

WHAT WE MUST DO (2)

UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES 10



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

What We Must Do (2)

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *What We Must Do (2)*

With Stephen and Paul as our examples, and understanding the times in which we live, each believer must do his part to advance the Kingdom of Christ. This entails living and proclaiming our witness to Him at all times and by every available means.

There couldn't be a better time for doing what we must. The secular, materialist, narcissistic worldview is exhausted, and the Gospel of the Kingdom is as much Good News today as it ever was. This is the day of salvation, and to us is the calling to make this Good News known.

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 Exposed and Undone?

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6.2

'Tis the season!

I suspect that some believers in Jerusalem, when they saw what happened to Stephen, and as they came under the rampages and threats of Saul of Tarsus, may have had second thoughts about whether the time was right to be making bold stands for Christ and His Kingdom. Most continued faithful in proclaiming the Good News, even as they were scattered from their homes. But undoubtedly there were some whose courage waivered.

Apparently, many Christians today have reached the same conclusion concerning the work of sowing good Kingdom seed in our secular and narcissistic age. Whereas those first Christians went everywhere “gossiping the Gospel” (Michael Green), Christians today are trapped in a spiral of silence, cowed into silence by the dominant worldview of unbelief.

At the risk of seeming to be out of touch with reality, I want to insist that the time has never been riper for Christians to be making their case for the Gospel of the Kingdom.

I know, I know: it seems more like a time for us to be hunkering down and lying low. The atheists among us are angry and aggressive. New websites pop up each week touting the virtues of atheism, and the evangelists for that cause – Dawkins, Krauss, Harris, *et al* – have achieved the status of rock stars. Christians are being pot-shot from every angle: we’re uneducated, irrelevant, hypocritical, opposed to science, and on and on.

Some of those charges, we know, have the ring of truth. And most Christians seem to be getting the point: All this loud objecting and protesting and threatening means we’d better tone down our witness for now and concentrate on our own personal relationship with Jesus.

But I want to insist otherwise.

Now is no time for shying away from engagement for the Gospel. The tares have sunk deep roots throughout the Lord’s field, it’s true, and they are propagating and spreading by every means. Nevertheless, now is the favorable time for Christians to declare and defend the Christian worldview. Now is the day of salvation, and all believers must be diligent in proclaiming the Good News at every opportunity and by every means.

Why all this fuss?

I’ve been thinking a lot of late about all this atheistic harrumphing, this unbelieving *Sturm und Drang*. There have always been atheists, and probably more in the past than today. Why are they suddenly so up in arms? Why so loud and angry? Why all this protesting against a Christian presence which, in the West, at least, has become weaker and more marginal over the past two decades?

Then it hit me. I recalled the words of Hamlet’s mother, the queen, in Act III, Scene II, as she watched the play Hamlet had written to expose her and her new husband’s treachery. The queen began to squirm as the actor playing the queen confidently insists she will remain a widow after her husband’s death – unlike Hamlet’s mother. Hamlet asks his mother, “Madam, how do you like the play?” To which she protests, “The lady protests too much, methinks.”

What the queen objected to was that the play threatened to expose her wickedness in marrying the murderer

of Hamlet's father, the king, and of thus participating in his treachery. She felt exposed and about to be undone, and so she protested the lines of the queen in Hamlet's play.

Atheism in trouble

Something like this is happening in the secular, unbelieving community in our day.

As Alister McGrath pointed out in his 2004 book, *The Twilight of Atheism*, unbelief is retreating all over the world, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Recent research shows¹ that, for all their "evangelizing" and harrumphing, atheists have not been able to persuade more than 2% of the world's population.

At the same time, Christians are popping up everywhere – in the former Soviet Union, all over Africa and Latin America, in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia, even among the nations of the Muslim world.

What's more, certain Christians are becoming outspoken on behalf of a Christian worldview. They are calling for the application of the Gospel to every area of life, pointing out that true human flourishing comes only when God's Word is obeyed, and challenging the presumptions of various groups and movements concerning such matters as the definition of marriage, the beginnings and value of life, and the freedom of religion. Christians around the world are sowing good Kingdom seed into the Lord's field, and it's only a matter of time before much of that seed takes root and begins to flourish.

