



KINGDOM AGENDA

BIBLE STUDY

TONY EVANS

LIVING LIFE GOD'S WAY



KINGDOM AGENDA

BIBLE STUDY

TONY EVANS

LIVING LIFE GOD'S WAY

Published by LifeWay Press®
© 2013 Tony Evans

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152.

ISBN 978-1-4158-7786-9
Item 005558792

Dewey decimal classification: 248.84
Subject headings: CHRISTIAN LIFE \ SPIRITUAL LIFE \ KINGDOM OF GOD

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.lockman.org) Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica Inc. All rights reserved worldwide. Used by permission.

To order additional copies of this resource, write to LifeWay Church Resources Customer Service; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0113; fax 615.251.5933; phone toll free 800.458.2772; order online at www.lifeway.com; email orderentry@lifeway.com; or visit the LifeWay Christian Store serving you.

Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0152



CONTENTS

THE AUTHOR

4

INTRODUCTION

5

WEEK 1

The Foundations of God's Kingdom Agenda

7

WEEK 2

One Life Under God

35

WEEK 3

One Family Under God

63

WEEK 4

One Church Under God

91

WEEK 5

One Nation Under God

119

WEEK 6

Living God's Kingdom Agenda

147



THE AUTHOR * DR. TONY EVANS

Dr. Tony Evans is one of America's most respected leaders in evangelical circles. He is a pastor, a best-selling author, and a frequent speaker at Bible conferences and seminars throughout the nation.

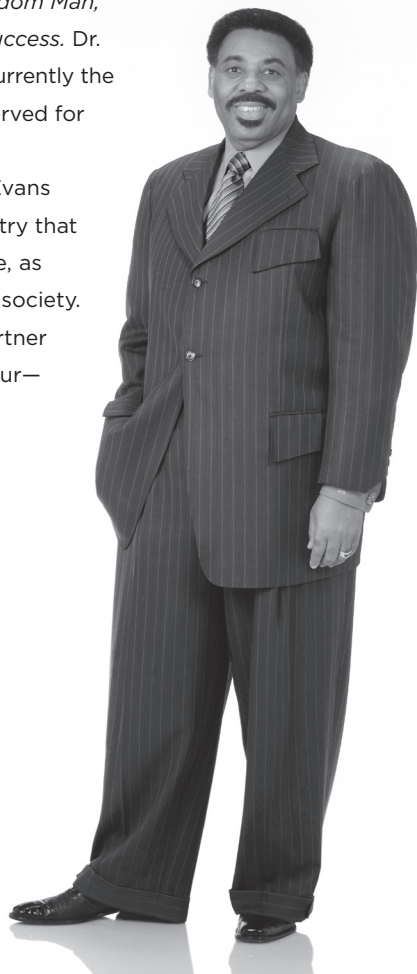
Dr. Evans has served as the senior pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship for more than 35 years, witnessing its growth from 10 people in 1976 to more than 9,000 congregants with more than one hundred ministries.

Dr. Evans also serves as the president of The Urban Alternative, a national ministry that seeks to bring about spiritual renewal in America through the church. His daily radio broadcast, "The Alternative with Dr. Tony Evans," can be heard on 850 radio outlets throughout the United States and in more than 115 countries.

Dr. Evans has authored more than 50 books, including *Oneness Embraced*, *The Kingdom Agenda*, *Marriage Matters*, *Kingdom Man*, *Victory in Spiritual Warfare*, and *God's Unlikely Path to Success*. Dr. Evans, a former chaplain for the NFL Dallas Cowboys, is currently the chaplain for the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, a team he has served for more than 30 years.

Through his local church and national ministry, Dr. Evans has set in motion a kingdom-agenda philosophy of ministry that teaches God's comprehensive rule over every area of life, as demonstrated through the individual, family, church, and society.

Dr. Evans is married to Lois, his wife and ministry partner of more than 40 years. They are the proud parents of four—Chrystal, Priscilla, Anthony Jr., and Jonathan.



INTRODUCTION

I've written a number of books and Bible studies throughout my years in ministry, but I consider this study, *Kingdom Agenda*, to be my magnum opus. This study uniquely expresses my comprehensive worldview, philosophy of life, and philosophy of ministry. More importantly, I consider this study important for every believer because it fundamentally addresses the kingdom of God and His agenda for us as members of that kingdom.

When I use the term *kingdom agenda*, I'm referring to God's blueprint for the way He wants us to live as His followers here on earth. This is vital information, and it needs to remain at the forefront of our thinking in order for that blueprint to fully penetrate our choices and decisions. When that happens, we're in a position to fully realize God's covenant authority and blessings.

Sadly, this message of God's kingdom agenda is sorely lacking today, even in the church. That's not to say that we don't speak about God's kingdom in the church; we do. But too much of what we say is esoteric, theological code words that are unrelated to the realities of life in the here and now.

