritual lives, that means the discipleship process isn’t occurring.

It’s obvious when children are physically growing because they demonstrate evidence of change in height, weight, and ability to care for themselves. Development is taking place as the child grows into an adult. In our spiritual lives that development is called discipleship.

**Compose two definitions of *discipleship*, one for individuals and one for the church.**

**How is your church taking an active role in your discipleship?**

In our churches today we can get so caught up in programs and structure that we lose sight of the priority of discipleship. Yet all the programs in the world don't matter if they aren't increasing kingdom disciples. That must be the ultimate goal of a church.

A church can have a number of moving parts, an established structure, large buildings, and a multitude of programs, but if the Holy Spirit isn't free to lead people in an ongoing process of discipleship, the church itself is actually getting in the way of God's kingdom goals for His body of believers.

Churches must focus on discipleship, not just membership. The church must do everything it can to create a large number of people who are prepared and equipped to infiltrate the culture as visible, verbal representatives of the kingdom of God. If it doesn't, we've allowed what God created to act as an authoritative entity in culture to become little more than a social club.

**Read Acts 1–2. What kind of influence was the early church having on the culture?**

**Read Acts 2:43. Are many “wonders and signs” commonly seen in local churches today and in their impact on the community? Why do you think this is so?**

**Read Acts 2:44-45. Compare the initial local church's freedom to provide for one another in tangible ways with the focus of many local churches today. How can the contemporary church learn from the early church in order to make a greater impact on society?**

The early church modeled a spirit of faith, coupled with a heart of giving that stands out from many churches since that time. As a result, the impact the Holy Spirit made through the early church was enormous.

Although programs and events are nice, returning to a church model that focuses heavily on discipleship would bring about a greater influence in our culture. In His Word God has given us the model for the way He designed the church to function. Each kingdom disciple has a responsibility to bring about God's purpose for the church through his or her own individual sphere of influence.

### *Prayer*

Faithful God, thank You for establishing the church to leave a lasting footprint on society. You've set the church as a beacon of light in the midst of darkness. I pray that You'll raise up great leaders in the churches across our land and around the world who'll emphasize the need for discipleship in all the church does. Help me make an impact for kingdom discipleship in my local church. In Christ's name, amen.

## *Day 2*

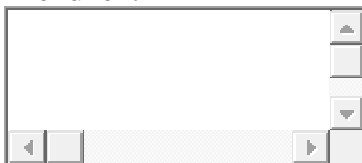
### **The Four Vital Experiences of the Church**

One of the most dynamic, influential churches of all time is described in Acts 2, which we read in yesterday's lesson. This church was vibrant and alive. It owned no buildings and had no loud speakers or parking lots. It didn't even have a complete Bible yet, just the Old Testament. Bookstores, brands, or Christian radio stations didn't exist, nor did full-time children's ministries, singles ministries, or couples ministries. None of those programs were viewed as essential. Yet this church was on fire because it had the Holy Spirit Himself. In fact, what I often fear for my own church and churches across our land today is that we've essentially programmed God out of the building. In our search for success in ministry, we may have missed the point entirely.

One reason the church in Acts was so dynamic is that it got off to a great start. Jesus had told the disciples in Acts 1:8, "Don't have church until the Holy Spirit shows up" (my paraphrase). They obeyed Him, and the Spirit showed up in great power at Pentecost.

Acts 2 reveals that this church was wildly influential in living out the reality of being Jesus' disciples. It did this through four vital, Spirit-inspired experiences that are necessities for churches that would follow Christ in kingdom discipleship. These experiences include outreach, teaching, fellowship, and worship.

**List and define in your own words each of the four vital experiences of the local church.**



1.

- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**OUTREACH.** If you're going to follow Christ as His disciple, you must be a witness. Witnessing is the way the church conducts outreach. Whether in your actions or your words, you must represent the Lord in all you do. The believers who were in the upper room and who received the Spirit on Pentecost became witnesses. The result of their witness and Peter's sermon on that special day was the addition of three thousand new believers to the body of Christ.

Notice that these three thousand people didn't come because of an evangelistic program. They came because God's people were overwhelmed by the experience of the presence of His Spirit. They were excited about Jesus. Their excitement erupted in great outreach, and many people were saved.