Even more, Christians have established themselves firmly as intellectual leaders in a variety of academic disciplines, and their views are being received by peers and students with great interest and attention.

Atheists are protesting because their ranks are declining, their folly is being exposed, and their frivolous view of life is in danger of being overrun by the progress of the Kingdom of God. Now is indeed the favorable time for what we as Christians must do in sowing the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout our Personal Mission Fields.

For now – *now* – is the day of salvation!

For reflection

1. Contemporary evangelists for atheism seem a lot like the wizard in *The Wizard of Oz*, when Toto has drawn back the curtain and exposed the charade. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. For all their hard work, the evangelists for atheism have not managed to persuade more than 2% of the world's population to let go belief in God. What does this suggest about the times in which we live and the people with whom we have to do each day? Is the dominant secular and narcissistic worldview beginning to unravel?
3. What about you? Would you describe yourself as one of those Christians who "are becoming outspoken on behalf of a Christian worldview"? Why or why not? Would you like to become more like this?

Next steps – Preparation: Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field yet? Now's the time do so, and to begin making your case for the Gospel to all the people you see each week. Watch the video on Personal Mission Field, which you can find on our home page, beneath the fold (www.aillbe.org).

¹ <https://www.cnsnews.com/news/article/global-study-atheists-decline-only-18-world-population-2020>

2 Now?

... for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14.17

Faulty views of the faith

Ask the unbelievers you know what they think of Christianity, and you're likely to get a variety of responses.

Some might say it's good for those who need it, making it clear that they, being independent and self-sufficient find such a psychological crutch unnecessary.

Others might say they think the faith of Christ has become irrelevant in our day, which is why they regard it as irrelevant to their lives.

Still others might flare up, get indignant, and start accusing you of trying to cram your religion down their throats.

It's not likely, however, that many will say, concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that it is the key to helping people learn to live together in mutual love and respect, so that everyone can flourish and be at peace, society and culture can be beautified and enriched, and everyone can know true joy and lasting fulfillment. After all, if they believed that, wouldn't they be Christians already?

Whose fault?

Why are so many faulty views of Christianity floating about these days? It's not primarily because aggressive unbelievers have misrepresented the faith or exaggerated its failings. For all their boasting and bluster, their straw-man caricatures of the faith, and their outright lies and distortions, they haven't really had much success in persuading people to their position, as we've seen.

Mostly these misrepresentations of Christianity exist because we who hold the faith of Christ have not been clear about what we believe, why we believe it, and why believing in Jesus makes a difference in our lives. Paul was clear, as he spoke to the philosophers on Mars Hill. Stephen was so clear, that no one in that angry crowd misunderstood his message. Certainly Jesus was clear about what it means to believe in and follow Him.

But Christians today, who have become largely silent when among the lost of this secular age, have *not* been clear about the faith, and, as a result, false understandings have filled the vacuum of notions about what kind of religion Christianity is. And, on top of that, we haven't exactly lived, in a caring, courageous, and consistent manner, the beliefs and convictions we claim to hold dear. If we're looking for someone to blame for the widespread misunderstanding of Christianity in our day, we only need to look around on Sunday morning.

But we are Christians, presumably, because we find that Jesus brings an experience of life, purpose, meaning, joy, and peace that nothing else has managed to provide. So why have we been so reluctant to proclaim this to our under-the-sun generation?

The day of salvation

The Apostle Paul declared, "Now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6.2). Now. But the *fact* of salvation seems to have eluded most people, including a great many of those who profess to possess it. What does it mean to be saved? Saved from what? Saved for what? So it's the day of salvation: just what does that mean?

The Biblical idea of salvation carries the meaning of wholeness, of rediscovering true humanness. It means

being set free from the snares and chains of mere lust and foolish self-interest – all that under-the-sun living Solomon warned his son against – so that we can discern more noble aspirations and pursue more fulfilling and satisfying paths.

