



THE
KINGDOM
AGENDA

TONY EVANS

LIFE UNDER GOD



PRAISE FOR THE KINGDOM AGENDA



Clarity. Conscience. Convicting. These three words summarize my experience with Tony Evans. He never fails to speak with clarity to my conscience—convicting of both God’s love and my response.

Max Lucado

PREACHER/TEACHER, OAK HILLS CHURCH OF CHRIST

Tony Evans has hit a spiritual bull’s-eye by showing in such a powerful way how to model the kingdom of God on earth, as it already is in heaven, in all areas of life. He makes it clear that nonbelievers will not be attracted to the Good News of the kingdom of God by what we say, but by what they see in our lives.

Barbara Williams Skinner

PRESIDENT, SKINNER FARM LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Lots of people in our messed-up nation are dispensing good advice, but good advice has never changed the human heart. Only the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the eternal truths of God’s Word will fix America’s families and communities. That’s what the reader will find in the pages of this book written by one of America’s best preachers and communicators, Dr. Tony Evans.

Luis Palau

INTERNATIONAL EVANGELIST

The Kingdom Agenda is the most significant book my friend Tony Evans has ever written. It is “must reading” for every believer who wants to live an authentic Christian life.

John Perkins

THE JOHN PERKINS FOUNDATION

Dr. Tony Evans has successfully laid out a strategic discipline of living according to God’s agenda. I would encourage anyone who wishes to make an impact for the kingdom of God to read this book, and take a serious look at God’s Word, which will enable you to live your life as God intended you to live it in all areas of your life.

Charles Stanley

SENIOR PASTOR, FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ATLANTA

Tony Evans writes like he speaks—with clarity, practicality, and power. *The Kingdom Agenda* is a road map to help you live life God’s way.

Ravi Zacharias

PRESIDENT, RAVI ZACHARIAS INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES

Tony Evans says we should fix our eyes firmly on the kingdom and let that perspective govern our view of this world. And when you read his clear, lively, and readable presentation of this profound biblical concept, you will agree. Tony has a tremendous gift for making hard truths easily understandable—and this may be his most important work yet.

John MacArthur

PASTOR/TEACHER AND PRESIDENT, MASTER'S COLLEGE AND SEMINARY

The book is captivating. Dr. Evan's ability to provoke vision and awaken consciousness through his clarity of thought is extraordinary. History is destined to record him as one of the true visionaries of our time.

Eddie Bernice Johnson

MEMBER OF CONGRESS, 30TH DISTRICT, TEXAS, CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

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TONY EVANS

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TONY EVANS

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*This book is dedicated to the late Tom Skinner,
whose life, ministry, and legacy
continue to inspire me greatly
and who clearly demonstrated
that there can be no distinction between
the sacred and the secular; and that the kingdom
of God must be brought to bear and integrated into all of life.*



PROLOGUE

The Kingdom Agenda was my fourteenth book to write when it was published in the late 1990s. Now, over sixty books and almost two decades later, I still consider it to be my magnum opus.

This book uniquely expresses my comprehensive worldview and philosophy of life and ministry. It is a worldview that I believe is solidly based on the authority of Scripture, and yet one I hope is communicated in a way that relates to the everyday realities of life.

This is fundamentally a book about the kingdom of God and His agenda for our lives. Consider it a handbook of sorts, a resource that can be referenced as you face a particular need or question, as well as an all-encompassing discipleship tool to walk with you through the various areas of your life. We've chosen to divide this book into thirty chapters, convenient enough to read one each day so that you can complete it in a month. Or, it can be read at your own pace for leisure and study.

The kingdom agenda is God's blueprint for how all of life is to be lived. It is something that needs to remain at the forefront of our thinking in order to fully penetrate our choices and decisions, thus bringing about the full realization of its covenantal blessings and authority.

Unfortunately, it seems that the message of the kingdom is sorely lacking today. This is not because people don't speak of the kingdom, but because far too much of their speech is in esoteric, theological "code words" that seem unrelated to the realities of life in the here and now.

The absence of a comprehensive agenda for life has led to a deterioration of cosmic proportions in our world. People live segmented, compartmentalized lives because they lack a kingdom worldview. Families disintegrate because they exist for their own fulfillment rather than for the kingdom.

Churches are having a limited impact on society because they fail to understand that the goal of the church is not the church itself but the kingdom. This myopic perspective keeps the church divided, ingrown, and

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unable to transform the cultural landscape in any long-term, significant way.

And because this is so, society at large has nowhere to turn to find solid solutions to the perplexing challenges that confront us today—troubling problems such as crime, racism, injustice, family disintegration, poverty, and a myriad of other ills.

It is time for Christians to live by God's kingdom agenda. We need to align our lives under an agenda that is a comprehensive demonstration of the way our Creator intended every area of life to be lived. An agenda big enough to include both individuals and societal structures, clear enough to be understood and appropriated by the average person on the street, yet flexible enough to allow for the considerable differences among peoples and societies.

This book is my humble attempt as a covenantal and progressive dispensationalist to contribute to this exercise. I believe that Christianity offers not only a clear message for eternity but also a message that is workable and life-transforming in time. I believe it provides food for the soul but also a solid foundation for civilization.

I believe that a kingdom agenda provides another option, another way to see and live life in this world. It transcends the politics of men and offers the solutions of heaven. Such an agenda can hold its own against any of the humanistic worldviews of our day.

While I am certain that some could challenge some of my assumptions, I welcome those challenges because they will make me a sharper thinker and a more strategic biblicist. The Christian message, when communicated from a comprehensive, kingdom perspective, provides an agenda that can stand next to and above all other attempts to define the meaning of life, whether it be the individual, the family, the church, or the nation.

A kingdom agenda based on God's Word, rather than a secular agenda based on man's word, is the best way to make all of life work as our Creator intended.

Everyone has an idea and a viewpoint, but I believe God has spoken and He has not stuttered. There are two answers to every question: God's answer and everyone else's. And everyone else is wrong. Thus it behooves us to bring our lives under God's rule and passionately pursue His kingdom agenda.



INTRODUCTION



Cradled within the depths that define our humanity lies an unyielding fascination with “kingdom.” No matter what color, creed, or culture we examine, we find with even the most cursory glance into the annals and accounts something intertwined with kingdom.

Whether it be the great kings and rulers of Scripture such as David or Solomon, or whether it be Caesar, Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, Tutankhamen, and the like, these lives somehow captivate us, intriguing our imaginations.

Even rulers who did not hold the official title of “king” have left their legacies, for good or for bad, to enthrall us. There is Napoleon, the dominator of continental Europe, who possessed a formidable intellect and superior military mind. There is Genghis Khan, the evil and brutal ruler who conquered most of the world during his time. There are the Pharaohs, most of whom possessed strength and skill to such a degree that for many centuries they led Egypt beyond the others in academics, engineering, medicine, and writing. Then there are the monarchs spanning over 1,600 years of history in one form or fashion, beginning humbly as the Angles, moving to Angle Land, and eventually becoming what we know it as today, England.

