

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be given onto you- **Matthew 6:33**

What does the kingdom of God look like?

Jesus stood up amongst his people and read from the prophet Isaiah which said from Luke 4 in the message

God's Spirit is on me;
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor,
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and
recovery of sight to the blind,
To set the burdened and battered free,
to announce, "This is God's year to act!"

Jesus said this prophecy is now fulfilled in his presence in him! This is God the fathers kingdom come through Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to seek first the kingdom?

To seek first the kingdom we need to seek first the king-Jesus

In the same way to flow as Freshwaters of the kingdom we need to flow from the source- Jesus

Ezekiel 47- The River of God- Freshwaters Church Foundational Passage

47 ¹⁻² Now he brought me back to the entrance to the Temple. I saw water pouring out from under the Temple porch to the east (the Temple faced east). The water poured from the south side of the Temple, south of the altar. He then took me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the gate complex on the east. The water was gushing from under the south front of the Temple.

³⁻⁵ He walked to the east with a measuring tape and measured off fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet, leading me through water waist-deep. He measured off another fifteen hundred feet. By now it was a river over my head, water to swim in, water no one could possibly walk through.

⁶⁻⁷ He said, "Son of man, have you had a good look?"

Then he took me back to the riverbank. While sitting on the bank, I noticed a lot of trees on both sides of the river.

⁸⁻¹⁰ He told me, "This water flows east, descends to the Arabah and then into the sea, the sea of stagnant waters. When it empties into those waters, the sea will become fresh. Wherever the river flows, life will flourish—great schools of fish—because the river is turning the salt sea into fresh water. Where the river flows, life abounds. Fishermen will stand shoulder to shoulder along the shore from En-gedi all the way north to En-eglaim, casting their nets. The sea will teem with fish of all kinds, like the fish of the Great Mediterranean.

¹¹ “The swamps and marshes won’t become fresh. They’ll stay salty.

¹² “But the river itself, on both banks, will grow fruit trees of all kinds. Their leaves won’t wither, the fruit won’t fail. Every month they’ll bear fresh fruit because the river from the Sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.”

Quiet time

- Often when we think of spending time with God intimately we think of quiet time. We are told spend 15,30, 45, 1hr each day reading our bibles and praying with a notebook if you like to write down what hes saying to you.
- Ask how many people really struggle with connecting with God and feels more like a chore most of the time, some of the time, hardly ever a chore
- Important to read the bible, to pray on your own but I think we have a problem when we think of quiet time as the main way in which we have a pathway to God the source

Reading through Bill Hybels Courageous Leadership and found a chapter on different ways people connect with God, pathways to God. There is also a great book by Gary Thomas called Pathways to God, discovering your souls pathway to God

I have used a really good activity below done by a guy called Mark Madavan to help you to understand your pathway to God and develop and grow in it. 7 Different Pathways

1 – Relational pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

Your spiritual growth comes most naturally when you are involved in significant relationships. - Small groups and other community life experiences are key - Usually relational pathway folk are small group junkies, forever forming small groups, at home, in the shop, in lifts – they just can't help it!

- Your life is an open book, and you are surprised that it is difficult for others to be open - Being alone can drive you crazy - You think solitude wouldn't be so bad if only I could bring a few friends with me! - People energise you – the more people the better - In key times of growth, like confronting sin, guidance for decisions, accountability for actions, expressions of love - God will often speak to you through people

Biblical example - Peter

He was part of the inner three, after the crucifixion he put together a fishing party. His life defining moments all took place in a relational context; confession of Jesus as Christ and his denial and restoration

To Strengthen

You need a relationally rich life - Use your spiritual gift to serve others, and pray with others in community - You'll probably learn best in a class or a small group (not distant learning/private study) - You'll tend to have lots of relationships, use your networks of contacts to further God's kingdom

Cautions

Guard against superficiality. Make sure you have a few deep relationships, people who get past the friend of all and can love you, challenge you, encourage you and give you wise counsel - Don't just always fit in

Ways to stretch

Develop a capacity for silence, so you can learn to speak and listen to God when you are alone - Keep some of your experiences with God a secret so you don't get addicted to hearing what other people think - Study scripture by yourself so you are grounded in God's word rather than other people's opinion - Be intentional about inviting one or two close friends to speak truth to you so that your relationship is more than a social

2 - Intellectual Pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

You draw close to God as you learn more about him - The study of Scripture and theology comes very naturally - You love books, learning, expanding your knowledge and understanding - You tend to have little patience for emotional approaches to faith - During worship you feel like you are marking time waiting for the word - In a small group you feel that relational folk are just swapping their ignorance - You like to think - When faced with problems or spiritual challenges you go into problem solving mode

A Biblical example - The Apostle Paul

Even before his conversion we read that he was well studied (a student of Gamaliel, Jewish scholar). After his conversion he liked to debate in the synagogues

To Strengthen

You need to keep building on your studying (Stop studying – and your faith will stagnate) - Expose yourself to books & teaching that stretches you - Find some like-minded people to stretch you

Cautions

Make sure you don't become all head and no heart - You love to be right and that can be dangerous - Don't confuse being smart with being spiritually mature

Dallas Willard wrote One of the hardest things in the world is to be right and not to hurt anyone with it

Ways to stretch

- Devote yourself to corporate worship and private adoration and prayer (This may be tough, but learning needs to lead to worship)

1 Cor 8:1 "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" - Another way to stretch is to assess how loving you are when you share your knowledge with others