Throughout the course of human history those who have known the salvation which God grants us through Jesus Christ have been responsible for bringing more in the way of beauty, goodness, and truth to the human experience than any other movement, philosophy, or religion. In every area of culture and society, the presence of the saved has meant liberation for human creativity, genius, and wellbeing. Yes, of course, there have been problems along the way and blips in the road. Christians aren't perfect, as we know.

But where the salvation of God has truly taken root in a person's life, everything begins to change. The life and love of Jesus replace mere self-interest, the peace of eternal rest overcomes all anxiousness and fear, and joy that nothing can shake or steal settles over the soul. In such a condition, people begin to flourish as never before. Together in their flourishing, the followers of Christ bear the fruits of their salvation in culture in ways that delight as they ennoble, and in societies, such that freedom and justice abound for all.

Now is the day of salvation! The Kingdom of God has come to earth, and righteousness, peace, and joy are expanding all over the world. If you are not experiencing this, it may be that your view of salvation is simply too small. If being saved means to you only that your sins are forgiven and you're going to heaven when you die, then you don't really understand the full power and scope of what Jesus has accomplished on your behalf. He Who is making all things new is ready to do the same in your life and, through you, into every arena of your life – all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

The Christian hopes for the glory of God (Rom. 5.1, 2), that is, that he might see God at work in and through him to bring honor and glory to His Name in all we are, think, say, and do. Now is the day of such a great salvation – now! And those who are saved strive to realize that glorious salvation more and more each day.

For reflection

1. As you understand it, what does it mean to be “saved”? Saved from what? Unto what? For what?
2. Do you think we as a community of believers have done a good job of helping people to understand why salvation is such Good News? How about your church? Why or why not?
3. What are some examples you might point to, from the course of human history, to demonstrate the power of the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom?

Next steps – Preparation, Conversation: How well do you understand the meaning of salvation? Ask some of your Christian friends what it means to be saved. Then listen to some music by Johann Sebastian Bach and ask yourself, what did it mean for Bach to be saved? Or read some poetry by Gerard Manley Hopkins, view some paintings by Rembrandt or Vermeer, and ask: What did it mean for these people to be saved? Where do you sense a need for more of our great salvation in your life?

3 The Gospel of the Kingdom

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation... Romans 1.16

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God has come to the field of the world, and it is increasing daily, as Lord works in and through His redeemed people to sow good Kingdom seed in Personal Mission Fields of every sort and extend. With the coming of the Kingdom of God a *new era* broke into human history. A *new King* is on the throne, and He is advancing a *new economy* – a spiritual economy in which grace fuses with Law, issuing, by the power of God’s Spirit, in widespread, ever-increasing love and truth among men.

A *new agenda* governs the affairs of men: King Jesus is building His Church and calling out a people for Himself. That people is constituted as a holy nation, and together they pursue an altogether *new priority* – seeking the Kingdom of God and His righteousness for all of life. And they are infused with *new hope*, the hope of knowing God’s glory and showing His glory to the world. A *new and overriding passion* governs all they do, that God, Who has saved and richly blessed them, might receive glory and honor and praise from every sector of the world field.

All this has come about because of the glorious saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the Good News of His Kingdom! His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension – and the promise of His imminent return – have ushered out the old era, overcome the old tyrant that ruled men’s souls, shackled our spiritual foes, canceled the old economy of sin and death, replaced the old agenda and priority of mere self-seeking, and the set aside the old, unreliable hope in fleeting things and circumstances.

The world may seem like a tapestry of secularism, narcissism, materialism, and sensuality, but this is only the ragged and confused underside. Turn that tapestry rightside-up, and you will see that the Kingdom of light is advancing in power everywhere (1 Jn. 2.8).

Good News!

The Kingdom of God is thus *good news* – Gospel.