The absence of a comprehensive agenda for life has led to deterioration of cosmic proportions. Few followers of Christ have developed a true kingdom worldview, and the result has been chaos and confusion in all areas of life. We live segmented, compartmentalized lives as individuals because we lack an overarching blueprint to give us direction. Families disintegrate because they exist for their own fulfillment. Churches have a limited impact on society because they fail to understand that the goal of the church is not the church itself but the kingdom. Society at large has nowhere to turn for solid solutions to the perplexing challenges that confront us today, including a myriad of social ills.

It's time for Christians to recognize our place as citizens of God's kingdom. We need a comprehensive worldview based on the way our Creator intended every area of life to be lived. We need an agenda big enough to include both individuals and societal structures, clear enough to be understood and appropriated by the average person on the street, and flexible enough to allow for considerable differences among peoples and societies.

In other words, we need God's kingdom agenda.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS

This member book includes content for both individual and group study. The best way to learn God's kingdom ways and priorities is to engage in individual, daily devotions and to participate in a Bible-study group that includes video teaching and discussion.

Each week's study begins with a suggested process for a group experience. Each group session should follow this general outline.

START. Begin each session with a brief time of discussion that helps you and your group get to know one another better and discuss what the Lord has taught you during the previous week.

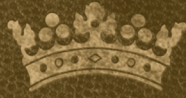
WATCH. Your group will watch a 30-minute teaching segment on DVD while completing the viewer guide provided in each group experience.

RESPOND. Use the suggested questions to discuss the truths presented on the DVD. Then close each group experience with prayer. Each session wraps up with a key verse of Scripture to memorize and a specific challenge to tackle the next week.

The teaching segment and group discussion will provide a foundation for your individual study throughout the week. Each day you'll read a devotion that fleshes out the Scriptures and ideas first presented in the group experience. You'll also complete personal learning activities that will help you move toward God's kingdom agenda. If you complete each week's personal study, you'll arrive at your next group session ready to begin another discussion based on the individual work you've done.

Throughout these six sessions you'll find a new perspective on what it means to be a citizen of God's kingdom. As you study biblical truths about your identity and role in the kingdom, you'll learn to exercise the rights, authority, and responsibilities God has granted you as His representative on earth whom He's commissioned to make an eternal difference in your family, your church, your community, and your world.

If you want to explore the kingdom agenda further after completing this study, read Tony Evans's book *The Kingdom Agenda: Life Under God* (Moody Publishers).



Week 1

**THE FOUNDATIONS
OF GOD'S KINGDOM
AGENDA**

START

Welcome to this small-group discussion of Kingdom Agenda.

To facilitate introductions and to focus on the theme of *Kingdom Agenda*, spend a few moments talking as a group about the process of building a house from scratch. Use the following questions to guide your conversation.

- What experiences have you had with building or remodeling projects?
- In your opinion or based on your experience, what are the most difficult aspects of building a new house from scratch? Why?
- Which features or additional elements would turn a good house into your ideal house?

How would you define or summarize *kingdom of God* in your own words?

Spend a few minutes as a group comparing and contrasting the values of God's kingdom with the values of our modern culture. (Consider creating a Venn diagram if a whiteboard or a large sheet of paper is available.)

To prepare for the DVD segment, read aloud the following verses.

Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

JOHN 18:33-37

WATCH

Complete the viewer guide below as you watch DVD session 1.

The kingdom agenda is the visible demonstration of the comprehensive _____ of _____ over every area of life.

God created man to demonstrate His greater _____ and to advance His _____ in history.

God has a kingdom but only if He is _____.

Worldliness is _____ against kingdomness.

God wants us in the world, but He doesn't want the world in _____.

The world is the system headed by Satan that wants to leave _____ out.

The reason God's kingdom is not fixing what's wrong in our world is that the folks who want God to fix it are simultaneously _____.

If you belong to Jesus Christ, this world is not your _____.

The truth is the absolute _____ by which reality is measured.

God does not leave His kingdom to satisfy our _____ in this world. He invites us from this world into His kingdom.

If you want your life and our world on target, then God must be recognized as the comprehensive _____ of this kingdom.

Unless God is free to call the shots, the _____ we need in our lives will not happen.

RESPOND

Use the following questions to discuss the DVD segment with your group.

What did you appreciate most in Dr. Evans's teaching? Why?

Think over your definition or summary of *kingdom of God* from earlier in the group session. What would you change after hearing Dr. Evans speak?

Which rules or guidelines are most important in your home?

Which rules or guidelines seem most important in God's kingdom?

Respond to Dr. Evans's statement: "The reason God's kingdom is not fixing what's wrong in our world is that the folks who want God to fix it are simultaneously worldly."

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *truth*? Why?

During what periods of life have you felt most connected to and aligned with God's kingdom agenda?

Application. As you move through your everyday routines this week, be aware of the times when your status as a member of God's kingdom causes tension or dissonance with your status as a participant in today's culture. Consider keeping a journal or taking notes when these clashes occur.