Stories of conquerors, conquests, rebellions, and conspiracy mesmerize us. We tell them to our children in fairy tales riddled with kings, queens, princes, princesses, and kingdoms. We read about them in history books, mythology, legends, and fiction. We flock to movies to watch the rise or fall of power connected to a kingdom in epic adventures. Inevitably, we portray the king, or the prince, as reputedly handsome—when he is good. We portray him as sinister and ugly when he is bad.

Queens and princesses also play a role in our fascination. From Cinderella to Nefertiti to Elizabeth I, we hold in highest regard that special strength of a woman who uses and maintains her nobility in the face of constant and devastating betrayal and opposition in order to produce a greater good for her kingdom, and her subjects.

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The life of a king or queen is often envied. Yet that envy is naïve. Any true historian knows the utter fragility that comes with absolute power. As Shakespeare wrote, “Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” Kings, queens, and other rulers frequently function in a culture of conflict and even violence. Those around them might swear an oath of total allegiance while simultaneously plotting their destruction, or even their death.

As a result, history reminds us again and again, through what may seem like the same story just set on a different stage, that kings and rulers often resort to brute force and extreme taxation to protect their personal interests and power. While freedom fighters such as the Scottish William Wallace (best known for being portrayed in the film *Braveheart*) could wind up drawn and quartered, it wasn’t only the rebels who needed to fear the near-paranoid wrath that sometimes appeared in a king. No one was safe when it came to the possibility of usurping his role, as we see with the myriads of poisoning of family members and siblings, and the gruesome beheading of the wives of Henry VIII.

Nowhere in any story of a king or kingdom do we read about the ruler himself sacrificing his own greatest treasure simply for the benefit of others. Sure, sacrifices were made. Lives were lost. But it was always toward the aim of preserving power, rather than yielding it. That is, except for the one, true King of the Bible who gave up His own Son, Jesus Christ, in order that those who believe on Him—His death, burial and resurrection—would be restored to the place of both fellowship and dominion with their King, something they had lost in the battle of the Garden of Eden.

THE UNUSUAL KINGDOM

It is not unusual that this unusual action was taken by this very unusual King, because His is an unusual kingdom. Jesus spoke of it plainly when He told Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm” (John 18:36).

When His followers asked Him to tell them who is the greatest in this very unusual kingdom, Jesus pulled a child close to Him and replied, “Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the king-

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dom of heaven.” And then rather than demanding the pomp and circumstance typically befit for a king, Jesus instructed His subjects on just how He would like to be approached as their Ruler and Lord: “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me” (Matthew 18:5).

This is a kingdom without borders and without time. To try and apply the rules, precepts, and writs of this world to this very unearthly kingdom would be similar to bringing a linebacker on a football field a horse and a polo stick, and instructing him to get on with the game. Neither the rules of this earth, nor its tools, govern God’s kingdom. As King, He determines how it is to operate.

In God’s kingdom, race or gender do not mean inequality. In His kingdom, power goes to the ones who recognize their weakness and humbly looks to Him. Forgiveness reigns preeminently, and the amount of money matters less than the heart that offers it, as we see in the case of the widow and her mite. Significance, in this unusual kingdom, is connected to service. Hope comes through helping others who may need it as well.

That is not to say there are no battles to fight or wars to win in this kingdom, or that it is a kingdom of rainbows, waterfalls, and unending bliss. There is a vile enemy still lurking and still seeking to dethrone the King of this kingdom because it is the greatest kingdom of all, and will also last the longest—just as it began before any other kingdom.

In fact, before there ever was an earth at all, this kingdom existed in the heavenlies and was a place of glory, majesty, and beauty. Yet treason was committed in an attempt to steal the seat of power, and those caught in an attempt to lay siege to the throne were kicked down into darkness, which would later be sculpted and called earth. Satan, the leader of this primeval rebellion, now uses charm, deception, distraction, temptation, lust, pride, apathy, evil, and all else to try to establish a rival kingdom whose subjects aim to defeat the subjects of the one, true King.

THE CHRONICLING OF THIS KINGDOM

In the chancery known as the Holy Spirit, the story of this unique kingdom has been preserved for us, its subjects—followers of the Lord Jesus Christ—in the Bible. Throughout Scripture chroniclers, inspired by the Spirit, recorded, encouraged, lamented, and presented the history,

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rules, redemption, and purpose of our King and His kingdom. Unfortunately, today many of us are living as followers of a King whom we also seek to dethrone, though perhaps not outright, but through more subtle ways of complacency, autonomy, independence, or through a lack of a connection to Him and His Word. As a result, we experience what anyone in any kingdom living apart from the rules of the king would in our personal lives, homes, churches, communities, and our nation—the chaos that comes from rebellion.

In a kingdom, life is to be lived under the rule and authority of the king. The blessings of the covenantal charter of our King in His Word are imbued with the authority He gives us through the dominion covenant along with His promises and His *chesed* love. These all come when we live all of our life under God. It comes when we live our lives on target with His goals and purposes.

A LIFE OFF TARGET

King Edward III of England came to power in 1327 at the tender age of fourteen. He would prove himself to be, over his fifty-year reign, a focused and disciplined military leader. Under his charge, England rose from the laughingstock that it had become under Edward's father to one of the fiercest, most formidable militaries in the world.

Edward also required focus and discipline from those underneath him. In fact, he is known for having banned football and any sport of any kind so that people could direct their energies to practicing the art of the longbow. The longbow, new to the battle seasons of the English wars in Edward III's time, was the sturdiest piece of offensive weaponry in existence. Its draw weight alone was close to two hundred pounds. The arrows were three feet long and had tips that could tear through both chain and plate mail.

But victory would come with the longbow only when the arrows hit their targets. Ripping up doors, fences, or the like would do little to gain the upper hand in war. So warriors spent considerable time practicing their craft.

In this setting imagine, if you would, that there was a warrior who was aiming his bow toward the side of a barn. He was target shooting, practicing as his king had commanded. When a passerby looked at the side of the

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barn one day, he noticed that every single arrow was right in the middle of the target. He asked the warrior, “How long did it take you to become so good at this?”

To which the warrior replied, “Not long at all. In fact, it’s simple.”

Surprised at the frankness of his response, the passerby asked him to show him how he did it. The warrior shot twenty arrows, one after another, at the side of the barn. The arrows landed anywhere and everywhere, but most certainly not within any target at all. Then, without a second thought, the warrior walked over to the side of the barn, picked up some homemade paints and dye, and started painting the targets around the arrows.

Now, you may be saying, “Tony, kings and kingdoms are interesting, but I’m an American and we don’t have kings anymore. None of this applies to me.” But let me explain. Even if you do not live in a visual, societal kingdom, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ you belong to a kingdom and a King. Understanding what a kingdom is and how it runs is essential to living successfully as a part of the kingdom you are in now. And this story of the warrior with his painted targets, while fictitious, illustrates the situation that our society is facing today.

Just as Edward III could have never won battles or restored order to his kingdom if he relied on warriors who simply painted targets around their arrows, God’s kingdom and His agenda will fail to advance and have the impact it was designed to have on earth in history without the focus, discipline, and diligence of His subjects. Unfortunately, many of us do everything we can to give the impression that our lives are on target, when in reality all we have done is learn to paint well.