The early church's witness went beyond words:

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.  
Acts 2:43

God witnessed not only in word through His disciples but also in deed. They demonstrated the truthfulness and authenticity of the gospel in their works, which are the hallmarks of outreach.

**Read Romans 10:14. Why is it essential to tell people about Jesus?**

**Why is it important for church members to make evangelism and outreach a priority?  
With whom are you currently sharing the gospel or have done so in the past?**

**TEACHING.** Along with their dynamic witness, the early believers were growing in their knowledge of God's Word. They were continually exposing themselves to the information and application of God's Word through teaching. We read:

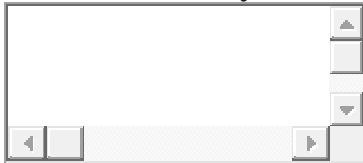
They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.  
Acts 2:42



The believers were being taught “day by day” (v. 46), just as people were being saved day by day. Do you notice the correlation? People were being saved every day. The followers were devoting themselves to the teaching of the Word every day. One had an impact on the other. To live as a kingdom disciple, the Word of God must be as necessary and desirable for the spirit as food is for the body.

Each of us—not just those with the high calling of teaching God’s Word—needs to commit our time and energy to the study of God’s Word through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s job is to reveal the Word to us. Jesus said the Spirit would remind us of all He taught (see John 14:26).

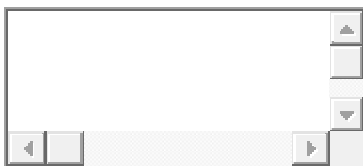
**Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. What four things does the Word of God accomplish?**



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

To acquire a taste for Bible study, you’ll have to discipline yourself to sit down and read, whether or not you feel like reading. The more time you spend in the Word, the more you’ll understand. And the more you understand, the more you’ll want to read. You know you’re becoming a kingdom disciple when you’re in the Word day by day. Instead of waiting until Sunday so that somebody else can feed you, you’re learning to feed yourself. You’re reading Scripture, meditating on it, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide you. When the Word of God is precious to you, you’re on your way. Church should light the fire, but you must fan the flame.

**Will you make a commitment to study God’s Word on a daily basis if you aren’t already doing so?**



**FELLOWSHIP.** The third vital experience of the church is found in Acts 2:42. Along with devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, the believers were devoted to fellowship. The Greek word for *fellowship* literally means “to share something in common with others.” It means being part of a common family of sorts.

Fellowship is sharing our lives with other believers. You’ll never grow to full maturity in Jesus Christ all alone. There’s no such thing as a Lone Ranger Christian who’s a growing, active disciple of Christ. It’s not “My Father who is in heaven.” Jesus instructed us to pray, “Our Father

who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). You can’t become a disciple of Jesus Christ independently of others.

The necessity of Christian fellowship is one reason the church is so important. It’s the fireplace where one log touches another and the fire is continually rekindled. In fact, the church in Jerusalem shared not only their lives but also their possessions, meeting any needs that arose in the body of Christ (see Acts 2:44-45). Sharing our resources is a part of fellowship too.

**Read Ephesians 4:16. How does fellowship increase the strength of the whole body of Christ?**



**WORSHIP.** The fourth vital experience of the church is to provide a context for worship to occur. The believers devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread [celebrating the Lord’s Supper] and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). In verse 46 we see that they were going to the temple every day and continually “praising God” (v. 47).

Worship is recognizing God for who He is, what He has done, and what we’re trusting Him to do. God is the focus of worship. Praising God, worshipping Him, and celebrating Him for who He is and what He has done get God’s attention. God responds to our worship, both public and private.

If you want God’s power in your life, worship must be part of your daily communion with Him. Celebrate God and exult in Him for who He is, what He has done, and what you’re trusting Him to do.

#### *Prayer*

Lord, thank You for the four vital experiences You’ve established and provided through the local church. I ask You to strengthen each ministry of my church so that it will be more effective in making disciples. Help me identify areas of my discipleship in which I need to grow as well. In Christ’s name, amen.

### Day 3

## Biblical Justice in God's Kingdom

Each of the four jurisdictions in God's kingdom—personal, family, church, and community—is called to promote justice and responsibility under God in its own distinct way. Biblical justice seeks to protect individual liberty while promoting personal responsibility.