This week's Scripture memory.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

MATTHEW 6:24

Assignment. Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

OUR TRUE KINGDOM

Do you know what it means to be part of a kingdom? As people living in a constitutional republic like the United States of America, we sometimes have trouble wrapping our minds around the concept of a kingdom, not to mention the consequences of living under the influence and authority of a king.

We have a president in America, of course, but that office is part of our larger governing body. In addition to the executive branch of government, we have legislative and judicial branches. This system of checks and balances was designed to ensure that one person or one group of people doesn't gain too much power and control.

That's not the case in a true kingdom, and that hasn't been the case with the majority of the kingdoms and cultures that have come and gone throughout history. In a true kingdom, all facets of life operate under the direct rule and authority of a king or a queen. The monarch is in charge. The monarch makes decisions and creates laws that steer the course and fortune of the entire nation—for better or for worse.

Therefore, the boundaries of a kingdom extend as far as the influence and control of the king. Wherever a king's direct authority is acknowledged and obeyed, that place is part of the king's realm—part of his kingdom.

It's important for us as Christians to understand these principles because the Bible tells us again and again that we're part of the kingdom of God. We're subjects in God's kingdom, which means we're under the direct authority and rule of God as our King—or we're supposed to be. Too often, however, we drift into rebellion and actively or passively seek to dethrone the One we're supposed to serve.

This week we'll explore foundational biblical components of what it means to live as a subject in God's kingdom and to live under the authority of His kingdom agenda.





Day 1

UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

I don't know about you, but I hate getting sick. I hate that feeling when my nose starts running, my eyes start watering, and my throat gets scratchy. I hate it when my stomach churns. I hate it when my head aches. I hate it when my mind gets fuzzy.

In other words, I hate the physical symptoms that are almost always connected with illness. Can you relate?

One reason I hate getting sick is that I know the physical symptoms I'm experiencing are evidence of a deep dysfunction in my body. Being sick means something is wrong inside me: a virus or bacterium has penetrated the defenses of my immune system, in turn causing adverse physical reactions in my body. These reactions can range from mildly annoying to life-threatening.

How do you typically react when you get sick?

Which symptoms of common illnesses do you dislike most? Why?

People often ask, What's wrong with the world today? They see people seeking self-help books and counseling because of anxiety, depression, drug abuse, addiction, and a multitude of personal problems. They see the rapid deterioration of the American family. They see the spiritual decline of our nation and the marginalization of the church, though the world desperately needs God's help. They see modern cities and suburbs wracked by crime, violence, racism, and greed.

There's something wrong with the world today, but the deterioration of our society isn't the core problem. Rather, just as physical disease manifests itself in physical symptoms, the dysfunction evident in us as individuals, as families, as a church, and as a nation is merely the symptom of a deeper problem.

In short, our society is suffering from a spiritual sickness. We're in the throes of a spiritual malaise that's been building for decades, and it's killing us.

Of course, sin is the ultimate source of our spiritual sickness. It's the virus that's infected and corrupted all human experience since Adam and Eve took their first bites of the forbidden fruit in rebellion against God.

But I believe a particular manifestation of our sin problem is responsible for the larger spiritual sickness currently attacking modern society. This isn't a new manifestation but one that can be traced all the way back to the struggles and symptoms experienced by the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

THE DIAGNOSIS

The following verses from 2 Chronicles 15 capture the essential elements of humanity's current situation:

For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress.

2 CHRONICLES 15:3,5-6

What's your initial reaction to these verses? Why?

How do you see the cultural symptoms described in these verses reflected in our society today?

These verses paint a picture of great spiritual and social chaos—the breakdown of a society. So what was wrong? Three crucial elements were missing in Israelite society, and I believe they're missing today in our nation as well.

1. THE ISRAELITES WERE WITHOUT THE TRUE GOD. The author of these verses wasn't saying God had abandoned His people, nor was he saying the Israelites had become atheists or no longer believed in God. The sacrificial fires were still burning at the temple, and participation in the religious practices was still high.

Rather, Israel had lost an accurate view of God. The Israelites wanted a convenient God—one they could control. They wanted a figurehead who displayed the trappings of authority but carried no real power. Essentially, the Israelites were interested in establishing a kingdom without a King. They didn't want the true God to interfere with their national life, reminding them that He had an agenda greater than their personal interests and desires.

In other words, the people of Israel had forgotten (or had willfully chosen to ignore) that God is the all-powerful, unstoppable Creator of the universe.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about God's true position in relation to humanity.

Exodus 19:18-24

Job 40:1-14

Romans 11:33-36

We've also lost an accurate view of God in today's society. Oh, we're willing to pay homage to Him every now and then in the right circumstances—offering a prayer before public meetings or setting up a nativity scene at Christmas. But mostly we prefer to view Him as a harmless deity with nothing significant to say about the educational, scientific, political, social, familial, and personal issues of our day.

What evidence have you seen that supports the previous statements?

When are you tempted to minimize or ignore God's glory and power?