Not only are our nation, communities, churches, and families suffering as a result, but we are also suffering individually. Too many have sought to camouflage their emptiness and failure with materialism, the scramble for success and significance, and other pursuits. Some people even try to fill their emptiness through religious activities such as church membership. They have learned how to look, talk, and act like Christians, but all of these things in and of themselves are simply “paint jobs” that try to obscure the fact that we are a culture and a people tragically off target.

We only have to look at the indicators to see that far too many individuals, families, and churches are missing the mark. And the results are seen in a society overrun by the enemy’s agenda of chaos and upheaval.

Personal Chaos

Judging by the meteoric rise in popular psychology books, clinics, and self-help programs, it would seem that personal lack of meaning and fulfillment is at an all-time high. Anxiety, depression, violence, promiscuity, materialism, overeating, drug use, and a myriad of other personal casualties affect us as individuals in a variety of ways.

Family Chaos

This breakdown at the personal level has had devastating effects on the family as well. The once stable American family is rapidly deteriorating as couples live as if they were wed by the secretary of war rather than by the justice of the peace. Personal happiness has taken priority over family unity.

In the inner city, the disintegration of the family is the greatest. More than seven out of ten black children are born to unwed mothers. The devaluation of women through the curse of pornography and the glorification of violence on television, in music, and in the movies has fueled family breakdown.

Church Chaos

Today the church and what it represents are all too often ridiculed, criticized, and rejected outright, or simply ignored, in the public square. In short, the church has become marginalized. The non-Christian society at large has failed to take the Person and Word of God seriously. And the church has been ineffective in its efforts to impact our culture for Christ at the deepest levels.

Thus the church has contributed to the spiritual decline of American culture by failing to produce kingdom people who are accomplishing Christ's kingdom agenda, and by failing to manifest and illustrate clearly the solutions of the kingdom for the critical issues of our day. We have done an admirable job of cursing the darkness. But we have done a poor job of spreading the light.

National Chaos

The criminal justice system cannot begin to handle the increase in crime that keeps the urban population living behind barred windows and doors while gangs, criminals, and drug dealers control the streets. Prisons

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can't be built fast enough to house the number of criminals the system seeks to incarcerate. Neither has increased education stemmed the tide of moral decay now engulfing us. That's why metal detectors are common at many high schools.

A multitude of books, government programs, seminars, workshops, and symposia have not enabled us to bridge the racial, class, and cultural divides that separate us. Our technological advances have far outpaced our sense of community. We can send a robotic probe to examine the surface of Mars, but we cannot manage our relationships. As a result, our society has declined economically, materially, educationally, and physically.

SPIRITUAL SICKNESS

So the question is, what really is wrong with us as individuals, as families, as the church, and as a society? I believe that when you put all our problems on the examining table and shine the light of God's Word on them, it becomes painfully clear that we suffering from a case of spiritual AIDS.

As we know, AIDS is a breakdown in the body's immune system. As the HIV virus attacks and incapacitates the immune system, the body is rendered vulnerable to a host of other diseases. A cold can become pneumonia. An otherwise minor infection can become life-threatening. In fact, an AIDS sufferer usually does not die of the disease itself but of AIDS-related complications.

What is true of the AIDS virus is true on every level of our society. Our spiritual immune system has been badly damaged, with the result that cultural colds have become societal pneumonia, and minor cultural infections have now become life-threatening. And none of the medications being applied is correcting the problem. At best, they may simply suppress some of the symptoms temporarily.

THE PROBLEM IN THE CHRONICLES

I believe that the heart of our problem is captured and summarized in these verses found in 2 Chronicles 15, a portion of God's Word talking about ancient Israel:

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For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. . . . In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. (vv. 3, 5–6)

Here is a picture of great spiritual and social chaos, the breakdown of a society. What was wrong? Three crucial things were missing in Israel's national life, and I believe they are missing today in our nation as well.

The True God and King

The first thing missing was “the true God.” The chronicler was not saying that the Israelites had become atheists or no longer believed in God. He wasn't saying that attendance at the temple was down. The sacrificial fires at the temple were still going. But Israel had lost a correct view of God, and the nation was no longer accomplishing His agenda.

The Israelites wanted a convenient God, one they could control. Essentially, they wanted a kingdom without a king. They wanted a mere figurehead, a puppet with but the trappings of kingship only. Yet if you have a God you can control, then you're god instead of Him. Any god or king you can boss around isn't the true God or King. The true God does not adjust to you. You adjust to Him.

The Israelites didn't want the true God interfering with their national life, reminding them that He had an agenda greater than their personal interests and desires. Our culture doesn't want a God like that either. Our culture wants to pay homage only—to offer a nice little prayer before public meetings, but we don't want to hear about the true God.

But any time we simply pay homage without aligning our thoughts and actions under God, we are reinforcing our culture's false view of God as a harmless deity who doesn't have anything significant to say about the educational, scientific, entertainment, civic, political, familial, legal, or racial issues of the day. Doing so, we seek to leave God the title of King in name only, but give His powers and authority to others, or even ourselves.

No Teaching Priests

The second problem in Israel was a lack of teaching priests. Again, the text doesn't say there were no priests. But the priests had stopped teaching

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the truth. They had traded enlightenment for entertainment. Worship had degenerated into a social club. The church was no longer the epicenter of all life and conscience of the culture, calling people to take God seriously.

Israel was suffering from an absence of spiritual leaders who took seriously the authority of Scripture for all of life. Too often today, pastors preach to please. They fear that someone might say, “Well, I didn’t like that sermon.” But if they say that and the pastor preached God’s Word, that’s the wrong response. The issue is whether it was true, not whether it was popular. Politicians need to be popular. Preachers need to tell the truth.

The issue of truth is all-important. The lack of truth leads to a “conscienceless” society. People become anesthetized in their conscience, losing their sense of right and wrong. In such a society every person becomes a law unto himself or herself, so chaos rules.

Yet in a world where everybody’s truth is true and everyone’s answers are right, nobody’s truth is true and no one’s answers end up being right. When a society loses truth, it loses meaning, because people are never really sure about anything. There’s only one standard of truth, the changeless Word of the one true God.

God’s Law Gone Missing

The third missing ingredient in Israel was God’s law. When a culture has a false view of God built on bad information, God begins to remove the restraint of His law, and evil begins to grow unbridled. What you and I are witnessing today in the rapid deterioration of our culture is the reality that God is removing more and more of His restraint.

Even sinners who respect God won’t do certain things. But once God is removed from or marginalized in a culture, then the standard for a society is gone, and God becomes one’s worst enemy and worst nightmare. That’s what had happened in Israel. When the rule of God’s law is missing, chaos replaces community. You cannot have order and structure in society without God. Men become enslaved by the very freedom they seek.

We have ungodly people in our culture who don’t want any divine standard to which they must be held accountable. But when God leaves a society, hope goes with Him. As long as you have God, you always have hope. He’s the one thing you can bank on. If God is still in the picture, and as long as His agenda is on the table, it’s not over until it’s over.

