

# GOD'S ECONOMY

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES 6



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*God's Economy*

God's Economy  
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*God's Economy*

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## Welcome to *God's Economy*

From an under-the-sun perspective, the field of the world looks increasingly like a weed field. Everywhere, it seems, the good seed of the Kingdom is being choked out, and ugly tares of corruption, immorality, godlessness, and narcissism are flourishing.

But when we look at the world from God's perspective, *under the heavens*, a different scenario unfolds. God is at work in the field of the world, working through His Church to sow Kingdom seed throughout the world, and to cultivate the field and nurture His crop for a harvest of glory.

And God has a plan and an overall administration which He is pursuing to ensure that of the increase of His Kingdom and peace there will be no end (Is. 9.7).

That administration – God's economy – has goals, priorities, and a place for every member of the household of faith to share in this glorious calling.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Focusing on the Right Economy

... *having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.* Ephesians 1.9, 10

### *Getting and staying focused*

All this talk about work can sound more like a course in economics than in understanding the times as Christians, so that we might know what we should be doing. In fact, our study is little bit of each.

When, during his first campaign for the presidency, Bill Clinton took up the mantra, “It’s the economy, stupid!” he did so to remind himself to keep focused on the thing that mattered most. By constantly speaking on economic issues he was able to put his opponent, the incumbent President Bush, in a bad light and to excite people to listen to and embrace his ideas for how to fix a limping economy.

While certainly much else was going on in the country and world besides the economy, Mr. Clinton’s ability to keep himself and his campaign staff – and the majority of the electorate, as it turned out – focused on this primary issue created a groundswell of opinion and action that vaulted him into the presidency from almost nowhere.

It was the economy then, and it’s the economy now. But not the getting-and-spending economy of our secular, under-the-sun world.

### *It is the economy!*

The economy that matters above all else is not the free, commercial, materialist economy of our American republic, but the eternal economy which God has proclaimed and is establishing through our Lord Jesus Christ. In the field of the world, God is working His own plan, administering His own economy, and enlisting His people in an entirely different agenda than what our secular neighbors feverishly pursue.

Our text mentions this idea of a divine economy under the rubric of a “dispensation.” Other translations use the word “plan” or “administration” here, which is a little closer to Paul’s meaning. God, Paul insists, has a plan for administering everything that takes place in the field of the world until the harvest.

That word *dispensation*, *plan*, or *administration* is, in the Greek, *oikonomia* – economy. It means an order, an administration, a way of “keeping house” that flows from a set of priorities through a bank of resources into a new order on earth, one that reflects the way things are in heaven, on that makes of the field of the world a wheat field for a glorious harvest to the Lord. There is a divine economy, and God is setting it up in our midst, right now, today, and every day of our lives. And it is *this* which matters supremely in our secular age.

We are part of that great plan, and thus it behooves us to understand as much as we can about it, so that we know what to do in the divine economy according to God’s purposes and designs.

### *Four things*

Notice four things about the divine economy as Paul introduces in it our text.

First, it is a program established for *now*. In his Pentecost sermon Peter announced that, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the pouring out of God’s Spirit, the “last days” had begun (Acts 2.14-17). Paul says Jesus came in “the fullness of the time” to inaugurate His great work of redemption in the last days (Gal. 4.4). The “fullness of the time” in which the divine economy is unfolding is now. We are living in the last days, the

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fullness of times, when the Lord of heaven and earth is establishing and expanding His divine economy throughout the field of the world.

Second, that divine economy embraces *all things*. Everything in heaven and on earth is subject to God's unfolding plan, in which we have an interest and a part.

God's purpose in doing so, third, is to *unite earthly things with heavenly things* so as to effect peace and harmony between the two realms. God is making things right on earth – all things: human lives and relationships, work, culture, institutions, the affairs of nations, indeed, the whole vast cosmos and creation. God is making things right with Himself, according to His original plan that all His creation should be “good” and “very good.” Nothing is off limits or beyond His reach as God sets up His economy.

Finally, all this is being accomplished *through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Only those who know Jesus and have entered into His Kingdom can take up the glorious work of laboring with God to advance His divine order on earth as it is in heaven. He is doing His work through the work of His saints, as they join the Son of Man in sowing the Lord's field with good Kingdom seed.

