

Tale of Two Kingdoms

Christians are called to be different and should be recognized for being different. Once we acquiesce to societal norms and procedures, we have effectively lost our capacity to be salt of the earth and light of the world. We continue the weary, threadbare legacy of domesticating the message of Jesus.¹

What does a God-honoring life look like? In our materialistic culture, the competition for our desires is intense. Our flesh cries out for security—security in things that can be seen. As financial planners, we have a tendency to rely on our spreadsheets for proof that we have the future nailed down. We fool ourselves, and I am afraid God laughs at us. The variables that we know, in conjunction more so with the mind of God that we do not know, make any certainty with respect to the future an illusion.

We do not mean that one should not work hard or plan. A “failure to plan and prepare will undoubtedly yield the worst result of all.”² The “trick” is to plan, and work, *with* God. His presence should be the driving force for everything we do. We far too easily strive after the false idol of security in materialism. How much better it would be if we strove for **communion, community, and confidence**—not certainty.

In reference to this post-modern world, where everybody seems to do “what is right in their own eyes,” noted Christian leader and thinker Os Guinness said the following:

Unfettered freedom could prove to be the Achilles’ heel of the modern world, dissipating into license, triviality, corruption and a grand undermining of all authority....

For at the heart of freedom lies a grand paradox: the greatest enemy of freedom is freedom.³

We have allowed money and the opinions of others to rule our lives. To our detriment, they have become the center of our kingdoms and distracted us from the one true kingdom. Like a fish not aware of the water in which it swims, we have become unaware of the materialistic culture that rules our life. The following attempts to outline a God-honoring life in His kingdom and give some practices to more walk with God in confidence.

¹ Diarmuid O’Murchu, *Catching Up With Jesus*

² Richard B. Wagner, *It’s All about the Numerators (Financial Advisor magazine)*

³ Os Guinness, *A Free People’s Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future*

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|| *The dual purpose of life is to cultivate wealth and to strengthen personal ego, right?*⁴

The Two Kingdoms

- John Calvin distinguished “the spiritual kingdom of Christ” from “the civil kingdom.”
- Augustine wrote of the “city of God” and “earthly city.”
- Wendell Berry uses the terms “the great economy” and “the little economy.”

We like the terms “Heavenly Kingdom” and “earthly kingdom.”

Though the Heavenly Kingdom is obviously greater than the earthly kingdom, the rules for both are important and should be respected. “We are commanded to seek the Kingdom of God *first*, but not exclusively.”⁵ As financial planners, we feel like we are proficient with the rules of the earthly kingdom - tax laws, investment allocation, the need to plan for the future, etc. As to the Heavenly Kingdom, which we should all aspire to live in as much as possible, we feel like we are stumbling in a fog.

The earthly kingdom is characterized by a scarcity mentality; the Heavenly Kingdom is characterized by abundance. In the earthly kingdom, we survive by our wits; the Heavenly Kingdom is characterized by a reliance on the Holy Spirit. True value is only created in the immeasurable Heavenly Kingdom.⁶

It's a Wonderful Life

Frank Capra’s protagonists in his *It’s a Wonderful Life* exemplify life in these two kingdoms. The movie is the story of George Bailey, played by James Stewart, who runs Bailey Brothers Building and Loan Association. The town’s other financial institution is run by Henry F. Potter. Whereas the Building and Loan concentrates on mortgages to blue-collar working people, Potter values profits. And as shown by Clarence, George Bailey’s guardian angel, a future with Potter as the town’s main businessman is not attractive.

Potter lives entirely within the earthly kingdom. Except for hiding the Building and Loan’s lost deposit, we do not see Potter actually breaking the law. And Bailey is hardly selfless. He longs for a life of world travel and accomplishments. Both, but especially Potter, are aware of the rules of the earthly kingdom. But Bailey values people more than profits. His business practices move him more to the Heavenly Kingdom.⁷

⁴ Judith L Favor, *A Spiritual Guide to Sabbath Economics*

⁵ <http://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2010/08/wendell-berry-and-the-great-economy/>

⁶ <http://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2010/08/wendell-berry-and-the-great-economy/>

⁷ special thanks to Tim Weinhold of Eventide <http://eventidefunds.com/faith-and-business/a-tale-of-two-capitalisms/>

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Why the Heavenly Kingdom?

Why do we want to live in this Heavenly Kingdom? As stated previously, we feel like we are walking in a fog when discussing this kingdom. Yet the “peace that surpasses all understanding”—*shalom*—is worth striving for.