2. THE ISRAELITES WERE WITHOUT A TEACHING PRIEST.

Again, the problem wasn't a lack of priests—Israel was filled with priests working in the temple and throughout the nation—but a lack of priests engaged in teaching.

That means the priests of Israel had stopped telling the truth. They'd traded enlightenment for entertainment and allowed genuine worship to degenerate into a social club. As a

result, the temple was no longer the epicenter of life and conscience in the culture, calling people to take God seriously. Israel suffered from an absence of spiritual leaders who were serious about the authority of Scripture for all areas of life.

We're also suffering from this absence in the church today. Too many modern pastors preach to please their congregations. Because they're afraid of hearing someone say, "I didn't like that sermon," they abdicate their proper prophetic role in the culture. Politicians need to be popular. Preachers need to tell the truth.

How do you intentionally expose yourself to preaching and teaching that are based on the authority of God's Word?

What steps do you take to apply what you learn?

3. THE ISRAELITES WERE WITHOUT LAW. Specifically, they'd lost an accurate view of and a proper respect for God's law as expressed in His Word. As a result, notice what happened in verse 6:

Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress.

2 CHRONICLES 15:6, emphasis added

You know you're in a bad situation when God is the one troubling you "with every kind of distress"! Yet that's what Israel experienced after they turned their eyes away from the true God, closed their ears to the truth, and turned their backs on God's law.

Once God has been marginalized in a culture, the standards of morality and civility degenerate, and people become their own worst enemies. When the rule of God's law is missing, chaos replaces community as people become more and more enslaved by the very freedoms they seek.

That's what happened in Israel, and that's what's happening in society today. The heart of our problem is that too many individuals, families, churches, and communities want to keep God's law—and by extension God Himself—on the fringes of their lives. They want God to be accessible if there's a critical need or a tragedy, but they don't want to live in submission to His Word or acknowledge it as the source of truth.

How have you seen God's Word marginalized or attacked in today's society?

What steps have you taken to affirm the truth of God's Word and submit to it as your standard of truth?

The spiritual diagnosis for what's wrong with the world today is simple: we've distanced ourselves from God, we've been hesitant to teach the truth about God, and we've refused to submit to God's Word as the law of our lives. And one of the saddest consequences of this spiritual disease is that we've lost our hope.

See, as long as you have God, you have hope. He's the one thing in this whole universe you can bank on with utter certainty—because He created this whole universe. But when God leaves a society, hope goes with Him. When God is marginalized or pushed away by a culture that desires its own rule, hope is marginalized and pushed away with Him. And that's what we're experiencing today.

How have you received hope from your relationship with God?

THE SOLUTION

What must we do to reverse the spiritual sickness causing this downward spiral in our lives? It's time to return to the King. It's time to place ourselves once again under His rule and His agenda. It's time to recognize that the kingdom of God isn't an ethereal fairy tale located in a far-off land. It's both here and now.

That's our goal in this study.

What ideas or images come to mind when you read or hear the phrase *kingdom of God*?

Before we move any further, let's establish two important definitions. First, the Bible refers to the kingdom of God as God's rule in this universe. His kingdom covers everything in creation and operates as a theocracy, where God rules, rather than a homocracy, where people rule. That's important.

With that in mind, let's use the Tony Evans Dictionary to define *kingdom of God*:

**KINGDOM OF GOD: GOD'S COMPREHENSIVE
RULE OVER ALL CREATION**

If God's kingdom is comprehensive, so is His kingdom agenda—His plan and program for the people and places under His dominion. So I define God's *kingdom agenda* as follows.

**KINGDOM AGENDA: THE VISIBLE DEMONSTRATION OF THE
COMPREHENSIVE RULE OF GOD OVER EVERY AREA OF LIFE**

We'll flesh out the practical elements of that definition in the days to come.

What's your reaction to the previous definitions?

The reason many believers are struggling is that we want God to bless our agendas instead of seeking to fulfill His kingdom agenda. We want God to OK our plans instead of seeking to fulfill His plans. We want God to bring us glory instead of seeking to bring Him glory.

But it doesn't work that way. God has only one plan: His kingdom agenda. That's why we'll spend this week exploring ways we can make sure we're following His plan instead of ours.



Day 2

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA IS FROM ABOVE

Yesterday we defined God's *kingdom agenda* as the visible demonstration of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life. To put things in more practical terms, God has a plan not just for your life and my life but for every facet of creation. He has a desired and designed program for everything contained in His kingdom.

The existence of this kingdom agenda has deep implications for all people because it offers us two distinct paths for how we choose to live our lives. We can get with the program and operate in submission to God's kingdom agenda, or we can go our own way and follow our own plans, goals, dreams, and desires.

People who choose their own path live in rebellion against God. By operating against God's kingdom, they create damaging consequences for individuals, for families, for churches, and for nations. We're currently experiencing these detrimental consequences throughout Western culture.