What a glorious privilege and opportunity! What a high calling! It *is* the economy – the *divine* economy – that matters most. Let us not stupidly miss it – and our exciting place in it – by being distracted to lesser things. Keep focused on *God's* plan for living under the heavens, and we won't become mired in the vanity of vanities lifestyles of those who are still trapped in their under-the-sun world.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is an *economy* – a plan or administration – a good way of thinking about what God is doing in the field of the world?
2. How are you aware of God's plan and administration, and how do you pursue in your part of the Lord's field, your Personal Mission Field?
3. As you see it, what are some primary differences between *God's* economy and the getting-and-spending economy of our secular age?

*Next steps – Conversation: How much of your own life is consciously being order, arranged, and pursued under the umbrella of the divine economy? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.*

## 2 Heaven on Earth

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.* James 1.17

### *God's household*

God has begun to establish His economy within the field of the world – His “household,” His way of doing things, His administration for reconciling all things on earth and in heaven. The world may appear to us to be irreversibly overrun with secularism, materialism, and narcissism, but this is only because we fail to see the ongoing work God is doing, in and through His Church, to prepare the world for a harvest of glory.

Through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, God is pursuing a plan to restore all things to Himself, so that His original very good (Gen. 1.31) purposes might be realized. And He is unfolding and establishing this plan, this *economy*, through the work of those who have come to know Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The followers of Jesus Christ have been given a stewardship – an *economy* – by means of which we are to affect everything and everyone with the nature, purpose, and power of the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

But what does that mean? How should we as Christians expect our lives to impact the world around us for the purpose of the divine economy? Our unbelieving, under-the-sun age abounds in idols, all designed to serve the god of self and happiness; and everywhere we turn, people seem blind to and even scornful of the truth of the Gospel. How does God's economy proceed in the face of such an antithetical worldview?

### *A new order*

As God works in and through each believer, and all the work we've been given to do, a new order of the ages comes into existence, beginning with and radiating from each individual, that demonstrates both the power of the Gospel to make all things new, and of the Word and Spirit of God to turn the world rightside-up for His goodness and glory.

While the divine economy is too glorious and beautiful to describe in a short space, we can mention at least three aspects of that economy which, as we are mindful of them, and as we pursue them in all our works, can make it possible for God's economy more and more to prevail on earth.

What then are these three aspects?

### *Three aspects*

First, the divine economy comes to expression *from the unseen world to the world of things we can see*. To understand, therefore, what the shape of the divine economy should look like in any context, Christians need to be well-versed in the landscape of unseen things, as that is revealed to us in the Scriptures. After all, our constant prayer is that the Kingdom of God might come *on earth*, in the field of the world, *as it is in heaven*.

Yeah, right away we got problems.

The unseen world exists all around us. It is the dwelling-place of Christ, Who is seated at the right hand of God. He is served by myriads of angels, celebrated by unnumbered departed saints, and, with the Father, dispatches His Spirit to make us willing and able to do the work of the divine economy. From that unseen realm Christ is building His Church, advancing His rule, and putting all His enemies under His feet.

Though it is *terra incognita* for most believers, that unseen realm is filled with patterns of beauty, embodiments of truth, and exemplars of goodness from which we must draw as we work to bring the economy of heaven

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to reality on earth. If we're ever going to make progress in the divine economy, we need to become better acquainted with that realm from which it derives and flows.

Second, the norms and standards of the divine economy *are unchanging and unalterable*. God's declared intentions – His Law and promises – remain the same for all times, and provide the motivation, vision, and protocols for all who take up the work of the divine economy. Certainly *applications* of God's standards will be adjusted from time to time and place to place, but the *standards* do not change, and they must not be neglected or altered to suit our temporal convenience.

Third, the divine economy is *unfailing and unyielding*. It is moving forward, developing and advancing, expanding to take more and more the cosmos into its purview and power, and to bring forth fruit for the harvest, and nothing can withstand its progress or divert its course.

And either we are moving and advancing with God's economy and plan, or it is leaving us behind, and at the mercy of the tares of the world.

God does not change, His purposes do not change, and His determination to expand His economy into all the vast cosmos will not be set aside by the puny plans of mendacious men or the neglect of faithless saints.