If we could summarize in one word just what that good news consists of, surely it would be the word, *power*. The Kingdom of God is power, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 4.20. The active presence and ready availability of that power – the power of God’s Word and Spirit – is Good News for the world because it makes possible a life that is new and transforming in all its aspects.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is the power of God for transformation, a transformation so complete and thorough that it makes all things new, ultimately, even the whole vast cosmos. Those who know this power are changed by the glory of God so that, increasingly, their lives refract the living reality of the risen Christ, their King into all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities (2 Cor. 3.7-18; Eph. 4.17-24). The fruits and virtues that flow from their lives, like rivers of living water, are precisely those most to be desired and least in supply in a fallen world (Jn. 7.37-39; Gal. 5.16-23). Together, those who know this power form communities of grace and truth whose ability to transform relationships, cultures, and whole societies has been demonstrated over and over throughout the course of Church history (Acts 6.1-7; 17.1-9; 19.18-20).

The transforming power of the Gospel

This transforming power of the Gospel of the Kingdom is the experience and testimony of every person who, coming to salvation in Jesus Christ, has taken up the calling to seek the Kingdom of righteousness,

peace, and joy in the Spirit as his guiding orientation in life (Matt. 6.33; Rom. 14.17).

Righteousness is truth abounding in love – spiritual knowledge and true discernment, leading to excellence and purity in life, after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1.9-11). Righteousness defines the *character* of the Kingdom of God.

Peace is that “beyond understanding” state of soul that nothing can terrify and nothing can shake (Phil. 4.6, 7). Peace is the *condition* which settles in as the Kingdom advances. Those who know the power of the Gospel know peace because they are settled on Christ, hidden in the palm of God’s hand, sheltered by His Word, and filled and protected by His Spirit.

The joy that issues from such peace represents the *consequence* of the Kingdom, and conveys a hope that is lodged in transcendent and unchangeable realities, a hope so infectious that, observed, it leads others to seek a reason for it (1 Pet. 3.15).

Where the power of the Kingdom is at work in the field of the world, the *salvation* of God brings *transformation*, so that the *fruit of righteousness, peace, and joy* begin to be increasingly in evidence among the tares of unbelief and sin.

This is the Good News of the day of salvation, the Good News that men and women in every age have delighted to know, the Good News that *power* is available for making all things new and bountiful, for all who believe, in all areas of their lives, throughout the field of the world.

For reflection

1. How do you experience the Gospel as Good News? Be specific, and be convincing.
2. The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit. Four ideas: Righteousness, peace, joy, and the Holy Spirit. What does each of these contribute to the “Good News” of the Kingdom?
3. How does the “transforming power” of the Kingdom work? What gets changed? How?

Next steps – Preparation: Prepare an outline of a presentation of the Gospel based on the Good News of the Kingdom as outlined in this article. Try sharing your presentation with another Christian. Ask for comments, feedback, and suggestions. Then begin to commit this presentation of the Gospel to memory, so that you will have it ready to share whenever a door of opportunity presents in your Personal Mission Field.

4 The Spiral of Silence

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear... 1 Peter 3.15

Making our case

In our generation, most Christians seem to believe that, if a case is to be made for the Kingdom of God and the Christian worldview, the task falls to others more qualified than they.

Declaring and defending the Kingdom is the work of theologians, apologists, writers and teachers, and, of course, preachers. The rest of us can't expect to make bold stands for the Gospel to our secular and unbelieving neighbors.

Certainly, theologians and preachers have a role in making the case for the glorious Good News that the Kingdom of God has come. But it would be a mistake to believe that such people are the *only*, or even the *most important* means for making our case for the Christian worldview.

That task falls to every one of us who have embraced Jesus as Savior and Lord. We must all prepare and be ready to break our silence on spiritual matters and speak boldly for Christ, like Stephen and Paul.

Trapped in a spiral of silence

Three primary means are available to us, by which we may share our views and beliefs, engage in discussions and arguments, and work to persuade others of the truth of our worldview. These are conversation, publication, and participation. And each of these is within the reach of every believer.

Thus, every believer needs to know how to make the most of opportunities for declaring and defending the Kingdom, beginning with everyday conversations (Eph. 5.15-17).

The worldviews by which people live are incubated, first of all, in everyday relationships, beginning in homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces all across the country. What parents teach their children to believe – the priorities they inculcate in them, the values they instill – these will have long-term implications for what they believe and how they live.