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Even if circumstances collapse, God will keep you. As long as God is front and center in a culture, there's hope. But when He is removed, just like people and their taxes leave the city and go to the suburbs, God goes to the spiritual suburbs, and the city's cultures deteriorate.

WHEN THE KING HIMSELF IS YOUR PROBLEM

The stunning thing about the situation in 2 Chronicles 15 is that God was the cause of Israel's distress, not the sinners in that culture, and not even Satan.

Now when God is your problem, then only God is your solution. If God is upset, it doesn't matter whom you elect or what programs you initiate. Until His anger is assuaged, you won't be able to fix what's wrong or spend enough money to buy your way out of your dilemma.

This is the heart of our problems today. Too many individuals, families, churches, and communities want to keep God on the fringes of our lives. There He can be accessible if we have a need, but we can keep Him far enough away from the center of our lives that He doesn't start messing with our agendas. But as long as we keep God at a distance, He will not take over the control center of our world and unrighteousness will rule. He will be close enough for invocations and benedictions, but not part of the debate in between.

The net result of all this is that we are seeing the "devolution" of mankind. The more we marginalize God, the worse things get. This is what Paul said in Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Then in verses 19–31, Paul traced the downward spiral of a culture that excludes God.

TIME TO BRING ALL OF LIFE UNDER GOD

What then must we do to reverse this downward spiral of our lives at all four of these levels? It is time to return to the King, His rules, and His agenda. What He says transcends human politics, secular social movements, and religious traditions.

It is time to recognize that the kingdom of God is not some ethereal fairy tale located in some far-off land. It is both here and now. And just

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as some of the kings and queens of ages past ruled the dominion given to them poorly, while others ruled well, it is up to each of us individually to write our own personal, and even family, legacy. And it is up to all of us collectively to write that of our churches, community, and nation.

May it not be said of us, as it has been said of many kings and queens in the past, that this one or that one was simply unkingly. May it be said that we accepted the responsibilities given to us as royalty and rulers under God to influence and impact the realms He has given us in His kingdom for good.

In the pages that follow, I have sought to dig deeply into the truths found chronicled in God's Word, which offer us a biblically based kingdom agenda. I will demonstrate that Scripture has provided us with a clear authority and a comprehensive, dynamic approach to all of life. I want to show you this through the four areas that God has given us to order all of life: personal, family, church, and society. I believe that when these areas are lived out in proper relationship to our King and His kingdom, as well as to each other, He will enable us to live victoriously in every area of *life under God*.

<http://go.tonyevans.org/covenant>





*“The Lord has
established His
throne in the heavens,
and His sovereignty
rules over all.”*



— *Psalm 103:19* —



THE
THEOLOGY
OF THE
KINGDOM
AGENDA

*A*s God's people, we are not limited by the choices this world offers us. God has an alternative plan for us—His kingdom with an all-encompassing agenda.



God's kingdom agenda may be defined as the visible demonstration of His comprehensive rule over every area of life.

<http://go.tonyevans.org/kingdomagenda/>





THE CONCEPT OF THE KINGDOM AGENDA

Everybody, it seems, has an agenda today. People have plans, programs, things they want to accomplish, and specific ways they want to accomplish them.

God has an agenda, too; something He wants to accomplish in His way. The Bible calls this agenda God's kingdom. I like to think of it as the alternative, because that word says there is another way, another idea on the table. As God's people, we are not limited by the choices this world offers us. God has an alternative plan for us—His kingdom.

If you grew up in America, you were reminded to whose kingdom you belonged each time you said the Pledge of Allegiance or participated in the singing of our national anthem in school or before sporting or civic events. It was clear that our country did not want us to forget that we are Americans. We recited the pledge day in and day out, allowing it to sink in, enabling us to fully understand that no matter what our background, gender, culture, or color, we belonged to this kingdom called the United States of America.

In the same way that our country wants us to be regularly reminded about our citizenship in this kingdom, there is another kingdom—a greater and more perfect kingdom—of which we are a part. It is the kingdom of God.

If you are an American, it is most likely because you were born here. If you are a part of the kingdom of God, it is only because you have been born again into His kingdom. The reason you need to come to a full com-

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prehension of the kingdom is not only because it affects you, but it also is the key to understanding the Bible. The unifying central theme, the common thread, throughout the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—is the glory of God through the advancement of His kingdom.

Without that theme, the Bible becomes a series of disconnected stories that are great for inspiration, but seem to be unrelated in purpose and direction. The Bible exists to share God’s movement in history toward the establishment and expansion of His kingdom, highlighting the connectivity throughout which is this concept. Understanding that increases the relevancy of this several-thousand-year-old manuscript to your day-to-day living, because the kingdom is not only then, it is now.

Throughout the Bible, the kingdom of God is His rule, His plan, and His program. God’s kingdom covers everything in the universe. In fact, we can define the kingdom as God’s comprehensive rule over all creation. It is the rule of God (theocracy) and not the rule of man (homocracy) that is paramount.

Now if God’s kingdom is comprehensive, so is His kingdom agenda. The kingdom agenda, then, may be defined as *the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life*.

This definition has some serious implications for us. The reason so many of us as believers are struggling is that we want God to bless our agenda rather than our fulfilling His agenda. We want God to okay our plans rather than our fulfilling His plans. We want God to bring us glory rather than our bringing Him glory. But it doesn’t work that way. God has only one plan—His kingdom agenda. We need to find out what that is so we can make sure we’re working on God’s plan, not ours.

The Greek word the Bible uses for kingdom is *basileia*, which basically means a “rule” or “authority.” Included in this definition is the concept of power. So when we talk about a kingdom, we’re talking first about a king or a ruler, the one in charge.

Now if there is a ruler, there also have to be “rulees,” or kingdom subjects. In addition, a kingdom includes a realm; that is, a domain over which the king rules. Finally, a kingdom also needs regulations, guidelines that govern the relationship between the ruler and the subjects. These are necessary so that the subjects will know whether they are doing what the ruler wants done.

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God's kingdom includes all of these elements. He is the absolute Ruler of His domain, which encompasses all of creation. Likewise, His authority is total. Everything God rules, He runs—even when it doesn't look like He's running it. Even when life looks like it's out of control, God is running its "out-of-controlness."

God's kingdom also has its subjects. Colossians 1:13 says that everybody who has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior has been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, your allegiance has been changed. You no longer align yourself with Satan, but with Christ.

And just in case there's any doubt, let me say right now that there are no in-between kingdoms, no gray areas here. There are only two realms in creation: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. We are subjects of one or the other.

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA IS UNIVERSAL

The problem we have in the church today is that people inadequately define God's kingdom. Some people secularize and politicize the kingdom, which means they think the solutions to our problems are going to fly into town on Air Force One.

These individuals believe that political involvement or social action will by itself usher in the kingdom. While there is nothing wrong with entering the political arena as an evangelical—it ought to be encouraged—we need to bear in mind that God's kingdom is not comprised of, or limited to, a political institution of mankind. God is neither Democrat nor Republican. He does not ride the backs of donkeys or elephants.