Make no mistake about it: It *is* the economy – the divine economy. They are stupid indeed who ignore the reality of this new order, fail to take up their place in it, or foolishly consider that, somehow, they might be able to resist or withstand it.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is it important for us to understand as much as possible about the unseen realm? Where in Scripture can we look to begin learning more about this?
2. God's economy – His new order for the ages – unfolds in and through the lives of His faithful people. What does this require of you as you pursue the work He has given you to do each day?
3. What is your vision for the coming of God's economy in your Personal Mission Field? How do you see the goodness and glory of God abounding there?

*Next steps – Preparation: How familiar are you with that unseen realm from which the divine economy flows? How might you begin to feel more "at home" in the unseen things of Christ?*

### 3 The Goal of God's Economy

*“For the earth will be filled  
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,  
As the waters cover the sea.” Habakkuk 2.14*

#### *The glory of God*

The glory of God in every aspect of life is the end toward which God's economy is unfolding. As the Son of Man goes forth each day in the field of the world, His aim is to bring glory to the Father. He glorified God while He was on the earth, through the work God gave Him to do, and now He is continuing to seek His glory through the work of those who labor with Him amid the tares of this secular age.

To be sure, the glory of God will not be fully realized until God Himself brings it in with the new heavens and new earth. In the meantime, however, Christians, to whom the stewardship of the divine economy has been entrusted, have been charged with seeking to do all things in such a way as to bring glory to God (1 Cor. 10.31).

There is not a facet of our lives, not a nook or cranny of the cosmos where God does not intend that His glory should shine forth. Indeed, even now He is showing His glory in created things, and even in aspects of the culture that human beings make to meet their own needs (Ps. 19.1-4; Ps. 68.18, cf. Eph. 4.8-10). God is manifesting His glory; the task of those entrusted with the divine economy is to discern that glory and make it known (Prov. 25.2).

#### *Making God's glory known*

But what does that entail?

The glory of God is the manifestation of God's presence, glimpsed through created things, as they capture, refract, and radiate His beauty, goodness, and truth through their own unique features and functions. Every human being has an innate sense of beauty, goodness, and truth. That's not to say that human beings agree on these matters, just that they all have a sense of them. This is because, as we have seen, all people are made in the image and likeness of God, and the knowledge of God is inherent in them. The ultimate standard of beauty, goodness, and truth is God Himself. He is *all* beauty, goodness, and truth, and He makes His character and presence known through the creation and culture with which we are surrounded all day long.

Our task, as those charged with working are part of God's field, is to observe, draw out, exemplify, point out, explain, and pursue the glory of God in every aspect of life.

Think of this charge in terms of the relationships, roles, and responsibilities that fill our daily lives. In all our relationships, in our cultural activities, our conversations, families, vocations, and diversions – what will it look like, and how will it appear to others when the glorious presence of God is being manifested through us?

Certainly there will be manifestations of *beauty* – things that demonstrate right proportion, wholesome and pleasing patterns, edifying tendencies and proclivities, and things which bring wholesome pleasure and delight to others.

We would also expect to find evidence of remarkable *goodness*, like the Lord Jesus Christ is good – looking out for others, serving their needs, accomplishing works and projects that bring health, happiness, and wholesomeness to others.

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Moreover, we will strive to make sure that all our efforts are bathed with *truth*, grounded in the Word of God and reflective of the character of Jesus Christ Himself. Nothing of deceit, nothing misleading or equivocal, nothing to confuse or subvert should be part of our way of life.

Beauty, goodness, and truth will thus attach to all that we are becoming, everything we do, and everything and everyone we touch. Our presence in this secular age, and the work we do in the Lord's field, will declare a hope of glory that the people we encounter will not be able to deny.

### *Refracting God's glory*

Everything in our lives can be a means of refracting the glory of God to the people around us, of drawing out and highlighting elements of His everywhere-presence through some word or work of beauty, goodness, or truth. But this will not simply happen.

We will have to *study* the glory of God, and give ourselves to *meeting* with God in His glory until the glory that shines from *His face* begins to affect and transform us in every aspect of *our lives* (2 Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

For until we *know* the glory of God – His beauty, goodness, and truth impacting us soul and body, day by day – we will not be able to *show* that glory to the watching world. This is our charge, and, while – as Solomon insisted (Eccl. 1.13) – this is a difficult task, it is one which, as we give ourselves diligently to it, we may certainly expect to realize.