Dallas Willard uses the following descriptions to describe walking in this “Heavenly Kingdom”:

- Your relationship with others is completely transformed
- You have the inability to be insulted (Psalm 119:165)
- You love others because God first loved you. He is lovely.⁸

“God’s presence, God’s desire, God’s love, evokes our desire”.⁹ Only with God's love in your heart, is one likely to try to walk in this Heavenly Kingdom. Of course if you have read this far, that love is real. To truly live a God honoring life, our attitudes must continually be shaped by the Holy Spirit. The lure of our capitalist world, with all the marketing symbolism, is too strong without supernatural help. This Heavenly Kingdom is not what is normally preached as a part of prosperity theology. Not walking in the ways of the earthly kingdom can be painful (John 15:9, James 4:4). We are, though, promised joy.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings,

knowing that suffering produces endurance,

and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

and hope does not put us to shame,

because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

~ Romans 5:1–5 (emphasis ours)

The hope provides the joy but not the absence of tribulation.

⁸ Dallas Willard, *Divine Conspiracy*

⁹ Daniel Bell, *The Economy of Desire*

I often use the term “God-honoring life” along with Heavenly Kingdom. I am not sure what that is, much less should I point it out for others. John of the Cross said “God leads each one along different paths.”¹⁰ Maybe not knowing will give fresh eyes to see to help a fellow journeyer.¹¹

Being mindful of the Heavenly Kingdom, we think, is as much attitudinal as behavioral. With a goal of hearing “well-done, good and faithful servant”, our actions should involve more of what Augustine called “*telos*”. The earthly kingdom does not have this *telos*, i.e. a common end or freedom to pursue an end goal other than self-focused gain.¹² Or as Todd Wagner pastor of Watermark Community Church said, “to define the future as your finite life is not good financial advice.”¹³ Eternal life begins now.

Stewardship Practices

We have to share with our people. Suffering today is because people are hoarding, not giving, not sharing.

~ Mother Teresa¹⁴

We believe one of the ways to walk into life in this Heavenly Kingdom is through “Sabbath Economics”.

*...a way of living in the world that starts from the assumption that it's possible for everyone to have enough to thrive. Scarcity and poverty are not 'the will of God.' They are failures of human imagination, departures from the dream God has for the world. Sabbath economics assumes that everyone can have enough. It is grounded in a conscious choice to place limits on our own work and consumption.*¹⁵

Contrast the foregoing with the two main axioms of classical economics:

- the assumed condition of scarcity;
- unlimited individual appetite¹⁶

The Sabbath and manna accounts in the Old Testament provide much insight into living in the Heavenly Kingdom. The Sabbath rest is first mentioned in the familiar creation passage in Genesis 2:3.

¹⁰ Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within*

¹¹ Kyla Mclurg, *Inward/Outward* email

¹² <http://www.wfrplanning.com/interesting-times>

¹³ <http://www.watermark.org/media/declaration-discussion-on-economics-and-preparation/3284/?autoplay=video> (39 minutes)

¹⁴ Tracy Gary and Nancy Adess, *Inspired Philanthropy*

¹⁵ Richard Lowery, <http://www.centerforfaithandgiving.org/StudyResources/StewardshipintheFirstTestamentSabbathDelight/tabid/1054/Default.aspx>

¹⁶ Chad Myers *Biblical Vision of Sabbath economics*

The second place, maybe not as familiar, is the story of the Manna found in Exodus 16. As a reminder, God gave the Israelites this bread--like substance to sustain them during their forty year wandering in the wilderness. It is a story of God's abundance. Each Israelite was to gather enough for that day (the leftover spoiled), except for the day before the Sabbath. On that day, they were instructed to bring in twice as much and rest on the seventh day.

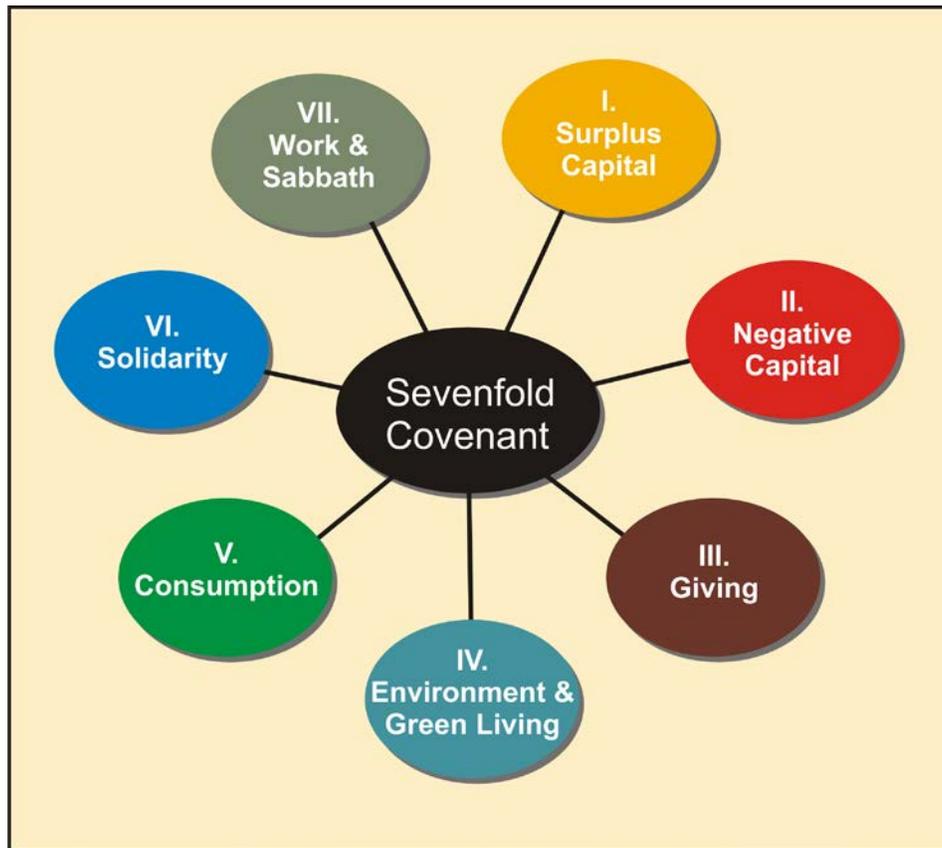
The Sabbath is also discussed in Leviticus 25. The Israelites are instructed to allow the land to rest every seven years and all debts canceled. In addition, the year of Jubilee, which was every 50 years, land was to be returned to the original owners.