At the other extreme are those Christians who over-spiritualize the kingdom. In contrast to their politically active brothers and sisters, these are the individuals who are so heavenly minded that they wind up being no earthly good. They live with their heads and hearts in the upper levels of the ionosphere because the concept of the kingdom of God never moves beyond the esoteric stage within them. They lack the concrete ability to put feet to the spiritual reality of the kingdom.

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God's kingdom agenda is not limited to the political and social realm. Neither is it limited to the walls of the church. When you were saved, the kingdom of God was set up within you so that it might be best positioned to reach outwardly while directing the circumference of your life.

Trusting Jesus Christ for your salvation will get you to heaven. But trusting Jesus Christ for your salvation doesn't automatically get heaven to come down to you. Getting into God's kingdom is through conversion, but experiencing God's kingdom in your daily life is through commitment. Commitment results only when the Jesus you placed your faith in is also the Jesus who rules within you in the kingdom of which you are a part. God's goal is to manifest in history the operations of heaven. Therefore, when history is not reflecting heaven ("Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" [Matthew 6:10]), God's kingdom is not visible.

FOUR FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS ABOUT GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA

As we start our journey through the depths, clefts, and mountaintops that make up God's kingdom agenda, let's begin by examining four basic fundamental truths about this all-encompassing concept and teaching of Scripture.

God's Kingdom Agenda Originates from His Realm

Since the realm in which God operates is spiritual, His kingdom also originated in the spiritual realm. This is not to deny what was said above, that the whole created universe constitutes the domain of God's kingdom. What I am saying here is that the kingdom is from above, not from the earth.

We see this in John 18:28–40, when Jesus appears before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The Jews want Jesus put to death, but they don't have the authority to carry out capital punishment. Since only Rome can do that, the Jews have to bring Jesus to Pilate to get his approval.

The Jews know exactly what accusation it will take to get Jesus executed by Rome. If He claims to be a king, He will be committing treason against Caesar (see John 19:12). So they decide to make the charge against Jesus that He made Himself out to be a king.

Now if you call yourself a king, that implies you have a kingdom somewhere. So the first question Pilate asked Jesus was, "Are You the King of

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the Jews?” (John 18:33). Notice Jesus’ answer in verse 36: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

Don’t misread that. Jesus was not saying His kingdom is not *in* this world. He was saying it is not *of* this world. His kingdom does not originate from earth, but rather from heaven. It is not derived from history, but from the heavenlies. Jesus’ servants weren’t up in military arms about His arrest because He was not trying to overthrow the Romans militarily.

Jesus explained to Pilate, in my Evans translation, “If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would be out there with their swords cutting off much more than just someone’s ears. They would be going to war. If My kingdom were man-made, I would not be going to the cross without a battle.”

But because Jesus represented another King from another kingdom that was not of this world, He did not resort to the methodologies of this world in order to defend or advance His kingdom. The same holds true for you and me. To live life according to the kingdom agenda will have an effect on our choices. Our decisions will not align with the world’s wisdom or methods. A divine frame of reference will punctuate all that we do.

Too many believers today are trying to find fulfillment and significance through human means. They are trying to discover their destinies through man’s methods. However, man’s methods have never accomplished God’s goals. Jesus revealed that when He answered Pilate straightforwardly. In essence, He said, “My methods reflect My source.” As believers, we are called to be in the world, but not of the world. Similarly, a boat is made to be in the water but not of the water. If the boat begins to be of the water and starts taking on water inside, it will soon go down.

To be in the world and yet not of the world means that the world, or worldliness—the system that seeks to leave God out—does not define the decisions, relationships, or priorities of your life. Your kingdom controls your methodology.

A Body of Truth

In John 18:37 Jesus said something else that was very significant. “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” By this statement, Jesus

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assumed the existence of a body of truth with which a kingdom agenda aligns itself. Simply defined, truth is an absolute standard by which reality is measured. It is God's viewpoint on the matter. This definition puts us as believers in conflict with our culture, because we live in a world where a commitment to truth no longer exists. People want relative truth, not an absolute standard that says what is always right and wrong, good and bad. But if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you must believe in, accept, and align yourself with the truth of God's Word—His absolute, governing standard that transcends time, culture, ethnicity, gender, preference, and all else.

One of the major problems leading to the breakdown of society is that we have far too many opinions dictating life choices and not enough truth mandating them. Even among Christians, absolute truth isn't always the governing standard. We say things like, "Well, this is how I feel," or "This is what I think," or even "This is what my parents taught me." Although there is nothing necessarily wrong with thoughts or feelings, they ought not be the deciding factors with regard to what is true. Truth transcends feelings. For example, you may feel like you have a headache, so you take an aspirin. But the lab report might tell the truth that you have a brain tumor and an aspirin won't do you any good. The feeling of your headache was real; it just didn't reveal the truth that you have a tumor. When you miss the truth, you miss everything. Likewise, when you miss the truth of God's Word, you miss the kingdom.

Our problem today is that we have substituted relativism, pragmatism, existentialism, pantheism, and many other -isms in the place of absolute truth. But all of these -isms will become "was-isms" one day when they are ultimately confronted with God's absolute truth.

Jesus was saying to Pilate in John 18:37, "If you understood My kingdom, you would know the truth." The only lasting solutions to life are biblical solutions, because only biblical solutions are derived from a heavenly source and can address the cause-and-effect relationship between choices and consequences.

Cause and Effect

Here's what I mean by cause and effect when it comes to the kingdom. Everything visible and physical is always controlled or derived from that

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which is invisible and spiritual. So if you want to fix the visible and physical problems, you have to address the spiritual and invisible issues first.

Why? Because if you don't address the spiritual and invisible, you will not have addressed the divine precursor from which to solve the visible and physical issue at hand. What you can see, hear, touch, taste, and smell must first be addressed from God's perspective before you can make any lasting and real difference on the human level.

Satan wants to get us to skip the divine perspective because he knows that we will never be able to solve our visible and physical problems until we address them from the invisible, spiritual realm. But heaven rules earth, so what happens up there determines what goes on down here. If you are not in contact with heaven then you ought not be surprised if you are in a quandary down here on earth.

One of the greatest kings in history, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, learned this truth the hard way. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him deeply, so he asked the prophet Daniel to interpret it for him. Daniel told the king he would lose his kingdom and be driven into insanity until he learned that "it is Heaven that rules" (Daniel 4:26). What Daniel prophesied then came to pass (see v. 28).

The Right Perspective

God's kingdom is lived from the perspective of heaven, not earth. That's why Jesus said, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The pagans may run after the physical, visible things in life (see v. 32), but we are called to prioritize God's kingdom.

But far too many Christians want to mix a little bit of God with a lot of the world. As a result, they wind up not experiencing any of God because His kingdom is not of this world. When you bring the world into the Word, you are asking the King to bless something that His kingdom is not a part of, and He won't do it.

If you lose sight of the kingdom, God's perspective gets lost and you start focusing on the physical and temporal things in life. When that happens, your judgment begins to be skewed and your decisions become shortsighted. Rather than fulfilling your God-ordained destiny and purpose, you end up with wasted time, effort, energy, and emotions.