The end of the materialist, narcissist, utilitarian economy of our secular age is the vaunting and pleasing of self. In the unfolding and expanding economy of God, as the good seed of the Kingdom bears fruit in sector after sector of that field, the glory, majesty, splendor, beauty, goodness, and truth of God will increasingly impact and transform every aspect of life.

### *For reflection*

1. How do you experience the glory of God, as He makes His presence known to you?
2. How can we do our work – all the work we've been given to do – in such a way as to radiate the hope of glory we have in Jesus Christ?
3. What are some things you might do to increase your understanding of the beauty, goodness, and truth of God? Why is it important to understand these?

*Next steps – Conversation: How much of beauty, goodness, and truth can you identify in your life at this time? Talk with a Christian friend about this question. See if together you can come up with some areas where you might increase in showing the glory of God to those around you.*

## 4 Make Disciples

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”* Matthew 28.19

### *Our first priority*

Any economy has priorities and practices which sustain and advance it. Whether that economy is a subsistence economy, one based on barter, centralized and government-directed, or free and commercial, as in our secular economy, unless those who participate in that economy understand its driving force and priorities, neither they nor the economy will thrive.

In God's economy, where the overarching objective is to bring God's beauty, goodness, and truth to light within human culture and society, *all* our activities must be directed to this end. This is the driving force of God's work in our secular world, where we join Him in pursuit of this overarching objective.

But while everyone and everything within the Lord's field has the *potential* to bring Him glory, only those who know, fear, love, serve, and enjoy Him as their Savior and King will undertake to *make His glory known* in all they say and do. Glorifying God thus requires *disciples* of Jesus Christ. If we would make God's glory known increasingly throughout the field of the world, we must work hard at the task of making disciples.

### *Every believer's calling*

Within God's economy, three priorities define the lives and callings of those who submit to Him in sowing good Kingdom seed throughout their sector of the world field. Let's consider these in order.

Jesus described the first of these in our text: *Make disciples*. All believers are called to take up the work of making disciples “as they are going.” This work defines the broad parameters of all the work we've been given to do. Wherever we go, whatever we're doing, whichever aspect of our work we may be pursuing, overarching and directing them all is the calling to make disciples.

Every believer, who is *already* a disciple, needs encouragement and strengthening in that calling. Certainly, we have many opportunities for encouraging our fellow disciples in their walk with and work for the Lord. And every *nonbeliever*, at the very least, deserves the opportunity to see and hear the Good News of the Kingdom; we must, therefore, make every effort to show them the life of discipleship and explain the way into it.

### *Two questions*

We don't want to take anything for granted in this calling. Since making disciples is what we must be about, as our first priority in stewarding the divine economy, we need to ask two important questions.

First, what is a disciple? And second, what's involved in *making* disciples? Here we can only touch briefly on these.

A disciple, in the simplest of terms, is one who is a friend and follower of Jesus, and who learns from Him, and thus becomes increasingly like Him. A disciple believes that Jesus, by virtue of His redemptive work, is God's solution to the narcissism, rebellion, disillusionment, and despair of our secular age, and who thus receives Him as Savior and Lord.

As followers of Christ we must first learn from Him (Matt. 11.28-30). We learn from Jesus by listening to Him in His Word, communing with Him in prayer, and gathering with other disciples to study and discuss His calling on our lives, and to worship Him. Thus we *learn Jesus*, and are transformed increasingly into His image (Eph. 4.17-24; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

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In addition to learning Jesus, every believer lives as Jesus did, treading the path of holiness and service that Jesus walked when He was on earth.

Every disciple of Jesus encourages others to consider Him. With our fellow disciples, we will worship, pray, study, share, and take up works of service. With our unbelieving friends, we will show the love of Jesus and share the stories of what Jesus has done for us, explaining the teaching of Scripture concerning His saving and redeeming work on our behalf.

Discipleship is a full-time calling. If we think that being a Christian means only that we have confessed our sins and are going to heaven when we die, then we misunderstand the Lord's calling for all who would follow Him. As we labor together at *being* disciples of Jesus Christ, we will find it the great joy and the noblest calling of our lives to work at *helping others* follow Him as well. *Making disciples* involves being together in the Lord, sharing what we're learning, encouraging and edifying one another, bearing one another's burdens, and making the most of every opportunity to demonstrate and teach what it means to follow Jesus.