Additionally, what people talk about with one another as they go about their everyday tasks and conduct their relationships also shapes what they believe and how they live. German sociologist Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann explains that those who are the most active and outspoken regarding their views and positions are likely to carry the day in democratic societies such as ours (*The Spiral of Silence*). The more people talk about their worldview, the more open and confident they are in making their case, the bolder they become. The bolder and more outspoken they become, the more a “spiral of silence” begins to engulf those who listen to them, but believe something else. No one wants to be thought of as holding to a “minority position” on anything, so, rather than speak up when others are going on about their worldview, most people will remain silent.

Including, alas, most Christians.

This is where the Christian community finds itself at this time, trapped in a spiral of silence before a blustering but empty secular and unbelieving worldview. As David Bentley Hart observes in his book, *Atheist Delusions*, “One would think these would be giddy days for religion’s most passionate antagonists; rarely can they have known a moment so intoxicatingly full of promise. A mere glance in the direction of current trends in mass-market publishing should be enough to make the ardent secularist’s heart thrill with the daring and

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delicious hope that we just might be entering a golden age for bold assaults on humanity's ancient slavery to 'irrational dogma' and 'creedal tribalism.'" Before that veritable tsunami of ink and paper, many Christians have retreated into a spiral of silence, not knowing how to respond, and fearing to be called out for standing against the dominant worldview.

This is not what we should expect from those who are designated vessels of truth, even though we be but frail vessels (2 Cor. 4.7).

Make the most of the opportunities

So it is very important that believers in Jesus Christ make the best use of every opportunity to talk about what is good and pleasing to God. We must teach our children well and insist that our churches assist us in this process. We must learn to think through the implications of the Kingdom of God and its application for every aspect of life. We must encourage one another to be ready at all times to give a reason for the hope that is within us.

If believers will not use daily conversation – in our homes, places of employment, among our friends, with our neighbors – we can expect others to frame the worldview by which the rest of us will live. The spirit of the times, rather than the Spirit of God, will continue to shape the environment and culture in these secular, narcissistic, and unbelieving times.

But imagine a nation of scores of millions of people, deeply conversant with the Word of God, and steeped in the experience of His Kingdom, people who understand the times and are eager to discuss and able to defend their views at every opportunity. There is more power for making our case in everyday conversations than we have yet begun to wield!

If Christians are ever going to break the spiral of silence and make the case for a Christian worldview, it will begin in the day-to-day opportunities that God provides for talking with our children, neighbors, and co-workers about the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

For reflection

1. Would you describe yourself as outside or within "the spiral of silence"? Explain.
2. What does we mean by "everyday conversations"? Can you give some examples? Do you agree that these could be a context for declaring and defending the Good News of the Kingdom of God? Why or why not?
3. Who are some people (first names only) you might try engaging in a conversation about the Good News? How might you go about that? What obstacles will you need to overcome?

Next steps – Conversation: Here's a conversation starter to use in engaging the people in your Personal Mission Field this week. Try it out with two or three folks, then share the results of your effort with some of your Christian friends, encouraging them to do the same: "If I had some really good news to share with you, do you think you'd be willing to hear it?"

5 Write it Out

“Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” Deuteronomy 4:6

A wide door or opportunity

The day of salvation has come! *Now* is the favorable time for making known the Good News of God’s Kingdom, and the righteousness, peace, and joy it brings to everyone who enters it. Atheism, materialism, postmodernism, secularism – all are exhausted, and have nothing left to offer a disillusioned world. God calls all those who believe in Jesus Christ to take up the challenge of breaking the “spiral of silence” and making the case for the Gospel and the Christian worldview.

As we have seen, this must begin in our everyday conversations at home, in the community, at work, and wherever we gather with others. The more we talk with our Christian friends about how truly good it is to be living in the Kingdom and sowing good Kingdom seed in our Personal Mission Fields, the readier will be to talk with our unbelieving neighbors and co-workers, as the Lord gives opportunity.

Talking with others about the Lord and our experience of Him, as part of our everyday conversations, is an important aspect of calling to sow the good seed.

A second means by which we must make our case for the Kingdom is by publishing the Christian worldview through every available means.