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Yet when God's kingdom is prioritized, you get to see heaven both rule and overrule in your life. You get to witness God overrule circumstances and people that you thought had the last word. You get to experience God at a whole other level when you experience Him as King. Many people say that God is King but fail to experience God as King simply because they do not position themselves under His rule.

Jesus said earlier in Matthew 6 that if you are not clear on the kingdom—the things of God—then you can't see because you are spiritually blind (see vv. 22–23). And if you are spiritually blind, then your feet won't know which way to go. Spiritual blindness affects not only your eyes, but all of your life choices.

I will never forget the morning I got soap in my eye in the shower. My eye started burning, so I began to rub it with my hand. The problem was, I had soap on my hands. So not only did I not get the soap out of my eye, I managed to get more soap in both eyes. Now, instead of one eye that couldn't see, I had two.

With both eyes closed, I instinctively reached for the towel. Yet because I couldn't see it, I hit my head on the soap dish sticking out of the wall as I leaned over to try and find it. When I did that, I knocked the soap off of the dish onto the shower floor. You can probably guess what happened next. As I groped around for the towel in my blindness, I stepped on the bar of soap and went flying, hurting my back. There I was, flailing around in the shower with a headache and a backache and stinging eyes, all because something had blinded me.

Let me tell you, when you are spiritually blind you will wind up with more than just a headache and a backache, you will wind up with a “life ache,” because you cannot live successfully in the physical realm if you cannot see the spiritual realm which affects everything else in life. God's kingdom operates from the realm of heaven. The only way you will be able to see life with clear vision is when you view all of life from a kingdom perspective.

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA REFLECTS HIS SOVEREIGNTY

Here's a second truth about God's kingdom you need to consider: When you adopt God's kingdom agenda, you come under His sovereign

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rule. Sovereignty refers to God's supremacy over all of His creation—visible and invisible. His rules are universal, absolute, and comprehensive. God, therefore, is accountable to no one.

Sovereignty is a word many people don't like or understand, but it is intrinsic within God's character and makeup. In Psalm 103:19, David wrote, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all." In other words, God is not operating by anyone's permission. He sovereignly rules over each and every one of us.

Look at Psalm 115:3: "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Many people don't want to hear that truth, but embracing it is a vital part of living a successful life. As David wrote, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations" (Psalm 145:13).

The claim of absolute sovereignty is the claim of deity, and God alone has the right to such a claim.

Living under God

I love having visitors come to my house to spend some time talking, eating, or watching football. Our home has always had a revolving door for those close friends who want to pass the time with us. However, there are certain rules you will have to follow if you come to my house. If you smoke, for instance, you will have to put it out before you come in, because the rule is that there is no smoking in my house. If you swear, you will have to make a mental note not to do so before you come over to my house, because in my house profanity is not allowed.

Or, if you were to come over to my house and say, "Evans, I hate this furniture. The colors on the walls are all wrong. I think they're horrible," I would say, "And your point is?" This is because your opinion, while listened to, is irrelevant to the overall décor of our home because the last time I checked you didn't pay for the furniture or the paint on the walls. It is okay for you to have an opinion about my house, but that opinion doesn't carry much weight with me for one simple reason: It's my house, not yours.

So when you come to my house, you have two choices. You can stay and adjust to my rules and my furniture and my color scheme, or you can leave. And I'm sure I would have the same two choices if I came over to your house.

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This world is God's house and it operates according to His rules. That means unless you and I want to go out and create our own universe, we need to adjust to the rules of God's house or suffer the consequences of our rebellion. To acknowledge God's sovereignty is to acknowledge the validity of His jurisdiction and His legislation in and over every area of life. It is to align all of life under God.

But like stubborn teenagers, we often say to God, "I want to come to Your house, God, but I'm going to bring in my own rules. I'm going to complain about the furniture in Your house, but I'm still going to come to church and tell You to feed me, clothe me, and bless me. I want Your goodness in Your house, but without Your rules."

A Discount God

It took a recent trip to a discount department store to help me see all of this in a new light. My wife, Lois, had asked me to pick up a few things for her from this store.

Before I go any further, you need to know that shopping and standing in checkout lines are not among my favorite things to do. And as things worked out, this particular day was not a good day for me to go shopping. The weather was nice, so everyone in Dallas apparently decided to go to this store as well. There were people everywhere. The checkout lines were all the way down the aisles.

So I got my stuff and went to the express checkout line, but it ended up taking even longer than the other lines. I was stuck, yet as I stood there something dawned on me. The store I was in is marketed and known for its discount prices. People go there and stand in long lines because they can purchase items for less than what they would pay elsewhere.

It occurred to me that this is what a lot of people do on Sunday. They come to church looking for a "discount God." They want God on sale. They come saying, "God, I want You and Your kingdom, but I want it at a discount price. I want a little of this and a little of that, but not the whole package. So give me thirty percent off the ticketed price."

People don't want a God who is sovereign, a God who says, "This is the package. When you get Me, you get My kingdom and My rules." There are no discounts in God's kingdom. He is sovereign. He rules over all. Psalm 24 teaches that so clearly:

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The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and has not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD. (vv.1–5a)

Verses 1–2 make it clear that everything on planet earth belongs to God. Then how much belongs to us? Nothing. We may use the things of earth, but we don't own them. That's good, because God's sovereignty means He is responsible if something breaks down. If you try to own your life, when something goes wrong you get to fix it. But if God owns your life, when something goes wrong He fixes it. I'd rather be under God's ownership than mine any day because that means He takes responsibility for working things out.

Living in God's kingdom brings blessings, but you don't get the blessings of the King if you're not willing to live for His kingdom and under His authority. You don't get to enjoy the blessings of the King if the King cannot enjoy the blessing of you. You don't get the King who owns everything if you keep demanding to own everything yourself.

Until you become a person who makes your decisions based on God's kingdom agenda, you will miss out on the abundant life that God has in store for you. To show up at church on Sunday when God doesn't own you Monday through Saturday is, to put it bluntly, a waste of your time. It is a false dualism to say, "Lord, You can have Sunday, but don't bother me on Monday, because I have to go back to the real world." Oh, no. On Sunday you are in the presence of the God who made everything, as you are on Monday, Tuesday, and every other day of the week. If you attempt to leave God in the pew by failing to acknowledge His ownership and sovereignty the rest of the week, you are willingly relinquishing His presence and blessing in your life.

Sovereignty and Our Choices

God's sovereignty also means that He either causes all things to happen, or allows all things to happen. Yet whether He causes it or allows

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it, when everything is finished it will come out the way He wants it to come out.

This helps to answer the question, why is there seemingly so much chaos in our world? God's sovereignty doesn't mean that there won't be any problems. It doesn't mean that Satan won't rebel, or that people won't say no to God's will. Sovereignty means that this is God's domain, and when all is said and done, He is ultimately in control and will guide, direct, and eventually use all things according to His plan.

For us, the question is not whether God is sovereign. That has already been determined. The question is, rather, how we as finite beings relate to and align ourselves under the infinite Sovereign who is God. He can carry out His kingdom agenda with or without us. God does not need any one of us to fulfill His purposes. Thus it is my desire, and I hope it is yours as well, to willingly go with God as He unfolds His plan rather than stand in His way so that He has to go through us or over us.