In God's economy, where glorifying God is the driving force, making disciples is the indispensable first task which enables us to accomplish the Lord's purpose for His field.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is making disciples so important to realizing the goal of God's economy?
2. How should believers try to help their fellow believers to improve in their discipleship?
3. Why is it important that we get to know, pray for, and make the most of every opportunity to talk with the unbelievers in our Personal Mission Field about the Lord and His Kingdom?

*Next steps – Transformation: How would you describe the state of your own discipleship at this time? How about your work of disciple-making? In which areas of your discipleship would you most like to improve?*

## 5 Build the Church

*“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”* Matthew 16.18

### *The context for disciple-making*

The Church is the indispensable context in which the work of making disciples goes forward, which makes the Church very important, and *building* the Church the second priority of the Lord's agenda for these last days.

Indeed, *central* to the divine economy is the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in building His Church. In the field of the world, churches are like garden beds, each containing a portion of the field, cultivating it diligently, and sowing good seed into yet more of the Lord's field. For this work, God has poured out His Holy Spirit, given His people His Word, appointed pastors and teachers, and established an order and procedures for carrying out His will.

But this is not a work which we may take on in whatever manner seems appropriate to us. It is not for us to define the church, nor to determine how the work of the church should proceed, or to what ends. The Lord has declared that He will build His Church, and He entrusted the apostle Paul with the blueprint for pursuing this great work.

We must build our churches as the Lord intends, or our work of making disciples will falter, the field of the world will not be sowed with good seed of the Kingdom, and tares will increase and spread throughout the Lord's field. Which sounds a lot like where we are today. The time has come for us to rediscover the Lord's plan for building His Church, and for committing ourselves to doing this work with Him, according to His designs.

### *The blueprint*

In Ephesians 4.11-16 Paul, picking up on the Lord's declared intention of “building” the Church (v. 12), shows us both what the *outcomes* of that project are to be, and the *process* we must follow. Paul says a church is being built-up when it is growing in unity and maturity, so that, increasingly, as a body, the local church constitutes the present incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's understanding of a healthy, growing church has very little to do with facilities, numbers of attendees, size of budget, variety of programs, or degree of contemporaneousness. For Paul, a local church is being built up when it evidences unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity in discerning, speaking, and living the truth of God in love.

If this is not the focus of our efforts in building our churches – and it does not seem to be – then we're working for something other than what the apostle Paul indicates our Lord is seeking. Mere numerical growth and a congregation of people who love their church are not the outcomes God intends in His economy. They seem to be the ones we're working for, however; so it's perhaps no wonder that our churches today are ineffectual at sowing and cultivating the Lord's field for His harvest and glory.

### *Getting healthy, growing churches*

Further, Paul told us how to achieve the outcome of healthy, growing churches. We must make disciples – real disciples, people who are equipped, soul and body, to serve others with the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who are, in fact, doing so.

## *God's Economy*

We do not build the church by running programs, raising money, or bending over backward to accommodate the cultural preferences and conveniences of our contemporary generation. We must build the church the way Jesus did, investing in people for extended periods of time, equipping them for ministry, shepherding them by the Word of God, and then sending them out to live as witnesses for Christ and His Kingdom.

Does this sound like what's happening in your church?

One of the indicators of a healthy, growing church, according to Paul, is that every member of the Body has become equipped and is serving others with the gifts God's Spirit supplies (Eph. 4.13-16; 1 Cor. 12.7-11). Churches are not healthy when 20% of the people do 80% of the work, while 80% of the people wait around to be served. This is not a *healthy* church but a church in need of the *reviving power* of God's Spirit. For every member to be thus equipped and serving, every member must submit to the process of becoming a disciple, a true follower of the Lord.

So the work of making disciples and building the local church are intimately connected.

As we persevere in this effort, God will build our congregations into true spiritual communities vibrant with worship, energetic for mutual edification, compassionate in sharing, and fervent in outreach to the larger community. That such churches are so few and far between in our day is a measure of just how much work we have to do in renewing this priority of the divine economy.

### *For reflection*

1. Why is having a healthy, growing church so crucial to the work of making disciples?
2. How can we explain the increase of tares in the Lord's field, when there are so many churches everywhere?
3. Is it important that local churches work to become healthy and growing? What role does Paul's model for a healthy, growing church have in your church?