Biblical justice provides society with a divine frame of reference from which to operate. The word *justice* in Scripture means “to prescribe the right way.” Since God is just (see Deut. 32:4) and is the ultimate lawgiver (see Jas. 4:12), His laws and judgments are just and righteous (see Pss. 19:7-9; 111:7-8). They're to be applied without partiality (see Deut. 1:17; Lev. 19:15; Num. 15:16) because justice identifies the moral standard by which God measures human conduct (see Isa. 26:7). The government's role, then, is to be His instrument of divine justice by impartially establishing, reflecting, and applying His divine standards of justice in society (see Ps. 72:1-2,4; 2 Sam. 8:15; Deut. 4:7-8).

Biblical justice, therefore, is the equitable, impartial application of the rule of God's moral law in society. Whether exercising itself through economic, political, social, or criminal justice, the one constant in all four realms is the understanding and application of God's moral law within the social realm.

**Why is it critical to promote both liberty and responsibility when seeking justice on someone's behalf?**

**What issues can occur when only liberty is promoted without personal responsibility?**

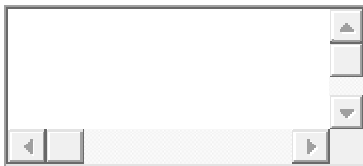
Repeatedly throughout Scripture God reveals Himself as a defender and deliverer. The exodus from Egypt dramatically portrays His execution of biblical justice on behalf of a group of people who were oppressed. Later, when God gave His laws to Israel, He reminded them of His deliverance:

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.  
Exodus 22:21

God consistently tied either a presence or an absence of biblical justice to a presence or an absence of His blessing. For example, Israel’s worship was rejected because of an absence of justice in society (see Amos 5:21-24). The Israelites were taken into captivity and held in bondage because of their rebellion against God. God had repeatedly told them to turn from their sin, practice “justice and righteousness” (Ezek. 33:14,16), and pay back what was stolen (see vv. 10-33).

The prophets of the Old Testament regularly condemned the people for their social injustices as well. These social condemnations were viewed not only as a secular affront to communities but also as a spiritual affront to God (see Zech. 7:9-12). The prophets specifically instructed God’s people, exiled in Babylon, to seek the welfare of the secular city and to pray for its well-being so that it would become a better place to live, work, and raise their families (see Jer. 29:4-7).

### **What’s your role or the role of your church in carrying out biblical justice?**



The role of the church, as a participant in God’s sociopolitical kingdom and as the bride of Christ, is to execute divine justice on behalf of the defenseless, poor, and oppressed. Scripture distinctly relates biblical justice to these particular groups because they most clearly represent the helpless in society who bear the brunt of injustices.

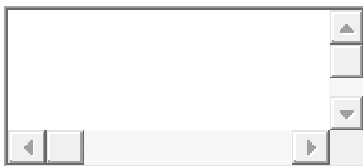
The church isn’t to mistreat the poor (see Jas. 2:15-16) or to practice class and racial prejudice (see Gal. 2:11-14). Rather, the church is commissioned to meet the physical needs of the have-nots within it. However, meeting these needs isn’t to be confused with subsidizing irresponsibility, which the Bible strictly prohibits (see Prov. 6:9-11; 10:4; 13:18; 24:30-34; 2 Thess. 3:10). Even in the biblical practice of gleaning—leaving portions of a harvest for the poor to collect (see Lev. 19:9-10; Ruth 2)—the poor needed to exercise responsibility in collecting what had been left behind. The amount of food that was obtained depended on the amount of work that was put forth.

The Bible clearly sees spiritual ministry and social responsibility working hand in hand. When the two are properly connected and integrated, people become productive citizens of society while also being prepared for life in eternity.

**Read Leviticus 19:9-10. What do these verses teach us about God’s nature in desiring to provide for the poor?**



**In what ways were the poor and needy required to be responsible in acquiring their food (see gleaning in practice in Ruth 2)?**



A strong biblical connection exists between our knowledge of and relationship with God and our concern for the poor and oppressed (see Jer. 22:16; Matt. 25:34-40). Micah 6:8 says:

He has told you, O man,  
what is good;  
and what does the Lord  
require of you  
but to do justice,  
to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly  
with your God?  
Micah 6:8

We “do justice” in a humble relation with a just God as a natural reflection of His presence in our lives. Religion becomes authentic when it manifests itself in ministry to others in need.

