

“**Don’t be such a baby!**” How many of you have heard, or used, these words before?

Ironically, these words are never directed towards an actual baby; babies are what they are, and cannot help the stage they are in.

So what is meant by this phrase? *Grow up. Stop complaining. It’s not as bad as you think. Grab some perspective. Don’t be so self-absorbed. Think beyond yourself.*

A baby lives with an incredibly limited perspective; they are almost entirely self-absorbed. Babies know very little beyond their immediate needs—tired, hungry, wet, cold; awareness is something that grows as they develop. When raised in a healthy environment, a baby’s awareness grows as they begin to perceive the “other”—often beginning with their mother. They become aware of the feelings of warmth, safety, and love; they begin to perceive a smiling face, soothing words, familiar sounds and smells.

When a child begins to crawl, and then walk, they become a danger to themselves. They can fall down the stairs, touch something hot, or dart into a busy street. It’s about this time that they regularly hear the word “no,” in its many forms. *Don’t touch that. Stop doing that. You can’t have that. No.*

No one likes to be told “no,” but especially a child. Children want what they want, but because their awareness is under-developed, they don’t understand how the “no” they are hearing might actually be a good thing.

¹ Matthew 6:9-10.

Awareness does grow as we age—awareness of self, others, and God—but the three-year-old in all us of remains. We want what we want, and don’t like to hear “no”. While we might grow in our awareness of others—their needs, interests, and desires—it’s difficult to shed the preoccupation with self: *What about me? When is it my turn? It’s not fair!*

Over the past four weeks we have been preaching through a series entitled, “*The Values That Drive Our Vision*”. Borrowing the analogy of a road trip, if our vision is the destination, then our values are the route by which we travel. Values guide us as we go; they describe *how* we will move towards the accomplishment of our vision. As we engage in the mission of the church—to *glorify God, reach people, and see them transformed*—what are the values that guide us as we go? This morning we come to Value #5.

Kingdom Focus: We will pursue God’s plan for our church, neighbours, city, and world. We strive to focus on other-centeredness and generosity and will regularly ask the questions: Where is God working and how can we be involved? Where can we partner with others? How can we bless and provide for others?

I want to begin this morning with a prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray; it will be familiar to many of you. “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*”¹

Here's the thing, when we pray for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done, whether we realize it or not, we end up praying against ourselves. God, build Your kingdom, instead of mine; God, may Your will—your plans and purposes—take precedence over mine. This prayer opens our eyes to the reality of God and others; there is much more going on than what is happening in and around me.

1. Understanding the Kingdom: I want to take time this morning to ground our Kingdom Focus value in t Jesus' teaching concerning "*the kingdom of God*".

No other subject even comes close to commanding the time and attention Jesus gave to teaching about God's kingdom. In His three years of ministry, Jesus' central concern was to declare, demonstrate, and deploy the kingdom of God on earth.

This word, "*kingdom*," assumes three interconnected realities: a ruler, a people, and a realm.

(A) Ruler: For many of us, democracy is the only form of government we know; we cannot fathom a government that rules without regard for "voter approval". Some of you have grown up in countries outside North America and you have had a very different experience—you have experienced the effects of absolute power in the hands of the government.

In the Ancient world, Rulers often had absolute power and they used it to their own advantage. They claimed the best of the land and the

wealth for themselves. They determined the laws; they decided when it was time to go to war. Their favour meant life and prosperity, their disapproval meant punishment or death.

To say that God is "king" is to say both that He has real authority, and, that we owe Him our obedience. God has absolute power, but He rarely wields it; when Jesus walked among us, He demonstrated what God's Kingship looked like.

In Mark 10:42-45 Jesus said, "*You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

From God's perspective, the one who leads is meant to do so as a servant. When Jesus walked among us, He didn't use power to His own advantage. He didn't live a **me-first** life, He didn't bud to the front of the line, He didn't step on the "little people". He didn't come to *be served* but *to serve*.

When Jesus walked among us, the only crown He wore was a crown of thorns, fitted by His executioners—His coronation took place on a wooden cross. On that cross, above Jesus' head, they nailed a placard that read: *This is Jesus, The King of the Jews.*²

One of Jesus' greatest miracles took place when, in the face of His

² Matthew 27:37.

own death, Jesus did precisely nothing. He had the power and authority of heaven at His disposal; at any point Jesus could have said, “*This is getting out of hand; I’m going to end this.*” Instead, He remained silent, led as a lamb to the slaughter. Hebrews 12:2 says, “*For the joy set before Him, [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

If God the Son had only been thinking about Himself, He wouldn’t have taken on our humanity, He wouldn’t have endured opposition, rejection, or death on the cross. But here’s the thing, Jesus wasn’t diminished—not in the least—by self-sacrifice. He gave Himself away, and yet, remained exactly who and what He was. The same is true for us. When we give our life away—to God and to others—we don’t lose ourselves, instead, we find life.