This structure prevented permanent poverty or a permanent underclass. Though it is not clear that the Israelites ever practiced the Sabbath year, Jesus' first sermon (found in Luke 4) is from Isaiah 61, in which He declares the year of Jubilee.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
~ Luke 4:18-19*

Bartimaeus' Sevenfold Covenant

In Christian tradition, the spiritual disciplines have long been a way to walk in the Heavenly Kingdom. Much like a ship's sail is raised to catch the power of the wind; the disciplines position one to better capture the power of the Spirit. The following seven items are similar to spiritual disciplines. They help you not just to be hearers, but doers of the word. The disciplines are about gaining wisdom not righteousness.



The above chart¹⁷ outlines ways to walk into this Heavenly Kingdom. As with the spiritual disciplines, the specific suggestions are not meant as salvific in and of themselves. They act as a means to position oneself in the right attitude toward God. We want to be careful to continue to keep our mind on participating in the Heavenly Kingdom and not make another set of religious rules. As Bono said “Religion to me is almost like when God leaves—and people devise a set of rules to fill in the space.”

Following is a short discussion of each of the seven covenants as found on the Faith and Money Network website (<http://www.faithandmoneynetwork.org/content/sabbath-economics>).

I Surplus Capital

Some of us have more money than we need to meet our basic needs. It could be put to work for justice, without giving it away. But how?

¹⁷ Ched Myers *Experimenting with a Household Sabbath Economics Covenant* (April, 2010)

II Negative Capital

Debt is a burden to most people—a crushing burden to some. It sometimes profits predatory lenders and always narrows our potential to focus on our mission. Freedom depends on breaking our cycles of debt.

III Giving

In recognizing that everything is God's, we can learn to relax our grip on what we have and keep God's gifts circulating.

IV Environment

People of faith are claiming our responsibility to honor God's creation, our natural world. Where do we find motivation for life changes required to live more sustainably? What's your next step?

V Consumption

Sometimes we try to fill our spiritual holes by consuming another material product or one more cool experience. But our hyper-consumption hurts the natural world, takes resources from the world's poor and leaves us empty in the end. There are other ways to live, despite what our consumer culture may tell us.

VI Solidarity

We may recognize that the growing gap between rich and poor is not God's vision for how people can live together, but our lives separate us from people who are poor. Solidarity is intentional connection to the poor and the marginalized.

VII Work and Sabbath

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A period of suspending our efforts to supplant God by providing for ourselves reminds us that God provides what we need. Our spiritual health—to say nothing of our physical, mental and relational health—depends on it.

Conclusion

If we are to grow up spiritually, if we are to become who we were created to become, we need structures in our lives in which we are held accountable to that becoming. We need people in our lives who will hold us to the commitments that keep us in the process of growing spiritually. Again, spiritual practices like prayer, sharing of resources and being with the suffering and excluded have no power in themselves to heal and transform. These practices merely keep us in the process of growing up spiritually. Spiritual practices are what keep the doors of our hearts open to the power of the Spirit of God. That Spirit does the healing and transforming.¹⁸

I admit to feeling more guilt and shame rather than conviction as I look back through these seven areas. Rather than trying harder with each discipline, I hope my prayer will be for God to work through me to bring me to Him. I also pray for community for God's support for this walk.

The bedrock of Jesus Christ's kingdom is poverty, not possessions. The knowledge of our own poverty brings us to the moral frontier where Jesus Christ works.

~ Oswald Chambers

All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted. For any misuse of Scripture, we pray for grace.

¹⁸ Killian Noe *Finding Our Way Home*