In contrast, people who choose to follow God's kingdom agenda live as active, productive members of God's kingdom. They experience the joy of fulfilling their purpose in life and of living in greater harmony with God.

During what seasons of life have you followed your own path and made your own choices rather than submitting to God's plan?

During what seasons of life have you intentionally followed God's plan rather than your own desires?

What outcomes did you experience in each of the previous seasons of life?

Our goal for this study is to understand the importance of relinquishing our agendas in order to follow God's plan and purposes for our lives. We also want to learn how we can intentionally and practically submit to God's blueprint rather than our own desires.

To move in those directions, we'll use the rest of this week to examine four fundamental truths about God's kingdom agenda:

1. GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.
2. GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA REFLECTS HIS SOVEREIGNTY.
3. GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES FOR HIS GLORY.
4. GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Before the crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus was forced to endure a series of interrogations by religious leaders and government officials, including the Roman governor, Pilate. Interestingly, Jesus used that conversation to deliver some of His clearest teachings on the kingdom of God.

The Jews wanted the Roman government to execute Jesus, so they accused Him of claiming to be an earthly king. Following that accusation, Pilate asked Jesus directly, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). Here's what happened next:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

JOHN 18:36

Jesus' words highlight our first truth about the kingdom:

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.

Notice Jesus didn't say that His kingdom isn't *in* this world. Rather, He said His kingdom isn't *of* this world. His kingdom doesn't originate on earth; it originates in heaven. His kingdom has its source in the heavenlies, not in history. And because Jesus represented another King from another kingdom outside this world, He didn't resort to the methodologies of this world to defend Himself. He didn't rely on a physical army to rescue Him from death, because He was committed to a different agenda.

Why is this important? Because if you're a follower of Jesus, you also represent a kingdom that's not of this world. Therefore, to live your life according to God's kingdom agenda means many of your actions and decisions won't align with this world's professed wisdom and preferred methods.

In other words, you'll be different. You'll be noticed and called out by the people of this world because you're different. You may even experience persecution, as Jesus did.

What are some of the main purposes of life that our culture typically elevates and embraces? Record at least three.

1.

2.

3.

How do your main goals and purposes in life compare and contrast with the previous list?

THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

When we understand that God's kingdom is not of this world, we realize that God's kingdom agenda must be carried out from the perspective of heaven, not of earth. That's why Jesus consistently made statements like this:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

MATTHEW 6:24-25,33

What's your initial reaction to these verses? Why?

Far too many Christians think they can mix a little of God with a lot of the world. They're willing to follow several isolated fragments of what they find in God's Word—going to church for fellowship, giving money when it's convenient, not committing murder, and so on—but they're not willing to submit to God's comprehensive plan and purpose for their lives. In other words, they're not willing to be part of His kingdom agenda.

That's a problem. Because when you bring the world into the Word, you're asking God, the King, to bless something that's contrary to His kingdom. He won't do that. In the end your efforts to keep hold of a little piece of God actually prevent you from experiencing any part of God. You can't operate in two kingdoms at once.

In what areas of life are you attempting to mix God and the world in order to follow your own agenda?

I'll never forget the morning I got soap in my eyes while I was in the shower. My eyes started burning, so I tried to rub the soap out with my hand. But since my hand had soap on it, I only made things worse. Then I smacked my head against the soap dish while I was trying to grab a towel with my eyes closed, at the same time knocking the soap onto the bottom of the tub. And of course, the next instant I slipped on the soap and crashed onto the shower floor.

There I was, flailing around in the shower with a headache, a backache, and stinging eyes—all because something had blinded me and clouded my perspective.

Few things will be more counterproductive to your Christian walk than mixing earthly values with your perspective on life. It results in spiritual blindness. It keeps you from seeing what God wants you to see, which in turn keeps you from going where God wants you to go and doing what God wants you to do.

No, the only way to keep your vision clear is by viewing all of life through the perspective of God's kingdom agenda.



Day 3

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA REFLECTS HIS SOVEREIGNTY

I love it when visitors come to my house, so I often have friends over to talk, eat, or watch football. But there are certain rules I require people to follow when they enter my home.

For example, I don't allow any smoking inside my house. That doesn't mean I refuse to associate with people who smoke; it just means they have to snuff out their cigarettes or cigars before they walk through my front door. Similarly, I don't allow any profanity inside my house—not from my family members and not from visitors. So people who choose to swear need to do it somewhere else.

There have been some occasions where visitors have been unimpressed by the rules I've set up for my house, even upset. When that happens, I make it clear that guests are free to disagree with my line of thinking, but they have two choices about their status as visitors: they can stay at my house and follow my rules, or they can leave and do whatever they like somewhere else. Because it's my house.

What are some rules in your house that you consider important?

How do you typically respond when people break those rules?

Today we're going to focus on the second fundamental truth about God's kingdom agenda:

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA REFLECTS HIS SOVEREIGNTY.

When you submit yourself to God's kingdom agenda, you place yourself under the King's sovereign rule. Because it's God's house.