Yet either way, God is going to get to where He's going. God's kingdom agenda cannot be altered, negated, or thwarted. God's ultimate plan will be done. That's good news for those of us who are committed to Him and His kingdom because there is a promise included within it for us. That promise is found in a very familiar verse, Romans 8:28: "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Paul is talking about committed Christians, those who are living for God's kingdom. If you are living according to God's kingdom agenda, your life may seem like a wreck, but according to this powerful truth you can know that your life is working out according to God's plan. The Greek word for "know" is *oida*, which can be translated into "intuitive knowledge." It means that we can "know" even when we don't know. We can "know" even when we don't feel like we know. We can "know" when everything says the opposite of what we know.

From this verse, what is it that we know? We know that God causes all things to work together for good. You say, "But Tony, things are falling apart. People are putting me down. I got laid off from my job. The doctors say they don't know if I'm going to make it." You can say all of that and more, and yet the truth remains that God can cause all of those things to work together for good because He is sovereign. Despite how

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circumstances may appear, God is in control. He is working things together that look out of control. In fact, when things seem out of control to you, all that means is that they are out of your control. God is in charge orchestrating everything in order that His divine purpose might be revealed.

Sometimes I walk into the kitchen to see what my wife is cooking. She may be putting together a meal that does not look to me like it's going anywhere. It's a little of this and a little of that and a little of the other. I'll say, "What are you making?"

She will answer, "Wait and see."

If I have the patience to wait while she puts the master's touch to that meal, when it comes to the table all I can say is, "Delicious!"

That's how God works. He takes a little of this and a little of that and a little of the other that might not look too tasty on their own. Yet in His sovereignty, He can mix it, stir in a little omnipresence, add some omnipotence, toss in a dash of grace, throw in a little goodness, mix in a little mercy, and stir it all together. Then, when it comes out of the oven, all you can say is, "Excellent!"

But the only ones who can say that are those who love God and are committed to His purpose. You've got to be on His agenda, not on yours. You've got to be following His path, not your own. It's not, "Lord, this is what I want," but "Lord, what do You want?" That is the question that defines a life lived according to both the King and His kingdom.

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES FOR HIS GLORY

A third truth that I want you to understand about the kingdom agenda is that it operates for the purpose of God's glory. Romans 11:36 says, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." As you may already know, *amen* means "so be it." There it is. That's it. God's glory is the bottom line in His kingdom.

For His Pleasure

Paul said that everything is *from* God. He is the first cause, the source. Then Paul said that through Him everything is. God is also the effective cause of everything in creation. And finally, Paul said that everything is to Him. He is the final cause. It all returns to Him to bring Him glory forever.

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It is crucial to understand that God created the universe for His pleasure and His glory (see Revelation 4:11), including each one of us (see Isaiah 43:7). God did not make the world first and foremost for us, but for Himself.

“Glory” is a sweet word. It comes from a Greek word that means “to be heavy” or “to have weight.” When we say, “That guy is heavy,” we’re giving him significance. We’re adding weight to his persona. That’s what glory is.

To fully understand the concept of God’s glory, you must understand the difference between intrinsic glory and ascribed glory. Most of us are only familiar with ascribed glory. This is the glory we assign to people because of who they are, what they do, or how much income they make.

For example, when we put a black robe on a man or woman, we call that person “Your Honor” because we ascribe glory to the role of judge. When someone pulls up in a limousine, we stop to see who it is, because we assume anyone riding in a limousine has to be significant. That’s ascribed or assigned glory, meaning that if you take away the black robe or the limo, the people involved lose their glory. Human beings can only have ascribed glory. Not so with God. People can ascribe glory to God, but even if we refuse to glorify Him He hasn’t lost anything, because God has intrinsic glory.

The sun does not have to try to be hot. Even on a cloudy day, the sun is hot. The sun does not have to try to be bright. Even when it’s dark outside, the other half of the world is basking in the brightness of the sun.

What heat and brightness are to the sun, glory is to God. It is part of who He is. You can go into your house and close all of your blinds, but you haven’t diminished the sun one iota. No matter what you and I do, we can’t diminish or reduce the glory of God. Everything in His kingdom is designed to bring Him glory, as it should since there is nothing and no one greater than God for Him to give glory to.

Holding It All Together

Now let me show you a tremendous implication of this for those of us who will adopt a kingdom agenda. In Colossians 1:15–17, Paul wrote: “And [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authori-

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ties—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

This is deep. Don’t miss it by skimming over a verse that may already be familiar to you. There are riches to be found in this passage. Let me tell you, if you abide by and live according to God’s kingdom agenda, Christ will bring together the things in your life that are falling apart. He will either fix the situation or fix you in the situation. As it is written, “in Him all things hold together.” So if your world is falling apart, fix your eyes on Jesus through whom and by whom all things come together.

But in order to receive the benefit of His hand in this regard, you must live your life for His glory. You must say, “Lord, my goal today is to reflect Your significance. I want to ascribe to You the glory that already belongs to You. I want to radiate, demonstrate, magnify, and illustrate Your glory.” That’s a life lived according to the kingdom agenda.

Most of our insurance policies call a natural disaster an “act of God.” If a storm blows your roof off, for example, that’s an act of God. We are quick to blame God in the midst of life’s trials. Yet we don’t give Him glory when He keeps the roof on. It’s an act of God if it rains and floods the crops, but we ought to give Him glory that we eat every day. Numbers of individuals run to church when something goes wrong. But people who live according to the kingdom agenda come into God’s presence to give Him glory no matter what because they understand the fullness of His power in holding all things together.

GOD’S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

The fourth and final truth to consider concerning God’s kingdom agenda is that it operates in accordance with His will.

You may have grown up reciting the Lord’s Prayer, which begins: “Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9–10). The first principle we garner from this prayer is that God’s name is unique—we are to hallow His name. The way that God’s name is hallowed is by His kingdom coming through His will being done. So the reverse of that is true as well. If you are not seeking to do God’s will, then His kingdom in your life

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is not coming and His name is not being hallowed. You cannot have the full presence of the kingdom if you are not willing to submit to the King. If you are outside of His will then you are disconnected from His kingdom. And to miss the kingdom is to miss His name, to miss Him, because they are intrinsically tied together.

God-in-the-Box

One of the first toys I remember playing with as a young boy growing up in Baltimore was that little jack-in-the-box clown that pops up to the tune “Pop Goes the Weasel.” I loved that toy. And while that concept is great for a toy, it is not so great for God. Yet, that’s how many people try to treat God—a toy in a box who pops up whenever we want Him to appear and do our bidding. “Bless me now, Lord. I’m turning the handle. Come on, pop up.” Then we stuff Him back down in the box and close the top when we don’t want to see Him anymore. “God-in-the-box, stay there and don’t pop up yet because I haven’t played Your tune.”