This does not require that we all become authors of best-selling books. That’s simply not going to happen. But never before has such a wide door of opportunity been available to affect the thinking of so many people by sharing the *written* word (1 Cor. 16:8, 9). Through local media, the Internet, and social networking, we may expect to influence many for the Kingdom of God whom we will never be able to talk with face to face.

No shortage of media

Here is a second area where every Christian can play an active role in making the case for the Christian worldview, and in sowing good Kingdom seed into the Lord’s field.

In our day there is no shortage of media through which we can employ the written word to challenge the secular mindset and propose our Christian alternative. Local newspapers still receive occasional op/ed pieces as well as letters to the editor. Even national journals of opinion will publish letters that are concise, considerate, and well-written. There is plenty of help to be found on the Internet concerning how to craft an effective op/ed piece or letter to the editor.

By engaging local papers and other journals and periodicals, we can help to make the case for a Christian worldview, if only with those who screen such missives.

But by far the greatest medium through which believers can make the case for the Kingdom of God is the Internet. Websites abound where Kingdom citizens can comment on contemporary issues, moral concerns, matters of belief, and ethics. Opportunities can be easily found for becoming involved in blogging conversations in which we may set forth our Scriptural views, even in the midst of the tares of our secular age.

Moreover, many websites exist in which questions of public policy and similar concerns are given thoughtful consideration by Christian thinkers. Articles from these websites relating to public policy matters can be

downloaded and copied or simply linked and emailed to friends. We should always make sure to follow-up on any emailed articles, or articles copied and distributed, with a view to engaging in conversation over the issue examined.

Believers should not be reluctant to post their own thoughts about worldview issues – on their own websites, through email, via social media, or for discussion in small groups – and thus to encourage conversation that can affect what people believe and how they live.

It's up to us

Now is the day of salvation!

Plenty of people are active on social media, in blogging, and on websites and in other media, celebrating their narcissistic and materialistic hopes and dreams. Why should theirs be the only message in town? No one is going to publish our Christian worldview for us. But with papers and journals, email, blogging, social networking media, and other outlets ready to hand, it would be irresponsible for us not to employ every means for making our case on behalf of the Kingdom of God, swarming all manner of media with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

Where believers are not present in those settings, the spiral of silence rules. So let us determine that here, too, we will challenge the existing worldviews of the day and make our case for the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

For reflection

1. What do you think? Is writing about the Kingdom and the Good News of Jesus really a viable option for believers? Why or why not?
2. What about email? Is that a viable source for striking up a conversation about the Gospel? How might it be used for this purpose?
3. What would it take to encourage you to begin, or to accelerate, this option of using publication as a means of communicating the Good News?

Next steps – Conversation, Transformation: Ask some friends about good websites to visit where you can get involved in blogging about the Kingdom of God. Make a list of two or three points about the Kingdom you'd most like to share. Then visit those websites and join a conversation. Stay at it for a while until it's clear you have begun to engage some readers. Let the Lord lead you from there.

6 Get Involved

Then Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Exodus 4.10

Three means

Worldviews are shaped and shared in everyday conversations, and through the views and opinions published in the various media of the day, especially the Internet.

Believers know how to talk, and practically every one of us is involved with email, social networking, and the Net. We must make the most of these opportunities to make our case for the Kingdom of God, and to argue the merits of its blessings as a worldview to be preferred over the failed secularism of our day.

Everyone else talks about their dreams and hopes and the things they love the most. Why shouldn't we? If we truly understand our times, and know the Kingdom of God to be Good News, then languishing in our current spiral of silence does not behoove us. We must find ways to break out of this black hole and begin living and proclaiming life under the heavens to our under-the-sun neighbors throughout the Lord's field.

A third opportunity for shaping the worldviews of others can be engaged by participating in arenas where people's views are being shaped. We may feel reluctant, like Moses, to take up a work of teaching, to start a reading group, or to become involved in a class at a university. But as Moses was made to understand that God's will for His people could not be realized without their involvement in the public policy arena, so we must come to see that God is calling us to participate where we can, in those settings where worldviews are debated and people are persuaded concerning how they ought to live.

Yes, you!

