

# CHAPTER 12, SESSION 24: LIVING IN THE KINGDOM DAY BY DAY

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

As we read Jesus' closing words from the Sermon on the Mount, we may be tempted to fall back into the legalism that has been addressed throughout this study. To avoid this tendency, you may want to return to the opening sections of the Sermon on the Mount. There we are reminded that we "are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." With this identity in place Jesus concludes the Sermon by describing the results of our choices. The better life comes through obedience, and obedience only results from action.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ If you have a group of 12 or more:
  - Slips of paper for each participant
  - Pens or pencils
- ☞ Large tablet of paper for creating the group rule
- ☞ Permanent marker

## WELCOME

The celebration of finishing the book will happen during the Closing Retreat. However, because things are wrapping up, you may want to have refreshments available to set that tone for this session as well. Confirm the arrangements for the closing retreat.

## RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

## 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

## PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Almighty God, King of all Creation, Ruler of our hearts  
You alone are the firm foundation we seek for our lives.  
You alone bring us forgiveness and healing when our pride leads to our downfall.  
You alone are the Master builder who can guide us into wholeness of life.  
Surround us with your grace that we might see you for what you are. Amen.*

## SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into groups of three or four. Use the questions below to discuss your experience of living one day (or more) devotionally.

1. What changes did you have to make in your daily routine to follow Madame Guyon's rule?
2. What changes would you make to this daily rule to continue living it?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the exercise?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that we cannot live an effective and joyful Christian life if we do not practice the spiritual exercises.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. At the beginning of the chapter, the author compares caring for his devotional life to tending a fire. What was your reaction to this illustration?
2. This chapter addresses two false narratives: (1) “What matters is having faith in Jesus, not having an ongoing relationship with him,” and (2) “The only way to be a good Christian is to keep all the rules” (pp. 206-07). How have these narratives shaped your own faith journey?
3. In explaining John 15:5-8 the author writes, “To abide in Christ involves spending time with Jesus. For me, this happens when I keep my mind and heart set on his presence with me” (p. 209). What practices help you abide in Christ? What impact does this have on your life?
4. Of the four images Jesus gives at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (wide vs. narrow gate; inner vs. outer reality; people claiming to know Jesus who don’t; and building on sand vs. rock) (pp. 209-14), which one is the most challenging to you? Why?
5. As you grow in seeing yourself as being indwelt by Christ and living in the unshakeable kingdom of God, have you been able to endure life’s storms differently? Describe the difference.

BREAK [5 minutes]

#### ENGAGING THE WORD [10 minutes]

Have a group member read Matthew 7:24-27 aloud, then discuss these questions as a group:

1. If you were explaining this passage to a friend, what would you tell them?
2. Given what you have learned from this book, what steps can you take in the days ahead to build your spiritual house on the solid foundation of Christ’s teachings?

#### EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [20 minutes]

This session’s experience involves writing a rule that the entire group can continue to follow even when the class is finished. The first goal of writing a group rule is to create a continued sense of community. It is encouraging as we go through our day to know that other members of our group are in prayer for us and to know that, as we observe a few minutes of silence, we are joining together in a great cloud of witnesses that includes our companions from this class. A second goal is accountability. We are more committed to soul-training exercises when we know others are doing these practices as well and that we will have the opportunity to share our discoveries with them. A third goal of creating a group rule is that the soul-training exercises on the list may not be the disciplines we would individually choose for ourselves, therefore we are stretched to engage in practices outside of our preferences. Finally it creates an on-going connection so that group members don’t feel abandoned when the study comes to an end. Instead, they can feel connected to one another even though the amount of time they spend together is reduced.

As you follow the steps for creating the group rule, keep in mind the last chapter of *The Good and Beautiful God* which taught us that change happens slowly. It may even be helpful to read to the group the story of the college president who compared our spiritual lives to an oak tree—slow in growing and filled with periods of growth and then solidifying. This analogy should give your group a little grace. It also serves to point out that you may be concluding a period of growth and now entering a period of solidifying. Do not approach the group rule (or your personal rule for that matter) as the secret to attaining limitless spiritual growth. If you do, you will find only disappointment and failure. So humbly embrace the practices that will nurture your soul and heal your narratives.

If you have a group of twelve to fifteen people, have each participant write on a slip of paper a soul-training exercise that has been a blessing to them and that they would like to continue doing. Gather those slips of paper and put all of them on a list.

If you have a group of less than twelve, have each participant name aloud a soul-shaping exercise they would like to continue doing. Write suggestions on a large sheet of paper.

Regardless of your group size, once the list is done go through it looking for duplications and combining appropriate disciplines. Then work through the list deciding what days or weeks during the next month you will practice these disciplines. Some disciplines may be done corporately with the group coming together for that discipline, but other disciplines can be done individually. The soul-training exercises may also be practices not found in The Apprentice Series. Here is an example of a completed group rule:

- ☞ Practice silence for 10 to 20 minutes each day.
- ☞ Drive the speed limit and be aware of God's presence with you. Bless each car that passes you.
- ☞ Lift up each member of the group daily in prayer.
- ☞ Read from the Sermon on the Mount daily for about 15 minutes.
- ☞ Take a nature walk as a group at a participant's house on the first Saturday of the month.
- ☞ Observe a Sabbath on the 3rd Sunday of the month. During the Sabbath read from the Gospel of John for 1 hour.
- ☞ Gather again in one month to modify this rule, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable in seeking God's kingdom first.

Once the rule is agreed upon, have members write it down in their journal, or have one person write it down and then e-mail it to the group within the next day or two.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Close your time together by having a volunteer in the group read this paragraph:

The only way to nurture my relationship with Jesus is to set my heart and mind on the kingdom of God. The fundamental building block of an apprentice of Jesus is living closely to Jesus in our ordinary lives. If we can learn how to spend an ordinary day with our minds set on things above we will have learned one of the most important spiritual exercises in the Christian life (p. 214).

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Encourage the group to begin living their group rule and to continue practicing any other soul-training exercises that have nurtured kingdom narratives within them. One additional spiritual practice would be praying about the future of the group: How would God like to see this experience continued and shared with others?
- ☞ Remind the group of plans for the closing retreat.