The second most frequently mentioned subject in Scripture, after money, is the poor. More than three hundred verses directly relate to the treatment of the poor, strategies to aid the poor,

God's intentions for the poor, and what our perspective should be on the poor. God cares about the poor particularly because they're the most vulnerable to suffering from injustice.

Ultimately, doing justice fulfills the two greatest commandments given to us by Jesus—loving God and loving others (see Matt. 22:37-40). Christ summarized, "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (v. 40). Both the content and the meaning of the Law and the Prophets centered not only on someone's relationship with God but also on whether the person was rightly related to his neighbor. The implication is that an understanding of and love for God that doesn't also express itself in love for one's neighbor can't satisfy the biblical definition of *love*.

Thus, Jesus linked our attitude toward God (spiritual) with our attitude toward others (social). When asked who our neighbor is, Jesus responded by telling the story of the good Samaritan, pointing out that our neighbor is the person whose need we see and whose need we meet (see Luke 10:25-37). Jesus concluded the story by exhorting us to love as the good Samaritan did.

**In what ways can you bring God's kingdom to bear on your community by seeking His justice for the poor and marginalized?**

**What ministries does your church have to establish justice?**

*Prayer*

Lord, open my eyes to recognize the legitimate needs of the people around me. Burden my heart with the needs that burden Yours. Show me practical ways I can help others and ways my church can better reflect Your desire to minister to the poor and needy. Forgive us for neglecting to make biblical justice a priority as Your followers. In Christ's name, amen.

### *Day 4*

#### **The Gates of Hell**

America has faced a number of tragic storms, such as Sandy, Harvey, and Irma. Yet one of these storms stands out in my mind, not because of the force of its winds but because of the number of lives that were lost. Its name was Katrina.

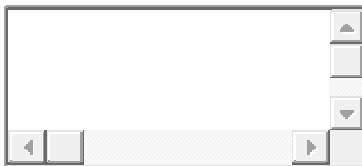
When Hurricane Katrina made its appearance in New Orleans, the storm was bad, but it wasn't the ultimate problem. Katrina had come into town, done its thing, and was on its way out. The trouble didn't come from Katrina. The trouble came when the levee broke. That's when the city flooded.

The job of the levee had been to hold the water back. If the levee had held, Katrina would have been remembered as just another strong storm in a long line of others rather than as the disaster it became.

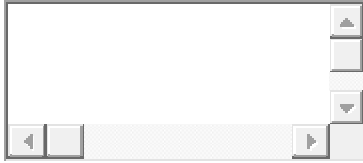
God has placed a levee in history. He calls it the church. The church is intentionally designed to hold back Satan's forces that are being unleashed against humankind. When the church functions as it was intended, even the strongest forces can't break it down. The gates of hell won't overpower it. In fact, when the church is being the true biblical church, it will storm in and overpower the gates of hell.

But if hell is on the doorstep, in the lobby, or in the pew of the American church—and many would argue that it is—it's because the body of Christ has failed to join together across racial, class, and gender lines as a unified whole to pursue a kingdom agenda. We know this is true because Jesus made it clear that He would build His church in such a way that the gates of hell wouldn't overpower it (see Matt. 16:18).

**In what ways is hell overpowering the influence of the church on culture and communities?**



**How does unity in the body of Christ help the church reflect God's light in a world of darkness?**



Jesus went on to say:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

**Matthew 16:19**

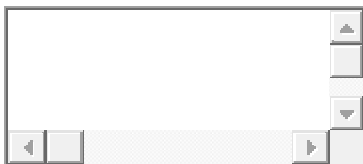
Jesus said He would give the church the “keys of the kingdom of heaven.” What do you do with keys? You gain access (see Isa. 22:22). Have you ever been in a hurry and couldn’t find your keys? That means that you’re not going anywhere anytime soon. Or if you’re like me, you have a number of keys on your keychain, but you’ve forgotten what some of them unlock. Those keys are no longer of any benefit to you.

