

Growing God's Kingdom

1/15/06

Tomorrow is the national celebration of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, but his birthday would have actually been today. Dr. King would be 77 years old. Some of you may remember him, but for many of us he seems more as an historical figure. He died in 1968 at the age of 39. In that short life he made a great difference in our country and beyond. When he was 35 he became the youngest person to ever receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He served as co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta with his father. His grandfather had been the long time pastor of the church.

From his spiritual depth, he believed that everyone should be treated with respect and dignity. He worked to make a change. King both saw the world as it was and how it could be. He took steps to change the world and sought to do it the right way.

Our theme for the year is "Love God, Love others. Make disciples"

Last week the focus was to 1st accept God's love for us. Before we can adequately love God, love others & make disciples we must accept God's love.

Also as we accept God's love we can dream with God what to do and how to do it.

Martin Luther King Jr, is an example of that. He had a dream or vision of what he wanted to accomplish it. He was committed to God and to that vision. He took steps to realize his dream and the dream lived longer than he did.

Another example is Jesus. A key phrase that Jesus used throughout his ministry was the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. In the gospels, the word kingdom is used 114 times and almost every time it is a reference to the kingdom of God or of Heaven.

What is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Heaven? It includes heaven, but I believe it is more. I believe the kingdom of God is God's reign in one's life, in the world. It will be fully realized in Heaven.

Earlier we prayed the Lord's prayer or the Model prayer. Within that we prayed, "your kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven."

Our goal is for God's kingdom to reign in our lives, our church and our world. That is what Jesus was totally focused on during his life. Matt. 4:12-25

- Building on the work of John
- Being a lone
- His example
- Calling disciples
- Preaching & teaching
- Healing
- Preaching to the masses while mentoring a small group.

Jesus had a vision and a strategy. He only lived 33 years, but he passed on what he was doing to others who carried on his work. His focus was the Kingdom of God eventually it lead to his death on a cross. This was to give us a way to experience God's Kingdom in this life and even more so in the life to come.

I don't want to elevate Martin Luther King to the status of Jesus, but he similarly had a brief focused life and passed his life work on to others. We, too, are to have visions and strategies within our lives, our homes, our work & within our church.

I would suggest that our focus should be like that of Jesus – growing God's Kingdom. This would include growing God's rule in our world and impacting people to fully experience God's Kingdom in Heaven.

This begins on a personal level – establishing God's Kingdom (God's rule) in your life, it is to grow beyond this to your family, your work, our church, and beyond. Sort of like Jesus' statement in Acts. 1:8 “You will receive power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

The beginning point is when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. As Christians we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, but we can be more open to the work and movement of the Holy Spirit or God's rule (Kingdom) within us.

1) The Kingdom of God in Me

What do you need to do for the kingdom of God or God's reign to grow in you? In some ways this can differ with different people. There are, however, certain spiritual disciplines that are really important.

- **prayer** – both talking to God & listening to God
- **reading the Bible** – as a teacher or church leader it can be really significant to study the Bible in preparation for your class lesson or devotion. We are to teach ourselves before we teach others. It is also important to read the Bible just for you and God.

Other things that you can do is to **journal** – write our your prayers, your concerns & how God is working in your life. Read other books that can aid you in your walk with God. For me this could include – turning off the radio when driving so that I can focus on God or taking a walk in the woods or time alone in the sanctuary.

Some people are less contemplative and for some the way for God's Kingdom to grow in you, would be through doing things. We all need to have a balance between the quiet time (prayer, Bible reading, journaling, other readings) and doing things. Some need more of one than the other.

Some things I do that help God's kingdom grow in me include: talking to people about God and their needs, visiting prospects, sick, leading leaders (deacons & others), teaching / preaching, counseling, going on mission trips, and involvement in local mission projects. It also includes corporate worship and singing.

If we are to work at growing God's kingdom, we must first allow God's Kingdom to grow in us. Then what about within our families.

2. Growing God's Kingdom within your Family

What do we need to do in order for God to be the center of our families life? We can't individually make that happen, but we can do our part.