Opportunities exist to throughout your community to participate in reading or discussion groups. Check your local library or bookstore. Ask around at church. If Christians could become more active and outspoken – with gentleness and respect, of course – in every such setting, how many minds might be changed for the Kingdom of God?

Ask your pastor or a church leader about ways you can become involved as a teacher or discussion leader at church. So much of what passes for Christian education today is focused too narrowly, with too small a vision of the salvation of the Lord. The Church needs leaders and teachers who understand the Kingdom of God and are living the Christian worldview as fully as possible.

It's not too much to expect that some of us, at least, might participate more actively in the work of politics and government. That governments frequently stray from the framework of goodness God intends will surprise no one. It certainly did not surprise Moses. Christians must be prepared to enter the arena of politics and government, as the Lord leads and calls, to work for policies consistent with the Kingdom interests of the Lord. Moses did not feel qualified for such work; yet God provides the qualifications His people needs when He calls them to any task.

But most of all, we must engage the people to whom God sends us each day, the people in our Personal Mission Fields, with a view to demonstrating the reality of Jesus, alive from the dead, living and caring and talking through us. If we refuse to become involved at this level, we are neglecting the most important arena where can bring the light of God's Kingdom into the darkness of our secular and narcissistic age, and we shall have to give an account of our stewardship of this calling before the Lord Who sends us.

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Begin and continue in prayer

Involvement in these various arenas begins with prayer, and is sustained by prayer, for all participants in the process. We must pray – for ourselves, our fellow Christians, the lost people with whom we have contact, and the secular generation among whom we live. Without prayer, our conversations, publications, and participation with others will lack the focus and power they require.

Prayer must be the basis for all our efforts to make our case for the Christian worldview. Believers must pray daily for the coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 6.10), that righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit would increase and abound wherever Kingdom citizens live and move and have their being (Rom. 14.17, 18). We should also join together, uniting our voices in prayer and crying out to God for revival, renewal, and awakening in the world. Abraham Kuyper wrote concerning prayer, “Movements in history...which do not spring from this deepest source are always partial and transient, and only those historical acts which arose from the lowest depths of man’s personal existence embrace the whole of life and possess the required permanence.”

Participation in prayer, in short, is our most important form of participation, and is essential to being effective in all our efforts to embody and proclaim the Kingdom of God among the tares of this generation.

Every day, let us take up the work of conversation, publication, and participation in order to declare and defend the Gospel, to set forth the reality of the Kingdom and the desirability of the Christian worldview. Commit your work to prayer and stay at it every day, making the most of every opportunity to make your case for the Kingdom!

For reflection

1. Getting involved and talking about the Kingdom should begin in the “safe zone” of our local church. What opportunities for getting involved in Kingdom conversations are you currently involved in in your church? What are some other places you might become involved?
2. We need to evangelize one another as much as we do the people in our Personal Mission Fields. Why?
3. How can prayer become a more important component in your work of declaring and defending the Good News of the Kingdom?

Next steps – Transformation: Talk with some Christian friends about opportunities for participating in a group or other activity where worldviews are discussed. See if you can recruit a couple of others to join you. Then make it a matter of prayer together to encourage and help one another to use your participation as a way of embodying and proclaiming the Christian worldview.

7 Seek the Kingdom

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” Matthew 6.33

Our highest priority

The apostle Paul explained to the assembled philosophers in Athens that God had so appointed the nations of the world, and their boundaries, that they would seek Him, and together become one Kingdom under the heavens, rather than man under the sun. Solomon’s advice to his son, Rehoboam, was intended to help him seek a kingdom which would know the blessings of God, rather than His chastening.

And in the field of the world, where God goes forth each day to sow good Kingdom seed, our calling is to seek His Kingdom – His *rule* – over every aspect of our lives.

Seeking the Kingdom of God must be the highest priority for every believer in Jesus Christ. If it’s not yours, it’s because you do not understand the Kingdom, or you do not believe it is as important, as glorious, or as powerful and transforming as the Scriptures teach.

The Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ, breaking into human experience by His Word and Spirit, through His Church. It is a spiritual domain, which King Jesus is advancing by His Word and Spirit, in and through the people of God, by and for the glory of God. Where the Kingdom of God is increasing, the goodness of the Lord – His righteousness, peace, and joy – is evident in a wide variety of ways.

The progress of the Kingdom has been more or less visible in different places and times, depending on the extent to which God’s people are faithful in their calling to seek it. In our day, in our country, among the followers of Jesus Christ, the presence of the Kingdom is increasingly marginalized, as churches proclaim a weak and truncated gospel of “near Christianity” rather than the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the Apostles.

Meanwhile, Satan, the father of lies, never ceases working to stall the progress of the Kingdom by promoting the lie that we are our own masters and that God is not the loving, redeeming, and sovereign King of all.

What we seek

What we seek, and what we call others to join us in seeking through the resources, networks, and the opportunities God provides, by all the means of His grace, is the progress of the Kingdom unto increasing revival, renewal, and awakening in our generation and beyond.

Where Jesus is advancing His Kingdom, individual believers experience the grace and truth of God leading to *daily revival* of soul and body, for growth in the Lord, the manifestation of His glory, and the proclamation of His truth. Revived people understand the times and how much our world needs the rule of King Jesus, so they give themselves to living and proclaiming this Good News by every means, all the time.

In homes and churches where men and women experience daily revival, families become forges of selflessness, charity, responsibility, industry, creativity, and civility. Such families, and others like them, impact their churches for *renewal* in every aspect of ecclesiastical life and ministry. Renewed churches find their worship services increasingly enriched by the sense of God’s presence and power. They take seriously the mandate to make disciples, and they work by every means to equip and stimulate church members for revival and for lives of mission.

As King Jesus advances His reign in and through revived individuals and renewed churches, the reality of the

What We Must Do (2)

Kingdom begins to impact every aspect of life in community, culture, and society. The potential for turning the world upside-down for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit begins to be very real. As this occurs it will be evident to all that our Kingdom-seeking has begun to bring about *awakening* in the world.

We do not expect to eradicate the Lord's field of all tares. Rather, we labor to sow good Kingdom seed wherever we can, as often as we can, and to tend that seed to maturity and fruitfulness in myriads of ways.

The overarching mandate

It is thus the highest calling and overarching mandate of the citizens of the Kingdom of God to pray for and seek the coming and progress of that Kingdom in every aspect of our lives – all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities.

Today is the favorable time! Now is the day of salvation! Seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness – these are our marching orders! We understand the times, so that we know what we're up against. And we know what we must do as Kingdom citizens and ambassadors in those times. Let us get on with the work.

Let every Christian resolve, through prayer, daily conversations, using the media, and getting involved, to break the spiral of silence about the Christian worldview and make our case boldly, consistently, and with sincere Christian love. Until living, declaring, and defending the Christian worldview becomes the calling and pursuit of every believer, we will continue to languish, and to betray the hope of the Gospel. But if we determine to do what we must do in seeking the Kingdom, God Himself will meet us, and begin making all things new.

For reflection

1. Does it make sense to think that, if we experienced the Kingdom more really, we might declare and defend it more consistently and convincingly? Why or why not? What does that involve?
2. What would you say are the greatest hindrances to believers in seeking and experiencing the power of the Kingdom of God?
3. Explain revival, renewal, and awakening, and how these terms relate to one another, and to seeking the Kingdom of God.

Next steps – Transformation, Conversation: Outline your next steps for making the most of conversation, publication, and participation to make the case for the Christian worldview and the Kingdom of God. Draw up a plan with a clear "to do" list. Commit your plan to the Lord in prayer. Share your plan with a Christian friend, and ask your friend to join you and to pray for you.

What We Must Do (2)

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Paul says now is the day of salvation, and we agree. Why?
2. Why is the Kingdom of God such Good News?
3. Have you mapped out your Personal Mission Field? Are you beginning to work it? What do you need to be more effective at sowing Kingdom seed in your Personal Mission Field?
4. How do conversation, publication, and participation apply to your work in the Lord's field?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you applying that lesson to your work in the Lord's field?

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 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.