Jesus said the church He’s building will have the keys to the kingdom of God, giving it the authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven. The keys to the kingdom are the church’s authority to make disciples and call people out of darkness and into light in Jesus’ name. Binding and loosing refer to the church’s authority in the world to bring about God’s kingdom rule.

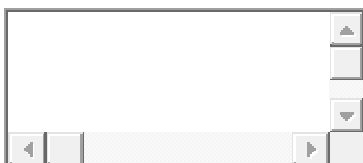
The implications of this truth are staggering. If we could only grasp the potential of this reality, there would be no end to the impact we, as the church, could have on our land and in the world.

Why aren’t we experiencing this power and authority in the church today? Because we aren’t operating the way Jesus designed His church to function. We’re trying to use our own church keys to unlock kingdom doors, and we’re finding that they don’t open much of anything at all.

**Describe the difference between church keys and kingdom keys.**



**In what ways is the church to have a transformational impact on the culture at large?**





**In your opinion, is the church fully using that power at this point in history? Why or why not?**



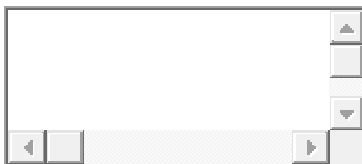
The keys Jesus is giving the church are the only keys that will work. These aren't program keys, ministry keys, sermon keys, or song keys. These are the keys that belong to the kingdom. So if our churches aren't kingdom-minded—if we've failed to comprehend and adopt a kingdom theology, ideology, and methodology—we won't be able to open heaven's doors. We'll have prayer meetings, preaching, songs, and seminars but no authority. We'll have no authority on earth because authority is directly tied to the kingdom. The keys belong to the kingdom.

The church doesn't exist for the church. The moment the church exists for the church, it's no longer being the church. God created the church for the benefit of the kingdom. God established the church to give us the keys to another realm. He didn't place the church here to be popular.

Our society isn't changing today because the church has settled for constructing buildings and programs instead of accessing the authority of the kingdom. We have church, but we don't transformation. Unless the church is kingdom-minded, it isn't being the church Christ came to build. In fact, Jesus mentioned church only three times in His earthly ministry, and all three times are recorded in the kingdom- focused Book of Matthew. The word *kingdom*, however, is found fifty-four times in the Book of Matthew alone.

Yet surprisingly, we often hear more about the church than the kingdom. We plant churches rather than promote the kingdom. Our seminaries teach our future leaders how to do church rather than how to be about the kingdom. Because the church and the kingdom are interconnected, we must focus on both.

**In what ways have you been guilty of making church more about your preferences than the desires of the kingdom?**



#### *Prayer*

Lord, I want to live as Your kingdom disciple in everything I do and say. Please bring me to a new level of commitment and surrender. Equip me and my church to bring about lasting change and transformation in the areas we can influence. Thank You for the power and authority You've given the church. In Christ's name, amen.

## Day 5

### Kingdom Impact in the Culture

Jesus' gospel includes both the spiritual and the social (see Lev. 25; Luke 4:18-37). It's designed to build God's kingdom rather than to save the world's systems. It's designed to be a model of a different system, one created by God, which provides a divine alternative so that the world can see what God can do in broken humanity.

All the social activity in the world can't solve the world's problems. In the long term, social action is limited; lasting solutions can come only from the kingdom of God because that's where Christ's sacrifice guarantees lasting freedom.

Unless social action is based on spiritual discipleship, it will lack the power for long-term transformation. This is because behind every physical problem lies a spiritual reality. By addressing the underlying theological or spiritual issues along with the physical, we can achieve long-term solutions because we're addressing the root of the problem, not just its physical manifestation.

Secular society doesn't understand the spiritual realities that cause physical, social, political, and economic problems. Therefore, secular society is limited in its ability to influence and transform society. Lasting impact comes from God when His rule reigns supreme and His law of love governs all.

**Name some ways secular society and government have attempted to create short-term fixes rather than long-term solutions.**

**Is church responsible for influencing the culture in a comprehensive manner? Why or why not?**

The apostle John stressed the connection between love for God and love for others when he said:

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

**1 John 4:20**

John reminds us that this love is to be expressed through actions, not just words, as it’s carried out “in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

James emphasized that we should show this love to the poor and oppressed as special objects of God’s concern:

Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

James 2:5

James also defined true religion by the way we treat widows and orphans.