3-Service Pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

You find God most tangible when you are helping others - You are often uncomfortable when you are not doing anything, even if it's only setting up the chairs, that's enough to help you feel close to God - You constantly look for acts of service you can engage in and often don't even need to be asked

Biblical example - Dorcas

In the book of Acts - a lady well known for her life of good deeds

To Strengthen

- Get plugged into a community so you have opportunities for meaningful service to offer God - If you are just attending church and not serving God, your connectedness to God will begin to disconnect - Look for glimpses of God in the people you serve and in the execution of your task - Cultivate an awareness of those moments when you sense God with you as you serve - Prepare to serve first by praying so your service is genuine

Cautions

- Be careful not to resent others who do not serve as much as you do - Remember that God loves you not because you are so faithful in serving him, but because you are his child, don't confuse serving with earning

Ways to stretch

- Balance your service with small group and community life - Learn how to receive love even when you are not being productive - Practise expressing love through words as well as actions (That way your pathway will help you feel liberated by service rather than confined by it)

4 – Worship pathway (not just through music also through other arts like dance, painting, drawing, poetry, liturgy etc the list is endless)

This is probably your pathway if.....

- You love Ps 122:1 “I rejoiced with those who said to me “Let us go to the house of the Lord” - You have a deep love of corporate praise and a natural inclination towards celebration - In difficult periods of life, worship is one of the most healing activities you engage in - When you worship at church you hope it will go on for hours - While the intellectuals are looking at their watches you are saying again, again - Sometimes people on this pathway are not demonstrative or expressive, yet in worship your heart opens up and you come alive and enthusiastically participate

Biblical example - King David

To Strengthen

Experience great worship on a regular basis - When the body of Christ gathers be there - Use Christian worship music - Learn about other worship traditions and incorporate them into your worship

Cautions

- Be careful not to judge others who are not as expressive in worship - Guard against experienced based Christianity that has you looking for the next high Meister Eckhart says “The danger in finding a way to God is that people grow to love the way more than they love God”

Ways to stretch

- Engage in the discipline of study. Keep filling your mind to keep your heart and emotions rooted - Serve God in concrete ways as an expression of your worship - Remain committed to you even when the worship isn't what you would like it to be

5 - Activist pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

- You have a single-minded zeal and a very strong sense of vision - You have a passion to build the church and to work for justice - Challenges don't discourage you, in fact they energise you – you thrive on opposition - You do everything you can to bring out the potential God has placed in other people - You love a fast paced, problem filled, complex, strenuous way of life

Biblical example - Nehemiah

Faced with the impossible job of restoring Jerusalem, he prayed and then got stuck in To Strengthen

To strengthen

- Create a sense of challenge in your life by immersing yourself in tasks that demand the best you have to offer. If you are not moving you get frustrated and stagnate - Find a team to invest in and work with them to achieve big goals

Cautions

- Be aware that you may run over people, or use them to achieve the goal - Guard against going too long without pausing to reflect, check your motives, spiritual condition and emotional state

Ways to stretch

- Create balance in your activism by spending time in solitude - Cultivate a reflective discipline like journaling - Develop close spiritual friendships with one or two others. Invite them to regularly ask you questions and speak to you about what God is doing in you – not just through you

6 – Contemplative Pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

- You love uninterrupted time alone - Reflections come naturally to you. The presence of God is most real when all distractions are gone - You have a large capacity for prayer - If you get busy or spend lots of time with people you get drained and yearn for solitude

Biblical example - Mary (Martha's sister) she sat at Jesus' feet

To Strengthen

- You have permission to build your strength - Don't criticise yourself for what you are not - You need regular, protected, intense times of solitude and stillness
- Making time and space to listen to God is vital
- Faithfully follow your intuition and the Holy Spirit's leading - Act on what you hear God saying during your silent times

Cautions

- You have a tendency of avoiding the demands of the real world because it doesn't live up to your ideals. Be careful not to retreat to your inner world when friends, family or society disappoints you - Be careful not to consider your times of private prayer and solitude as less important than the more public acts of ministry performed by others - Don't view others as less spiritual because they don't spend hours in solitude

Ways to stretch

- Choose a regular place of active service (remember to show your faith by what you do as James urges) - Stay relationally connected, even when these relationships become difficult or challenging - Connect with those who have an activist pathway. Pray for them and consider getting involved in some aspect of their ministry

7 – Creation Pathway

This is probably your pathway if.....

- You respond deeply to God through your experience of nature - Being outdoors replenishes you, it moves your heart, opens your soul and strengthens your faith. - You are highly aware of your physical senses, and often art, symbols or ritual will help you grow - You tend to be creative

Biblical example – you get the big one – Jesus

Jesus actually could be used for all of the pathways, however the Bible seems to highlight a special connection with nature. Jesus often withdrew to an outdoor place, the mountains, the Sea of Galilee - to be with his Father. I guess this shouldn't be a surprise as he made it!

To Strengthen

- Get outside as much as possible. - Find a location to getaway to. - Make natural beauty part of your spiritual life - When you pray it might be helpful to have some natural beauty around you, like scenery, flowers, or candles

Cautions

- You may be tempted to use beauty or nature to escape - You will find that people are sometimes disappointing - Guard against the temptation to avoid church because you think you can worship God in nature by yourself - Yes you were made for God's beauty but you also need to see God's beauty in people and allow God to speak to you through them

Ways to stretch

- Stay involved in a worshipping community (You need people – after all God made them as well) - From time to time be prepared to help out in less than beautiful settings, the ugliness of the fallen world is not pleasant, but God's love is for all, and you are part of His solution - Take Scripture with you into nature, and meditate on God's word as you enjoy his