(B) A People : The word “*kingdom*” assumes three interconnected realities: a ruler, a **people**, and a realm. Let’s talk for a moment about “kingdom people”.

I said last Sunday that Jesus came to form for Himself one new humanity, a kingdom of people who bear His likeness. Jesus has a vision of God’s family and it includes rich and poor, male and female, young and old, along with every nation, tribe, and language.

Jesus’ first sermon was short and to the point: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.*”³ In essence, Jesus was saying “Get ready, align your life to God, because He is now taking control.”⁴

³ Matthew 3:2.

⁴ R.T. France, *NICNT: Matthew*, 102.

It wasn’t as though God wasn’t in control before; Psalm 145:13 says, “*your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. You rule throughout all generations.*” But the biblical writers were not blind to the way things were; they knew that the world was not all that God intended it to be.

In Hebrews 2:8 we read, “*At present we do not see everything subject to God*”. When we open our eyes, we see a world where violence and oppression continue. We see the effects of narcissism and greed all around us—*at present we do not see everything subject to God*.

We do not live in a world where God’s kingship is universally recognized. In the present, submission to God’s rule is voluntary. The Kingdom of God is already here, but it has yet to be fully embraced.

When we pray for God’s kingdom to come, we are asking for the world to be put to rights, back to the way He intended it, before we made a mess of things. When we pray for His kingdom to come, we are praying for healing, wholeness, reconciliation, and peace. We’re praying that we might more fully embrace His kingship, and, that others will do the same.

(C) A Realm: The word “kingdom” assumes three interconnected realities; we’ve already talked about a ruler and a people, now it’s time to talk about a **realm**. “May your kingdom come, your will be done, *on earth*, as it is in heaven.”

illus: In 1620, aboard the famed ship *Mayflower*, pilgrims left England's shore in order to begin again in North America. But it was more than new land that they were after, they wanted to begin again when it came to faith and worship. The place they landed was renamed "New England," and their hope was that in this new land, God's kingdom would come in all of its fullness. Their hope was that the people of God would be like a city on a hill—set apart, distinct, noticeable. Their prayer was that the light of God would burn so brightly in this new land that the whole world would take notice and be drawn to God's light.

I share this not to evaluate the relative success or failure of their endeavour, but to draw attention to one single idea. They fully expected that God's kingdom would manifest itself in their midst. Wherever God's people dwell, heaven touches earth. Heaven's priorities are worked out in and through kingdom people, wherever they live.

In speaking about the kingdom, Jesus once told the following story: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."*⁵

The main point of this parable is that salvation—which is the short form for a life with God both now and forever—is beyond compare. Even if you sell everything you have, it doesn't come close to the value of what God offers. Whatever we must give up, in the pursuit of Jesus, pales in comparison to what we receive. We are never

impoverished by surrendering to God, we are always enlarged, always blessed.

My dear people, the kingdom of God is larger than you or me, in fact, it's not just for you and me, it's for anyone who is willing to follow Jesus. And when we receive a gift like the one we've been given, when we wake up to the reality that life is about so much more than our pleasure, we are born again, into a new way of seeing what—and *who*—is all around us.

To people in the West, Jesus is an enigma. He is recognized as a wise moral teacher. He is admired for His acts of compassion and non-violence, and those who believe in miracles applaud the way He healed the sick. But following Jesus flies in the face of Western values of independence and autonomy. Self-fulfillment is seen to be the highest good; what could be better than getting what we want out of life?

It's not that a preoccupation with self was foreign in the ancient world, but it was foreign to Jesus. Independent thinking or action wasn't a part of His core values; instead, obedience, submission, dependence on God defined His life.

We have believed the lie that independence will lead to greater fulfilment. Many of us live with the myth that when we move out on our own, or have enough money, or get to the top of the corporate ladder, then we'll be free and happy.

⁵ Matthew 13:44.

We can feed the monster of self for decades, but this monster is never satisfied—its hunger never diminishes, its thirst is never quenched. It's not freedom from constraint that we need; we need freedom from the tyranny of self.

Helmut Thielicke once wrote, "For no [one], no matter if [they have] tried it a hundred times, has ever yet found happiness in pursuing [their] own will."⁶ Jesus was preoccupied with living for the Father and serving the people around Him. Listen to His words in John 4:34, "*My food...is to do the will of him who sent me*". Thielicke writes, "It is not an 'extra,' a 'dessert,' ...No, it is my food, it is the principle meal of my life to do the will of God."⁷

Jesus' fundamental posture to God was **willingness** (hands open), not **willfulness** (arms crossed). A willing spirit says "*Your way, Your will God*", but a willful spirit says, "*My way, or no way*". Wherever we live with hand open—to God and to others—the kingdom of God comes.