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *sovereignty*?

GOD IS IN CHARGE

Sovereignty is a concept many people don't like or understand, especially when applied to God. But at the core, the fact that God is sovereign simply refers to His supremacy over all aspects of creation. His rules are universal, absolute, and comprehensive. Therefore, God is accountable to no one. He is sovereign.

Many passages of Scripture help us understand this aspect of God's character. Here's one:

*The LORD has established His throne in the heavens,
And His sovereignty rules over all.*

PSALM 103:19

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about God's sovereignty.

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

Psalms 145:13

Ephesians 1:3-12

This world is God's house, and it operates according to His rules. That means unless you and I want to go out and create our own universe, we need to adjust to the rules of God's house or else prepare to suffer the consequences of our rebellion. Those are the only options before us.

But adjusting to the rules of God's house has major implications. To acknowledge God's sovereignty is to acknowledge His jurisdiction over every realm of life—including *your* life. To acknowledge His jurisdiction is to acknowledge the validity of His legislation in and over every area of your life. It's to align all your life under God's kingdom agenda.

Many Christians behave like teenagers in God's house. They say, "We're happy to live in Your place, God. We'll eat the food You provide. We'll enjoy the accommodations and other blessings You bring us. But we've got some of our own rules we need to follow. And we've got a few complaints we need to bring to Your attention."

In short, they want to experience the goodness of God's house without also submitting to God's rules—without recognizing God's sovereign authority. It just doesn't work that way.

How have your recent actions and attitudes reflected God's sovereignty over your life?

In what areas of life are you attempting to operate by your own rules?

Yes, living in God's kingdom brings blessings, but you don't get to enjoy the blessings of the King if you're not willing to live for His kingdom and under His sovereign authority. In other words, until you become a kingdom person who makes decisions based on God's kingdom agenda, you'll miss out on the abundant life He has in store for you.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

God's sovereignty over His creation means He's in charge of all aspects of that creation. In the same way, the fact that God is sovereign means everything that happens in creation—including everything that happens in your life and mine—is either caused by God or allowed by God.

That's an important distinction. There are times when God actively causes things to happen in history. There are other times when we cause things to happen as people operating in our own free will, and yet nothing we attempt can actually come to pass unless God in His sovereignty allows it to happen.

This helps us answer the question, If God is sovereign, why is there so much chaos in the world? God's sovereignty doesn't mean there won't be any problems. It doesn't mean Satan won't rebel or people won't refuse to obey God's will.

What God's sovereignty does mean is that He's ultimately in control of every situation in this world. It means He will guide, direct, and ultimately use all things according to His kingdom agenda.

What's your response to the previous statements?

God's sovereignty means He's going to get wherever He's going. His kingdom agenda can't be thwarted, stopped, altered, or negated. That's why the apostle Paul wrote:

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

ROMANS 8:28

What emotions do you experience when you read this verse? Why?

When has God caused difficult circumstances to “work together for good” in your life?

Paul was writing to committed Christians—those who “love God” and “are called according to His purpose.” In other words, this verse applies only to people who are intentionally living according to God's kingdom agenda.

Now for the good news: God is in control of your life and all of your circumstances. Moreover, God is completely able to work in the different circumstances of your life to bring about good things according to His purposes.

Maybe you say, “But Tony, things are falling apart here! People are putting me down. I lost my job. The doctors say they don't know if I'm going to make it.” I understand all that, and I've felt the pain you're experiencing in those kinds of situations. But the fact remains that God is sovereign over all things. Just because everything seems out of control, it's only out of *your* control—not God's.

What situations seem out of control in your life right now?

If life is difficult for you right now, don't approach God in His sovereignty with an attitude that says, “Lord, this is what I want.” Rather, ask, “Lord, what do You want?” That's the question that defines a life lived according to God's kingdom agenda.



Day 4

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES FOR HIS GLORY

Glory is a common term in the Bible, one we usually encounter in connection with God. Unfortunately, we as Christians often miss the full meaning and significance of these encounters because our definition of *glory* has become skewed by the culture around us.

For example, people in our culture often make a connection between glory and fame or glory and riches. We see people on the covers of magazines and think, *They look glorious* or, *That person is covered in glory*. To be honest, we've confused glory with bling.

People in our culture also connect glory and victory—especially victory in sports or in warfare. How many movies have you seen in which Roman gladiators or historical generals shout for their followers to fight for glory? How many times have you heard sportswriters and announcers talk about an athlete's career in terms of glory?

These definitions of *glory* may be accepted in our cultural lexicon today, but they miss the mark when it comes to a biblical understanding of glory.

In what other ways have you seen *glory* defined or interpreted?

What ideas or images come to your mind when you hear the word *glory*?

So how are we to understand the concept of glory as it's presented in the Bible? We'll explore that today as we study the third fundamental truth about God's kingdom agenda:

GOD'S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES FOR HIS GLORY.