*Next steps – Preparation: How do the leaders of your church assess its health? That is, how do they determine whether your church is healthy and growing? See what you can find out.*

## 6 The above All

*For unto us a Child is born,  
Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called  
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His government and peace  
There will be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,  
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
From that time forward, even forever.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. Isaiah 9.6, 7*

### *The Rule of King Jesus*

The Word of God came to earth in the Person of Jesus Christ to accomplish the redemptive plan of the Father, bring near the Kingdom of God, and inaugurate the divine economy.

He did this, as He frequently testified, by bringing the Kingdom of God into the affairs of human history, and calling all those who would follow Him to seek that Kingdom as their first priority (Matt. 6.33). Making disciples and building the Church creates a setting and context, in communities all over the world, for seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God. Disciples are citizens and ambassadors of that Kingdom, and local churches are signs of its presence and outposts of its advance.

The Kingdom of God is the rule of King Jesus, in the power of His Spirit, by which He is reconciling the world and all things in it to His Father and ours, making all things new, replacing the darkness of sin and fear with righteousness and peace and joy in the Spirit, and bringing the knowledge of the glory of God to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

### *Kingdom and glory*

Realizing the Kingdom of God is the objective of the divine economy toward which the works of making disciples and building the church strain. God is glorified as His Kingdom advances. For as the Kingdom of God grows, by the Word and Spirit of God, in and through the Church, every sector of society, all of culture, and every human being are brought into contact with a reality infused with transforming power not of this world.

Over the past 2,000 years of Christian history, the Church has been the healthiest and has contributed the most good to the world when this vision of the Kingdom of God has been the motive force in all her endeavors.

In our day, when we have turned the faith of Jesus Christ into a shrunken and personal thing (David Wells), this vision of the Kingdom of God is all but nonexistent. Of course, every Christians knows about the Kingdom and believes in it, at least to an extent. But the evidence of this world-transforming power is sparse in our world today, suggesting that churches have lost their focus and are seeking something other than the Kingdom of God. If we would realize the full flourishing of the divine economy in the field of the world, we must make the Kingdom turn and take seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as the commanding priority for all of life.

*Seeking the Kingdom*

But what does it mean to seek this Kingdom?

First, it means to *understand* the Kingdom and its peculiar nature. It is a Kingdom where righteousness, peace, and joy proliferate in the Holy Spirit. In the Kingdom of God holy virtues spread out from the churches to touch, affect, and infuse all aspects of life and culture with the glory of God. Christians should nurture some sense of what that might look like in their own communities, and pastors should preach that vision fervently, tirelessly, and with full conviction.

Second, seeking the Kingdom requires that each believer take up the challenge of *growing* in Kingdom virtues and skills, as a part of our everyday walk with the Lord (2 Pet. 1.5-11). Here our calling to be and make disciples intersects with Christ's command to seek the Kingdom and our prayer that this Kingdom might come on earth as it is in heaven. Only by attending diligently to the work of sanctification will we be able to seek the Kingdom more expansively in all our other work.

Third, we need to *proclaim* the Kingdom, as Jesus and the apostles did. We need to tell our neighbors, with great joy, that a new power has broken into human history, a new hope is held out to us, a new economy is unfolding all around us, and new promises can light our paths through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We must proclaim this message without compromise and with great joy, and we must back up our proclamation with works that bring the newness and glory of the rule of Jesus into all of life and culture.

Finally, we must *pray fervently* for the coming of the Kingdom. The progress of God's Kingdom is the work of our Lord Jesus, and He will be pleased to do this great work through us if we will turn consistently to Him in prayer.

The divine economy is unfolding and straining toward the realization of the Kingdom of God. Are we?

*For reflection*

1. As you understand it, what is the Kingdom of God? What is our role in that Kingdom?
2. Paul said we have been called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12), and Jesus commanded us to seek the Kingdom first in all things. Why is it important that we understand as much as we can about the Kingdom of God?
3. How can you begin to become more consistent and more fruitful in seeking the Kingdom of God?

*Next steps – Conversation: How clear is your understanding of the Kingdom of God? Or of what it means to seek the Kingdom? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions. How can you help one another in this high and holy calling?*

## 7 Planning to Succeed

*So teach us to number our days,  
That we may gain a heart of wisdom...  
Let Your work appear to Your servants,  
And Your glory to their children.  
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,  
And establish the work of our hands for us;  
Yes, establish the work of our hands!* Psalm 90.12, 16, 17

### *Planning in the economy*

The most important thing to understand about these secular times is that God is at work in the field of the world, using all the work of His people to establish, unpack, and expand His Kingdom, and the unique economy of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit that Kingdom brings with it. We will know better what we should be doing each day, if we can keep this fact in mind at all times.