Our lives are not our own; we belong to the One who made us and redeemed us. There is a purpose over your life that goes far beyond your pursuit of education, vocation, family, or pleasure. For however long you live on the North Shore, you are a part of His kingdom purposes here. Jesus once said to His followers, "You are the salt of the earth;" we are God's flavour, His preserving agent in the world. Jesus went on to say, "You are the light of the world, a city on a hill

⁶ Helmut Thielicke, *Our Father In Heaven*, 72.

⁷ Thielicke, 70-71.

⁸ Matthew 5:13, 14.

that cannot be hidden."⁸ *Wherever we live with hand open—to God and to others—the kingdom of God comes.*

The word "*kingdom*" assumes three interconnected realities: a ruler, a people, and a realm. Christ is our King—our Saviour and Lord. We are His people—those who have been called to follow. And His kingdom can be seen and heard through our lives, wherever we go. So how does all this talk about "*kingdom*" come to bear on North Shore Alliance Church?

Application:

First, when it comes to the Board of Elders and the Staff team, our conviction is that North Shore Alliance belongs to God, not to us—God is the Master, we are merely stewards. This truth keeps our leadership team humble and prayerful. We're not calling the shots as we see fit; our primary responsibility is to discern God's direction, to watch for His activity, and to join in what He is doing.

We frequently ask the question, "Where is God working, and how can we get involved?" It was this mindset that led to the ministry that we now call Coffee Time. Launching Coffee Time wasn't a part of our strategic plan, it was a response to the growing need that God brought to our doorstep. People began to show up in numbers, needing financial aid, needing a place to belong, needing to be treated with dignity and respect. It didn't take long for us to

recognize God’s handiwork—He was bringing people, in their need, to us; we said “yes” to God, Coffee Time was born, and we haven’t looked back.

Second, a kingdom framework has determined how we define “success”. In business, we tend to evaluate success in terms of gains and losses.

- How profitable is our business? Are we gaining market share?
- How strong is our brand recognition among consumers?

Some churches use similar markers to measure success:

- How much money is being given?
- What’s our weekend attendance?
- How well-known is our church?

There is a place for these questions. If dozens of people are leaving our church, or financial giving is dwindling, there may be issues that need to be addressed. If no one outside our church knows that we exist, it may evidence a preoccupation with ourselves, and a glaring failure to live missionally.

That being said, in the kingdom of God, the question “*what did we gain?*”, often misses the point; instead, we need to be asking, “*what did we give?*”

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son. Asking the question, “*What did God gain?*”, puts the attention in the wrong place. Instead, we are meant to focus on *what God gave*. He gave His life for the world.

When Jesus walked among us, He didn’t live a **me-first** life, He didn’t bud to the front of the line, He didn’t step on the “little people”. He didn’t come to *be* served but *to* serve. Mother Theresa once said, “Intense love does not measure, it just gives.” God didn’t give in order to get; He gave, because it is in His nature to give. And we give to others because God has given to us.

Nearly 10 years ago, a small, fractured church came to us, asking if they could meet in our facility. In the wake of an adulterous affair, a pastor brought devastation to this church; only 30-40 people remained. They didn’t have any money, and they feared they might not survive.

10 years later, North Shore Iranian Church still share our facility, they are 300 strong, with people becoming Christians and getting baptized at a rapid rate. *What’s in it for us?* It’s the wrong question. *What can we give? How can we share our resources?* These are the questions that the kingdom prompts us to ask.

This past Thursday, North Shore Alliance provided a BBQ for the students and teachers at Handworth High School—a total of 1500 hamburgers and hotdogs were grilled and handed out. *What did we gain?* It’s the wrong question.

Over this past ministry year, the money you have donated to our Care Fund was used to provide food, housing, medical care, and counselling to people in need. By the end of June, we will have invested close to \$40,000; our generosity has demonstrated the love of God in practical ways.

In August we will be sending a team to Project Samuel in Zambia to partner in the work that Kim and Brendan are doing to impact the lives of orphans trapped and oppressed through poverty, abuse, and abandonment. *How will we benefit?* It's the wrong question. We are never more like God than when we give.

We will pursue God's plan for our church, neighbours, city, and world. We strive to focus on other-centeredness and generosity and will regularly ask the questions: Where is God working and how can we be involved? Where can we partner with others? How can we bless and provide for others?

It's a great blessing to be a part of this church, to grow with you, to pursue God's purposes with you. If you are looking for the perfect pastor, or the perfect church, you won't find either here. But I hope and pray that you will find a group of people who are committed to following Jesus, to loving one another, and to reaching out to those beyond our circle.

Pray

Worship

Benediction