CREATED FOR HIS GLORY

Let's begin exploring the connection between God's glory and His kingdom agenda by examining these powerful words by the apostle Paul:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

ROMANS 11:33-36

What's your initial reaction to these verses? Why?

What do these verses teach you about God?

Notice the progression in verse 36. Paul described everything in creation as coming “from Him and through Him and to Him.” In other words, everything that exists was created by God, is currently supported by God, and ultimately points to God. Moreover, none of this happens randomly. It all has a purpose, which Paul described this way: “To [God] be the glory forever.”

So the reason God created the universe and everything in it—including you and me—was for His pleasure and His glory. Don't let anyone tell you that God created the world and people because He was lonely and needed companionship. That's false. God created this world and human beings for the primary purpose of displaying and reflecting His glory.

Look at the words of the prophet Isaiah:

*Bring My sons from afar
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.*

ISAIAH 43:6-7

You and I were created for the purpose of bringing God glory. That's a vital component of God's kingdom agenda for us.

GLORY DEFINED

So what is glory? How do we understand glory when it's connected with God? In the New Testament the Greek word translated *glory* essentially means *to be heavy* or *to have weight*. This isn't physical weight, of course, but rather significance. The more glory something has, the heavier it becomes in terms of its importance.

That's not all. To fully comprehend the concept of God's glory, we need to understand the difference between ascribed glory and intrinsic glory. Most of us are familiar only with ascribed glory. This is the kind of glory we assign to people based on who they are or what they do. For example, judges carry ascribed glory when they put on their robes and everyone says, "Your Honor." When they lose the robes, they lose the glory. It's ascribed.

Human beings can carry only ascribed glory. But God is different. God's glory is intrinsic. His glory stays with Him at all times; it's part of Him.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about God's intrinsic glory.

Exodus 33:15-23

Ezekiel 1:22-28

Matthew 24:29-31

Think of it this way: the sun doesn't try to be bright. It's always bright, even at night or on cloudy days when things seem dark to us. In the same way, God always exudes glory. He's eternally glorious. And just as the moon reflects the brightness of the sun, all creation has been designed to reflect God's glory and direct it back to Him—including you and me.

How do we reflect glory back to God? What does that look like?

**When have you intentionally sought to glorify God in recent days?
What happened?**

GOOD NEWS FOR US

God's glory has tremendous implications for those of us who submit ourselves to His kingdom agenda. Look at Colossians 1:15-17:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-17

How do these verses contribute to your understanding of God's glory?

There's that same principle again: "All things have been created through Him and for Him" (v. 16). All creation has been designed by God for His glory. But look at that last phrase: "In Him all things hold together" (v. 17).

If you abide by and live according to God's kingdom agenda, Christ will bring together the things in your life that are falling apart. He will either fix the situation you're in, or He will fix *you* in the middle of that situation. He will hold things together for you, so fasten your eyes on Him when the going gets tough.

How do you need Jesus to hold things together for you right now?

But to receive the benefit of God's hand when things are falling apart, you must live your life for His glory. You must say, "Lord, my goal today is to reflect Your significance. I want to ascribe to You the glory that already belongs to You. I want to radiate, demonstrate, magnify, and illustrate Your glory."

That's what it means to live as part of God's kingdom agenda.



Day 5

GOD’S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES ACCORDING TO HIS WILL

When I was a little boy growing up in Baltimore, one of the first toys I remember playing with was a little jack-in-the-box. When I wound up the crank on the side of the box, it played the tune “Pop Goes the Weasel.” I’d keep winding and winding, of course, building up the tension until boom! A spring was activated somewhere in the box, and a painted clown popped out of the top. I loved that toy. It always scared me a little, but I still loved it.

The concept of a jack-in-the-box is great for a toy but not so great for God. Yet so many people today, even a number of Christians, treat God as if He were a clown they can call up whenever they need Him and then stuff back in the box again when they want to go back to their own way of life.

That brings us to the fourth and final truth we need to explore about God’s kingdom agenda. So far we’ve seen that God’s kingdom agenda originates in heaven, reflects God’s sovereignty, and operates for His glory. Today we’ll explore this kingdom principle:

GOD’S KINGDOM AGENDA OPERATES ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear phrases such as “God’s will” or “the will of God”?

GOD’S KINGDOM WILL

Let’s continue our exploration of God’s kingdom agenda by focusing on Daniel 7, which records a supernatural vision that God gave to the prophet Daniel. That vision contained powerful images and prophecies that were overwhelming to Daniel at the time; he wasn’t able to comprehend the full scope of what he saw. Looking back from our perspective, however, we can see that God blessed His prophet with an accurate picture and prediction of several future kingdoms that would rule on earth.

Read Daniel 7:1-12. Which images are emphasized most in Daniel’s vision?