And if we plan carefully and prayerfully for our part in it.

Americans spend a good deal of time – probably more than we realize – planning to succeed in our free enterprise economy.

When you think of all the hours we spend in education and training, just to find the right niche for a lifetime of getting and spending; or how diligent we can be in planning our retirement and other aspects of a secure financial future; not to mention the plans we make at work, for improving our home, and for making the best use of our resources, getting ready for a vacation – in view of all this, planning to succeed in the American economy is a constant, ongoing part of what every American must do.

But I wonder if we spend as much time planning for success in the divine economy? My experience tells me that we do not. Instead, what far too many Christians do is squeeze everything that relates to the *divine* economy within their plans for success in the *American* economy.

And then they wonder why their lives in Christ are no more exhilarating and power-filled than they are.

### *Planning and review*

If we're going to make our way in the divine economy, so that we maximize our contribution to the work of making disciples, building the Church, and advancing the Kingdom, and, along the way, find full and abundant, powerful and glory-filled life in Christ, we're going to have to adopt a perpetual process of planning and review related to everything in our lives. If we're not willing to do this, or if we make our plans in anything less than a God-honoring way, then our Christian life will suffer, and along with that, our witness for the Lord as well. And, rather than cultivate to fruitfulness our sector of the Lord's field, we will open it to incursions of every sort of secular tare.

So how do we do this? How do we make our way in the divine economy and plan for success in that glorious and everywhere-present realm?

### *Moving forward*

First, we must humbly admit that we do not know the future, but that the Lord does (Jms. 4.14; Prov. 27.1). Therefore, we need to be careful that we're not merely relying on what *we* want or *we* think is best for our plans and future. Let us come humbly before the Lord, seeking His wisdom, and ask Him to help us

## *God's Economy*

“number” our days, as our text indicates. Let us do our planning, and submit all our plans for all aspects of our work, to the Lord, for His approval and wisdom.

At the same time, we must accept that, puny though they may seem to us, our lives matter to God and are significant for His eternal plan (cf. Ps. 8). So we must be diligent, day by day, in pleading with Him to show us all the work we've been given to do, and to help us prepare to glorify Him in that work.

The more we study the different aspects of the divine economy, the more we will be able to plan our activities around those divinely-appointed priorities. We will want to make the most of every opportunity we have each day for advancing God's realm and rule on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6.10; Eph. 5.15-17). We all engage people throughout the course of the day. Do we have a disciple-making plan for reaching out to each one of them? We all have gifts from God's Spirit which we are to use in building-up our fellow church members (1 Cor. 12.7-11). Have we begun to discover and exercise those gifts? And we all work and live in a variety of cultural and social arenas – home, neighborhood, work, and so forth – where we can give ourselves to the pursuit of the priority of God's Kingdom – righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So if we can make these the constant focus of our study and growth, we'll make better plans and do better work within the divine economy.

Making our way in the divine economy is not rocket science; it is, however, hard work, and it requires a continuous focus on the Lord's priorities and will, together with constant reliance on His presence and Spirit, if we're going to be wise in understanding where we fit and knowing what we must do in the glorious divine economy that is unfolding all around us.

### *For reflection*

1. Summarize your approach to planning your life – your days, weeks, years, and so forth. How does your contribution to the divine economy fit into that planning?
2. Meditate on Psalm 8. Do you believe your work in the divine economy has something to contribute to its unfolding? Explain.
3. What steps might you take to better fulfill the exhortations of Psalm 90.12, Ephesians 5.15-17, and James 4.13-17?

*Next steps – Preparation: What can you do to begin making better progress in the divine economy? Share your thoughts and plans with a Christian friend, and seek his or her support in prayer.*

*God's Economy*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by a “divine economy”? How much is included in that economy?
2. What are the proper ends and objectives to seek within the divine economy?
3. What do you expect it to look like as God unfolds His divine economy in your Personal Mission Field? What is your role in this?
4. How would you counsel a new believer to plan for maximizing his contribution to the divine economy? What should he expect as he takes up this work each day (Ps. 90.16, 17)?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.