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How to Distinguish Between Earthly Purpose and Kingdom Purpose

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In Christian circles, we often talk about the distinction we need to make about living life based on a "worldly" purpose as opposed to living based on a "Kingdom" purpose. In this case, we are basically talking about the difference between making life decisions based on personal desires vs. God's will. But as much as we affirm that dichotomy, and as much as we avow allegiance to living by a Kingdom purpose, it is not always easy to make the distinction. Even more than that, it is perhaps even more difficult to live consistently based on what we know to be right.

Our daily lives are so tied to the material world we live in that without conscious and deliberate effort we just naturally fall into a life which supports temporal outcomes. In fact, the tendency is so strong that many, perhaps even most, Christians live their lives based on a totally temporal foundation while actually believing they are Kingdom focused. It is very possible to work "for" God but do it in a way which bypasses the work "of" God in our lives. By the same token, it is very possible to see even dramatic outward results of our service to God which has the appearance of spiritual success, but which, in fact, produces no spiritual fruit at all. Sometimes these outward results fool us into believing we are actually accomplishing the purpose of God when we are really not.

For example, think of a church which is continually getting larger with hundreds, or even thousands, in attendance and an ever increasing bottom line. In that scenario, can we conclude that we are seeing a sign of Kingdom success? Well, maybe or maybe not. We must, at that point, ask a further

question: What is the spiritual condition of those who are participating in that church? Kingdom purpose is demonstrated by spiritual fruit in individual lives, not temporal fruit which can be measured by material means.

Using the hypothetical church in the above example, let's ask some questions which can help us make this distinction. Is the personal relationship with God of those in the church becoming continually stronger or do they just periodically participate in various religious programs? Is a Kingdom purpose of those church members being expressed by the use of their spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purpose, or do they live for their own purpose and just do some occasional good deed? Do these church members see themselves as stewards of God's resources which he has entrusted into their care, or do they simply contribute a portion of "their" resources to the cause of Christ. The way these questions are answered point to whether the lives of the people in this church are focused on temporal or Kingdom outcomes.

But let's take this one step further. We used the example of a church to make an important point. But the truth is, the measuring stick must be applied at the individual, not the church level. What this means for us individually is that we must answer these questions for ourselves and make this evaluation personal.

Spiritual renewal in a church or a community is a grass roots movement. It is totally dependent on ordinary, everyday Christians to penetrate the culture to accomplish God's purpose in the world. Without this mass "going out" of everyday Christians into the world with the deliberate intention of planting Christ in the culture,

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a Kingdom purpose cannot be expressed and spiritual renewal will never happen.

But there is a problem which is hindering renewal in our land. The problem is that, as a whole, the Christian community does not understand what is needed and are not prepared to be used by God to accomplish his purpose. So with that, what exactly do we need to do?

The first arena we must address is spiritual. The struggles we deal with in this area revolve around our inability to distinguish between God's ways and man's ways of accomplishing ministry. Man's way may build outward measurables, but will not create disciples of Christ. This may seem harsh, but any ministry effort that does not make and build authentic disciples is not of God. It is very possible to "do" good work without "becoming" a person devoted to Christ. Kingdom work is focused on becoming, not doing. Doing follows becoming, not the other way around.

The other arena we must address has its root more in the material world. While the results of Kingdom work are ALWAYS spiritual, we are material beings who must do the work of God in the material world. As such, our methods must be expressed in this arena.

The issues we must engage here revolve around the knowledge and skills we need to acquire in order to do the work of the Kingdom. There are three basic categories of knowledge and skill that Christians truly need to master.

First, it is necessary to have a working knowledge of the essential core of biblical faith. There are many things the Bible teaches, but there is a core that literally defines the

boundary of authentic Christian faith. We must master this core.

Second, we need a basic knowledge of the beliefs which non-believers hold as they live their lives out in the world. This is important because in the religiously pluralistic world we inhabit, we need to have the ability to build conceptual bridges which allow us to express the gospel message in ways that people from other worldview backgrounds are able to understand.

Third, we must have the ability to actually share the gospel message when the opportunity arises. God has called and commissioned every believer to be a messenger who is able to express the gospel message to those who don't know Christ.

The fact that so few Christians have actually mastered these three essential categories of knowledge and skill is a crying shame. But the situation is not hopeless. This knowledge is readily available. In fact, the very purpose of MarketFaith Ministries is to provide this knowledge to you, and we have abundant resources to help believers grow in this area. Beyond that, there are scores of other places people can get this knowledge. But the mere existence of the resources is useless if they are not used.

Over the years, many Christians have expressed the need for spiritual renewal. They have talked about it, prayed for it and promoted events hoping to bring it on. The fact that it isn't widely happening is not a problem with the desire or with the possibility. The problem is with the fact that, as a whole, believers have not equipped themselves to do Kingdom work and have not gone out into the world to do it.

The power to accomplish Kingdom work comes only from God. Only he has the ability to change people's lives. That said, we are the hands and

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feet of God in the world. He has chosen to use believers as his instruments to carry out this work. We cannot simply sit and pray that God will bypass us and perform some supernatural wonder. We must pray, sure! And God must do his supernatural saving work! But unless and until we, his disciples here on earth, discipline ourselves and prepare our lives for his service, he will not choose to work in us. The fulfillment of Kingdom purpose requires the preparation and use of Kingdom tools. So, what are we waiting for?

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