Daniel envisioned four beasts: a lion with eagle's wings, a bear, a leopard, and a terrifying beast of unknown form. These four beasts corresponded to four specific kingdoms or nations in history. The lion represented the Babylonian Empire. The bear represented the Medo-Persian Empire. The leopard represented the Greek Empire led by Alexander the Great. And the terrifying beast represented the Roman Empire and its many offshoots.

Essentially, Daniel saw a prophetic vision of actual historical kingdoms that would come to power on earth. But that's not all. After his vision of earthly kingdoms, Daniel also received fascinating insight into God's heavenly kingdom:

*I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,
And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
**And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,**
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed.*
DANIEL 7:13-14, emphasis added

How do these verses enhance your understanding of God's kingdom?

Notice the progression in these verses. First, "One like a Son of Man was coming" (v. 13)—that's Jesus. Son of Man was a messianic title used several places in Scripture. Jesus specifically used this title to describe Himself in the Gospels.

Next we have the "Ancient of Days" (v. 13)—that's God—deliberately giving dominion, glory, and a kingdom to Jesus (see v. 14). This was a symbolic representation of the fact that Jesus is the driving force in God's kingdom and has the authority to carry out God's kingdom agenda. In other words, Jesus is in control.

Finally, we see our part in this huge, heavenly picture:

*That all the peoples, nations and men of every language
Might serve Him.*

DANIEL 7:14

Do you see the connection? Jesus has been given glory and dominion over God's kingdom, and we've been charged to reflect that glory and serve Him in all things.

In other words, you and I were brought into God's kingdom to serve Christ and to do His will. That's the goal we should strive for every day.

How have you intentionally served Jesus in recent days?

What we need to understand is that God's kingdom is moving forward, whether or not we're on board. His kingdom agenda can't be stopped. His plans can't be thwarted or delayed. God has said:

*As the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.
For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*

ISAIAH 55:9-11

It's our job, as members of God's kingdom, to set aside our plans and desires, submit to His kingdom will, and work to carry out His kingdom agenda.

Jesus Himself modeled this principle for us when confronted with His own crucifixion, the most painful, humiliating experience imaginable:

He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."

LUKE 22:41-42

What obstacles regularly prevent you from identifying God's will?

What obstacles regularly hinder you from carrying out God's will?

How can these obstacles be overcome?

BECOMING A KINGDOM PERSON

Do you want to be a kingdom person? Do you want to discover God's plan for your life—the place and work He has for you in His kingdom agenda? It doesn't have to be a mystery. God is both willing and waiting to reveal it to you. But you must come to the place of submission to His will. If you don't know how to find that place, ask God to show you the way. Seek Him by restructuring your thoughts, words, and actions to conform to the standards of His kingdom.

Again, Jesus is not only the authority in God's kingdom but also our example for living each day according to God's kingdom agenda. For example, look at His words in what we refer to as the Lord's Prayer:

*Pray, then, in this way:
"Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."*

MATTHEW 6:9-13

What do you like best about Jesus' prayer? Why?

How does this prayer compare to the way you normally pray?

Notice that Jesus' prayer begins with a desire to exalt God's name—to proclaim God as unique and worthy of all honor in creation (see v. 9). Also notice the posture of humility Jesus took before His Father:

*Your kingdom come,
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.*
MATTHEW 6:10

Finally, notice how that humility shaped the end of Jesus' prayer: "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (v. 13). Jesus was showing us how to bend our wills in submission to God's will. He was demonstrating the necessity of letting go of our earthly kingdoms and desires in order to grab hold of God's kingdom agenda.

I can't tell you everything that following God's kingdom agenda will mean for you on a practical level. I just know that whatever it is, you must be willing to do His will, not your own. You must be able to pray, "Your will be done" and "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (vv. 10,13).

How will you intentionally submit to God's will this week?

In the days and weeks to follow, I want to challenge you to live your life according to God's kingdom agenda—to submit to your King and seek His kingdom. God is the source of all things. He's in charge. He's sovereign. He's your Lord and mine. And when you do His will, you become His representative in a world that longs to find a better way to live.



Which KINGDOM Will You Serve?

There's a battle raging today over the direction of your life. The kingdom of this world is fighting for your loyalty, tempting you to embrace the sinful and selfish values of our culture. God has something better. He provided a comprehensive blueprint to help you live and thrive—the kingdom agenda.

In this Bible study Tony Evans lays out biblical characteristics of the kingdom agenda, based on the eternal plans and priorities of the King. You'll discover your identity, role, and responsibilities in God's kingdom, as well as the rights and blessings granted to kingdom citizens. And you'll learn how God wants you to serve as His representative in your personal life, your family, your church, and your nation.

Only one King is worthy of your supreme devotion.
Make sure your life is aligned with His kingdom agenda.

ALSO AVAILABLE

Kingdom Agenda Leader Kit includes resources for leading a six-session group study: one member book, *The Kingdom Agenda* book, and two DVDs that feature Dr. Evans teaching the study. Item 005558791

ISBN 978-1-4158-7786-9



9 781415 877869

 **LifeWay**
Biblical Solutions for Life