- Model the Christian life
- Don't take things out on family. It is easy to get upset with someone at work or a friend and hold in our feelings then take it out on our family. Be aware of that and work not to take things out on your family.
- Be aware of fatigue. Again when we are tired we may be on good behavior in public, but not around our families. If God is to reign in our family life, we need to be aware of how we treat our family members
- Build them up. Seek to encourage others in your family in doing good things. Work to build their self esteem.
- Prioritize your family.
- Pray together & read the Bible together
- Worship together
- Do ministry together. – possibly a local mission project or even a mission trip with other family members can be really bonding.

We are to put God first in our lives and within our home. Beyond this we are to view our work place and our neighborhoods as mission fields and do our part to build God's kingdom at work and in our neighborhoods.

We are also to work to build God's Kingdom in and through our church.

3. Building God's Kingdom in and through our Church

We may think well the church that is definitely where God does reign, but that is not always the case. If we are to build God's Kingdom in and through the church, we must first totally prioritize God in all that we do – in our worship, in Sunday School, in different groups that we have, ministries, committees – God is to be a focal point and priority in all that we do.

We are also to realize that we live on a mission field. There are so many opportunities for ministry right here in our church's community. We must look at what we are doing & where God is leading.

I believe that we are doing some great things in our worship, Sunday School, youth music, missions – local and mission trips, giving. God is using us, but I believe there is so much more that God desires to do in and through us.

If we really focus on God and dream with God what will happen. It will be amazing to see how God will use us.

Let me share some of my dreams. Currently we typically have about 30-40 people attend our early service, about 170 attend Sunday School and about 200 – 225 attend our 11:00 worship. We have a couple of adult mission trips per year with about 12 – 15 people going on these trips and about 30 taking part on the youth trip. We also have some small groups beyond Sunday School and some local mission activities. These are some of the things that we do.

So – do we want to have more people involved in our worship, and Sunday School? Do we want more small group opportunities? Do we want to enrich our worship experience? Do we desire to have adequate staff, facility and money to do these things?

I believe that we do and we can, but we must be lead by God and focused on doing God's work – it is not to be about us, but it is to be about God – allowing His Kingdom to grow in us, in our families and in and through our church.

- I dream of a day in the not to distant future when we are averaging 500 or more in worship and 400 in Sunday School or other small groups. Can we do that?
Is that realistic?
- I dream of a day when we have 100 new members join our church per year with at least 1/3 accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior? Is that realistic with the amount of members we have and the community in which we live?
- I dream of having a really large and active small group ministry – with a variety of small group options: some dealing with deepening one's spirituality, others on divorce care, grieving, parenting, some targeted to seekers and some for discipleship and / or deepening community.
- I dream of expanding our children's ministry and having a year round children's choir and upward basketball ministry
- I dream of starting new churches. In the past 4 ½ years we have worked to help start the Chinese church. I want us to continue to support this mission as it becomes a fully functioning church and to continue to partner with them, as we look to start other churches. This could include: Hispanic or other language ministry or other English speaking congregations.

- I am so thankful for all our mission work, but I dream of our mission work growing and getting more people involved. I dream of having 25 or more go on an adult mission trip and having 200 or more involved in Operation Inasmuch.

- I dream of expanding our facilities and increasing our staff.

And what is the purpose of these visions and dreams? To grow God's Kingdom in and through our church. It is not my goal to do things my way, but to follow God's leadership and to do things God's way and in God's time.

Conclusion

Martin Luther King Jr. saw things as they were and dreamed of how they could be. He worked with others to help change the world. He died at a young age, but his impact can still be felt today.

More than King, Jesus had a focus in his life to build God's Kingdom. He worked to do this through his life, his teachings, his selection and leadership of the disciples, and eventually through his life and death. His life was focused on growing God's Kingdom.

Our theme for the year is to love God, love others & make disciples. If we really do this, we will be growing God's Kingdom. We are to focus first on our own lives – God's rule in me We are to work to influence our family for God and our neighborhoods and workplace. We are also to work to build God's Kingdom in and through our church. That is not something that will just happen. It happens by focusing on God, dreaming dreams that are led by God and working to see them through. It also takes many of us committing our lives to God and to God's work and God's church. What does God want to do in and through you? How can you be used in our church, in your family, and in other places to help grow God's kingdom?