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Are You Weird? Jesus' Counterintuitive Kingdom

“Yeah, we’re reaching thousands,” remarked Pastor Simon (“Sonny”) Butkis, as he spoke to the press. “The Christian religion is supposed to be a spiritual high, and that’s what we make it, every day, for every man, woman, and child. Just talk to any of our fans—that’s what we call our members. We make Christianity cool, like Jesus.” When asked about his recent appeal for several million dollars to purchase a new jet airplane, the reverend responded, “God pays for what He orders!” As the short interview ended, Pastor Butkis got into his new Jaguar and drove away.

Meanwhile, across town, Reverend Johnson concluded the Sunday evening service at First Lutheran. The predominantly white-haired crowd began to exit from their scattered positions throughout the 70-year-old sanctuary. Gladys Higgenbottom completed the closing anthem and gathered the music from the organ she has played for 42 years. Reverend Johnson sighed, as he took off his clerical robes. He thought, “Yes, we’ve been declining for three decades, and I see the end in sight. But at least I can look in the mirror and know that we have been faithful.”



Kent Hunter is the architect of the *Healthy Churches Thrive!* a 24-month spiritual adventure for Christians and churches to recapture the uniqueness of the Kingdom of God. Kent is the author and teacher of the DVD series, *The Damascus Road: Where Christians Become Missionaries*. He has just completed the new workshop: *Healthy Churches Thrive!: Energize Your Church for Impact*.

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Jesus on This Subject

Jesus clearly declared, “My Kingdom is not of this world.” He said it to His followers, and told Pilate as well. Have you ever considered what those words mean? How do they apply to you? What do they mean for your church? The issue may be more complex than you

MULTIPLYING MINISTRY

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ever imagined! It has significant implications for one of the greatest challenges facing almost every church today: effective, biblically-based mission strategy.

My Own Journey

In spite of my extensive theological and mission training, I never looked at the church through the lens of the Kingdom of God during my days in school. In seminary, I read George Eldon Ladd's classical book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*. However, as a student, I had little ministry experience to put the academic content into focus.

As I reflect on the subject, I think, subconsciously, when I heard the words, "My Kingdom is not of this world," what little thought I gave to the subject may have been interpreted something like this:

"Jesus said, 'My Kingdom is not of this world.' That probably means that one day I'll die, and, as a believer, because Jesus died for my sins, I will be with Him in His Kingdom, which is in heaven. After all, in the Lord's Prayer, we pray, 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth, just like it is in heaven.'" (I focused more on "in heaven" than "on earth.")

During the last ten years, I have focused much of my study time on the Kingdom of God, and what it means for the health and vitality of the local church. My focus? "How Kingdom of God teaching impacts every Christian to reach others." This has led to the greatest spiritual and practical breakthrough of my thirty-five year career as a church consultant. My focus has been on the church's effectiveness to reach people for Jesus Christ. This will be the subject of my next book. It is now the subject of a new workshop called, "Energize Your Church for Impact." It describes the value of the 24-month spiritual adventure for churches, called *Healthy Churches Thrive!* Kingdom-of-God-thinking has been a major influence among churches field-testing *Healthy Churches Thrive!* We have measured significant results in strategic elements of the churches involved.

Jesus' Unusual Kingdom

When Jesus says, "My Kingdom is not of this world," He is saying, "My Kingdom is not like this

THE TEN PATHS TO KINGDOM WEIRDNESS

1. Focus on the stories Jesus told through the lens of your values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews.
2. Read the letters written to the churches in the New Testament. How are the apostles correcting "drift" from Kingdom culture in these young congregations?
3. Look at every aspect of your church through the lens of Kingdom culture. Focus on areas of "how" your church operates (strategies).
4. Look at your own life through the lens of Kingdom culture, as you study the teachings of Jesus.
5. Look at what Jesus taught, and how the disciples demonstrated making decisions. How does that mesh with your congregation's approach to decision making?
6. Focus on how people are invited to be involved in service. Do they know their spiritual gifts? Are they disciplined into ministry by another person? What does it mean that Jesus never once asked, "Can I get a volunteer?"
7. Jesus spoke a lot about generosity. The Scripture says, "It is better to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). How does this fit your approach to life? How does it fit your church? Does your church spend more time, energy, and money on others, or itself?
8. Jesus' approach to reaching others is to "go" to them. Is this the direction of your church? Or does your church focus more on a "y'all come" approach? Is your church building a destination or a launch pad?
9. Do you see yourself as a missionary to those in your social network who don't know Jesus? Or, do you see the mission as something you support, so staff and a few others can do the work of outreach?
10. Are most of the people in your church open and excited about appropriate change? Or are they stuck in the "good ol' days"? What about you?

world.” Jesus is saying that we, as Christ followers, are different. We are supposed to be different. Our churches are not to be operated like this world. “Church” is an operational organism that is not supposed to look, feel, act, and operate like the world around it. In a good sense, the church is supposed to be a little weird.

When Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, He used words now known as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Whether He intended the prayer to become a rote format for centuries is debatable. His primary purpose was most likely to demonstrate *how* to pray, rather than *what* to pray. Regardless, the prayer includes great biblical teaching about the Kingdom of God.

In the Lord’s Prayer, the phrase, “Your Kingdom come” likely has several levels of meaning: (1) we are praying that God’s Kingdom *come to everyone*, in our city, our nation, and the world. (2) We are praying for Jesus to return *at the end of time*. We are not asking Him to return—He already said He would, and we believe it. We are confessing we believe it, and acknowledging that we anticipate the fulfillment of His promise. However, there is more: remember when the disciples asked Jesus when the end would come (Matthew 24:3)? Jesus responded that there would be wars, earthquakes, etc, but that is not the end. He then gave them a lens through which God sees all history: “when this good news—the gospel of Jesus Christ—is given to every group of people on earth (everyone has a chance to believe in Jesus), the end will come (Matthew 24:14). *The hinge of the door of history is the mission of the church*, to reach others for Jesus Christ—the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). (3) We are praying that His Kingdom *grow in us, personally*. That means we are asking God to increase in us, in our churches, the Kingdom culture that is not like this world. We are praying that you and I, and our churches, become *Kingdom weird*.

What Is Kingdom Weird?

Kingdom weird is unlikely the flamboyant style of Reverend Sunny Butkis. Being a Kingdom which is not like this world isn’t just any kind of weird. It isn’t about being different, just to be different. Kingdom culture is unique-weird/different from the way the world works. Sonny’s church may attract many followers because it has tried to become, in many respects, just like the world. There are churches high on entertainment, and watered-down Scripture, to fit into the world’s culture. This is drift from what Jesus intends.

There is a mission term for this drift from Jesus’ Kingdom. It is called *syncretism*. It occurs when Christians adapt to a driving principle of *syncing up with culture*. It is discipleship in reverse: the Scripture says that as we grow in faith, we are to move from milk to the meat of God’s Word (1

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Corinthians 3:2). Sonny's church has moved from meat to milk. In churches like Sonny's, it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you show up, have a good time...and give financial support.

Reverend Johnson's church once flourished in a day when 17th Century garb, hymns, architecture, and styles were in vogue. But the world has moved on. Musical styles, dress codes, architecture, and language, are different than in previous centuries. Perhaps, as an overreaction to the syncretism of churches like Sonny's, Reverend Johnson's congregation has failed to make the unchanging Word of God, the meaning, intelligible to a world that has changed. Reverend Johnson's church has failed to be what mission teachers call *indigenous*.

When Jesus came to this world, He came in the flesh (John 1:14). The word for this is "incarnation." It is God's statement that mission is most effective when you speak the language of those you are trying to reach. The appearance of Jesus in the flesh—looking like the people He was reaching—is God's clear message: don't put any barriers between unbelievers and Jesus. The Missionary, Paul, said, "I have become all things to all people so that, by any means, some might be saved" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The Greatest Challenge

The most common drift from Kingdom culture is more subtle. It occurs in most churches. These are churches where leaders go to great lengths to reach people for Jesus Christ, and in their message, are soundly biblical. But in their *strategies*—the "how to" dimension of reaching others, have drifted from Kingdom culture.

When Jesus started the greatest movement on the planet, He spent most of His effort with twelve ordinary men and taught them Kingdom culture. He used stories: "parables"—a word rarely used today. These stories began, "The Kingdom of God is like...." In the Kingdom approach, most of Jesus' focus was not about what *you do* to change the world, but who *you are*, who *you become*. This is the essence of Kingdom weirdness.

Try this: look at your church through the *lens* of Kingdom culture. Look at Kingdom culture as values, beliefs, attitudes, priorities, and worldviews. Look at the "strategies" (the "how to" elements). How does your church organize? How do you get people involved? How do you reach out? How do you disciple? How do you make decisions? How do you staff? How do you prioritize? How do you reach your community? How do people grow spiritually? How do you impact your community? How do you share the gospel? In essence, how Kingdom-weird, how biblically different, are you?

Now ask, "How effective is our church?"

To schedule a phone appointment to discuss this topic further with Kent, call Jason Atkinson at 1-800-626-8515.



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