But a kingdom person says, “Not my will, but Your will be done.” Jesus said in Matthew 13:11 that the kingdom is a mystery to those who aren’t willing to hear, see, and understand what God is doing. Jesus would not reveal His Father’s will to people who were not willing to obey it.

God’s Kingdom Will

Let me show you why God has you and me in His kingdom. In Daniel 7:13–14, the prophet wrote:

I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory *and a kingdom*, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. (emphasis added)

You were brought into God’s kingdom to serve Him, to do His will, and to confiscate from Satan that which belongs to God. The prophet Isaiah also learned that the kingdom of God operates according to His will. In probably the most well-known passage in the book of Isaiah, the prophet

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said, “In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted” (6:1).

Isaiah had just experienced a tragedy. The king who had brought Israel a long way back toward God had just died. So what’s the point? After all, Isaiah knew the Lord before King Uzziah died. The point is that Isaiah didn’t really see the Lord until Uzziah died. He needed to learn that although a king was dead, the King was alive and well.

Sometimes it takes a tragedy in our lives, or other negative circumstances, for us to truly see God. We may know Him in terms of being our Savior. But a lot of us won’t really say, “God, I want to see You, I want to experience You” until our “King Uzziah” dies. That is, until the physical and tangible thing, person, career, bank account—or whatever we are trusting in—passes from a position of prominence to obscurity. That is one reason God will allow tragic situations to come into our lives. He knows that our focus is on the created rather than on the Creator. And until we adjust our vision from the temporal to the eternal, we may miss out on seeing the eternal altogether.

God is not simply interested in getting you to heaven. He wants you to see and experience Him here while you are on earth. The book of Revelation tells us that one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth; but before you ever get to heaven you will have a job to do in this new earth, in history. You don’t get to heaven until you finish a thousand years of doing work for God in history in Christ’s millennial kingdom. So if all you think about is heaven, you will miss out on history. God wants you to experience and see Him now in order to best prepare you for then.

Sometimes God is most clearly seen in the midst of painful situations. When you are in a crisis, it is not enough to say, “Lord, why am I in this mess?” You need to be praying, “Lord, help me to see You the way the three Hebrew boys saw You in the midst of the fiery furnace (see Daniel 3). Help me to see you the way that Isaiah saw You.”

What did Isaiah see? He saw a God who is holy to the third power. “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isaiah 6:3). The prophet saw a God who rules over all the situations of life.

What did Isaiah do when he saw God? He cried out, “Woe is me, for I am ruined!” (v. 5). The word “ruined” means “coming unstitched.” Isaiah felt like he was falling apart, unraveling before a holy God. “I am a man of

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unclean lips,” Isaiah continued. Despite being a significant and prominent prophet dedicated to the service of God his entire life, in the presence of a holy God Isaiah fully felt his own inadequacy. He fully felt his own sin. And in that reality, Isaiah confessed his uncleanness.

Because of this, Isaiah experienced grace. One of the seraphim flew over to him with a hot coal he had taken from the altar with tongs, and he touched Isaiah’s lips with it. “Your sin is forgiven,” the seraphim said (vv. 6–7). The lips are the most sensitive part of the human face. The angel touched Isaiah’s lips with a burning hot coal, which meant there had to have been pain.

This is because in order for Isaiah to experience his life being cleansed, he had to experience the pain of the past that had gotten him there. But when he did, he discovered more than the purifying searing of the coal. He discovered his purpose. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” (v. 8).

There it is. Isaiah came to know the revealed will of God, and he received the power to do that will when he saw God. The prophet got plugged into God’s kingdom agenda when, in a broken and painful situation, he saw God for himself.

BECOMING A KINGDOM PERSON

Do you want to be a kingdom person? Do you want to discover God’s best for your life, His agenda? He’s both willing and waiting to reveal it to you. But you must make that decision. If you want to know which way to go, just ask. If you don’t know the way, come to the One who knows the way. Seek God by restructuring your thoughts, words, and actions to conform to the standards of His kingdom.

I can’t tell you what following God’s kingdom agenda will mean for you. I just know that whatever it is, you must be willing to do His will. You must be able to pray, “Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13). It is God’s program that you are to pursue.

If that means being single, you are ready to do that for His sake. If that means staying in a marriage even though right now you are not happy in it, you are ready to do that. If that means staying on a job you don’t like, you

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are ready. If that means you don't reach all of your goals, that's okay as long as you can say, as Paul did, "I have finished the course" (2 Timothy 4:7).

We used to have two dogs. They belonged to my son, but when he wasn't home, I had to take care of them. Those dogs had a good life, as far as dog lives go. They would come in and find food already sitting in their bowls. They would get fresh water every day. They had a warm spot to sleep in whenever they wanted it. My son even asked that I buy their food at a special store in order to feed them the healthiest option for a dog.

One day I was trying to get one of the dogs to move while I fed it, and the dog growled at me. I looked at it and thought, *You're a fool. I'm here feeding and watering you at no cost to you. I don't want to do it, don't need to do it, don't feel like doing it. And you're growling at me?*

That dog didn't understand that he ate by grace. He drank by grace. He had a place to sleep by grace. The only thing that dog should have said to me when I came over to where it sat was, "Thank you, bowwow," because everything that dog had was by grace. Needless to say, that dog didn't stay much longer in my domain.

The first word of wisdom for living according to God's kingdom agenda is to understand that He is the King, and you are not. He is God, and you are not. He makes the rules, and you do not. When you decide to live by a kingdom agenda, you no longer say, "This is my food, and You'd better give it to me, God. You'd better supply my drink. This is my house, and You'd better keep it covered and paid for. And You'd better keep clothes on my back."

No, you don't say that to God. The only thing you say when you get up in the morning is, "Thank You, God" and, "What can I do to show my gratitude?"

Our desire should be to give God the glory that is rightfully His and to live for His will, because we're included in His agenda. In the chapters that follow, I want to challenge you to live your life according to the kingdom agenda, to live your life for the King and His kingdom. He is the source. He is in charge. He is sovereign. He is Lord. When you do His will, you become His representative in a world that longs to see a better way to live. When you live for God, then and only then will you truly begin to fulfill the destiny He has planned for you. Are you ready to discover Him and His kingdom?

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Every two years nations around the globe send their strongest, most elite athletes to compete against others in the Olympic Games. Individual athletes who are at the top of their game go head-to-head with the world's best. On display for the world to see are their individual prowess, individual determination, individual commitment, and individual abilities.

Yet, when the gold medalist stands on the platform, he or she is not asked, "What is your favorite song?" The winning athlete does not get to choose which song will be played as the flag is raised. Instead, the national anthem of that individual's country plays loudly. This is done because it is understood that while the individual was the one who sacrificed, practiced, and competed, he or she represents something much larger. The athlete is just one of many who make up a nation that operates underneath the covering of that same anthem.

As a Christian, you stand as a representative of a bigger kingdom. Your life is not just about you. I know you want your blessing, your crown, and your reward. It is fine to desire to stand on the podium of this life, just as long as you know that when you stand there it is for God's anthem to sound out the lyrics of His song, "Hallowed by Your Name."

Seek first the kingdom of God. It is the wisest thing you could ever do, because in doing that, all other things will be added to you.

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