**Read James 1:27. Identify contemporary groups or individuals who are in positions similar to the widows and orphans of James’s time. What are some ways we can help them through action?**

**In the world of social media that we live in, are we reflecting Christ’s love when we post disparaging, disrespectful comments about other people or other views? Why or why not?**

**In what ways do disrespectful social-media posts intensify the problem rather than cultivate an environment in which people work together toward a solution?**

Jesus' earthly ministry to people consistently modeled the integration of the spiritual and the social. He taught spiritual truth as He dwelled among the oppressed (see John 4:39-40), ate with them (see Luke 5:27-30), comforted them (see 12:22-34), fed them (see 9:10-17), restored them (see 5:12-15), and healed them (see 7:18-23) to fulfill His Father's will. All of Jesus' good works were clearly connected to the spiritual purposes of God (see Matt. 4:23-24).

When Jesus delivered His great Sermon on the Mount, He instructed His disciples to be the salt of the earth and light to the world (see Matt. 5:13-16). Salt was used as a preservative to stop decay, and light was used to dispel darkness. In similar ways, Christ's followers were to influence society for God.

Salt has been used as a preservative for thousands of years. Rubbing it into a piece of meat helps preserve the meat from decay because salt is an antibacterial agent. Roman soldiers in biblical days even received some of their pay in salt. Salt's value became part of the language, which we can see today in the word *salary*, which is derived from the word *salt*. You may be familiar with the expression that someone "isn't worth his salt." A person who didn't do his job right didn't receive his full allocation of salt.

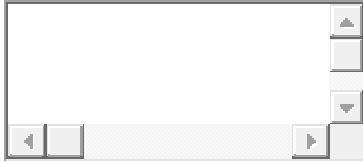
Jesus put His church on earth to act as a preserving influence on a rotting world, to slow down the decay of sin. If Jesus had nothing on earth for His people to do, He would have taken us out of here the moment we trusted Him as Savior.

But salt can't do its job when it's sitting in the shaker. When followers of Jesus Christ are gathered in the house of God, that's salt in the shaker. When the doors open and we go into the world, that's when the shaker should be turned over to shake the salt of God's kingdom where it's needed. If our communities are going to be better and if our country is going to be stronger, the salt must be at work.

**In what ways have churches kept the salt in the shaker in our contemporary culture?**

**Read Matthew 4:23-24. Why did Jesus preach the gospel in the context of meeting physical needs?**

**Name three actions the church can take, either singularly or collectively, to connect meeting physical needs with spreading the truth of the gospel.**



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Jesus also said His disciples are to be light that dispels darkness in the world. Paul told the Ephesians:

You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.  
**Ephesians 5:8**

When believers are walking through the world as children of light, the world has a better opportunity to see things as they really are:

All things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.  
**Ephesians 5:13**

You know how hard it is to sleep when someone comes in and turns the light on in your face. That's the effect we should have on unbelievers who are sleeping the sleep of eternal death.

If you're in a dark room where people are groping for light and you know where the light switch is, it's a waste of time to organize a panel discussion on the effects of darkness or shake your head over how terrible the darkness is. Your assignment is to turn on the light, and the darkness will automatically be overcome.

Jesus went on to say, "Let your light shine before men" (Matt. 5:16). In other words, carry your light out where it's dark so that unsaved people can see it. It would be ridiculous to turn on a lamp and then put something over it to hide its glow.

Yet all too often that's what we do in the church. Our lights burn brightly inside the church, but we're the only ones who benefit from them. Meanwhile, the world outside goes on in darkness. It's impossible to hide a light that's "set on a hill" (v. 14), and the farther the beam reaches, the more people who are affected by it. Our goal as kingdom disciples who make up kingdom-minded churches is to influence our culture for God and for good. Anything less than that doesn't adequately honor our King and His agenda.

### *Prayer*

Lord, give us the strength, insight, and unity we need to make a comprehensive kingdom impact on the culture. Let our light shine so brightly that people respond and are drawn to You for

salvation. Help me live my life as a kingdom disciple, submitting to Your rule in all I do. In Christ's name, amen.