

TEN STEPS TO KINGDOM SIGNIFICANCE

A PILGRIMAGE TO GREECE AND TURKEY

October 27 – November 7, 2015



JIM DENISON

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S I G N I F I C A N C E**

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A great spiritual movement is sweeping the nations. More people are coming to faith in Christ than ever before in Christian history. According to David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*, some 82,000 people become believers every day. Many scholars believe the number to be much higher.

When I was in Beijing, I was told that 100,000 come to Christ every day in the People's Republic of China. More than a million Cubans have become Christians in the last ten years. South Korea is one-third to one-half "born again" Christian; last year, they sent more missionaries into the world than America did. If current trends continue, by 2015 Brazil will be one-half evangelical Christian. More Muslims have trusted Christ in the last fifteen years than in the preceding fifteen centuries, many after witnessing visions and dreams of Jesus.

By contrast, the number of atheists and agnostics in our country has quadrupled in the last 20 years. In Great Britain, there are four times as many Muslims in mosques on Friday as Christians in churches on Sunday. Why are we missing this global Christian explosion?

In the Bible, God is a king. Jesus began his public ministry with the declaration, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). He taught us to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). He instructed us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). When he returns, his name will be "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Revelation 19:16).

By contrast, in our culture God is a hobby. He is for Sunday, not for Monday. He is relevant to "religion," not the "real world." He relates to the "spiritual," not the "secular." We choose to obey him or not, as we wish.

In our study tour of Greece and Turkey, we embarked on a spiritual pilgrimage. At its heart was this question: Is God our king? If so, will we serve his Kingdom? How can we live lives of eternal significance? How can we find and fulfill our Kingdom assignment?

CORINTH

SERVE GOD WITH COURAGE

October 29

In Corinth, Paul was faced with a stark decision: Would he serve God with his life, or just with his religion? When the Jews opposed his ministry and became abusive (Acts 18:6), he could have retreated from the city and avoided personal risk. Instead, he continued preaching boldly, winning both Gentiles and Jews to Christ.

But his fears must have been very real, for one night he received this word from God in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent” (v. 9). “Do not be afraid” can be translated literally, “Stop being afraid.” Why? Because “I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city” (v. 10). As a result of this divine affirmation, “Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God” (v. 11). He served in Corinth longer than any city in his missionary travels except Ephesus.

Then came the crisis by which God kept his promise: “While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court. ‘This man,’ they charged, ‘is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law’” (vs. 12-13). But Gallio dismissed their charges before Paul could even defend himself.

So the great apostle “stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila” (v. 18). He would eventually write two biblical letters to this congregation, and two or three others as well. The church at Corinth would become one of the most significant missionary outposts in first-century Christianity.

At Corinth we discover our first principle in Kingdom Christianity:

To advance the Kingdom, serve God with courage.

If he is your king, he is the Lord of every dimension of your life. He is master of the money you keep as well as the money you give; he is Lord of your private life as well as your public actions; he is king of every moment in every day.

During my first visit to Cuba, I told one of the pastors that I had been praying for persecution against his people to lessen. He asked me to stop. Seeing my puzzled expression, he explained that persecution was being used by God to purify the church and strengthen the resolve of true believers. Then he told me that many in Cuba were praying for persecution to increase against Christians in America, for the same reason.

When I started my doctoral dissertation, I wrote on an index card the words of Galatians 6:9, “Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we will reap a harvest if we faint not.” That card got me through some tough days.

When I went to East Malaysia as a summer missionary, my pastor gave me a devotional book inside which he had written the words, “The will of God never leads where the grace of God cannot sustain.” That sentence got me through the jungles of Borneo. Jim Elliott, the martyred missionary, left in his journal these words: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Will you pay any price to serve Jesus today?

ATHENS

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

October 29

At Athens, we met for worship on one of the most famous hilltops in antiquity: Mars Hill. This outcropping of rock is adjacent to the Acropolis and towers over the Agora below. Here Paul was invited to address the Areopagus, the intellectual Supreme Court of the ancient world.

In his message he began by citing the Athenians’ statue dedicated to an “unknown god” and promised to reveal this God to them (Acts 17:23). He is the maker of heaven and earth (v. 24). As a result, it is illogical to believe that he could live in man-made temples such as those populating the Acropolis (vs. 24-25). Since their own poets affirmed that “we are his offspring” (v. 28), he must be a living being like us and cannot be made of gold, silver, and marble like their idols.

Now this God calls us to repent of such ignorance and prepare to face his judgment (v. 30). How? By trusting in the One he has raised from the dead (v. 31). While some rejected the resurrection, others accepted the gospel (v. 32). One of them, a member of the Areopagus named Dionysius, became the patron saint of Athens and is considered the founder of the Greek Orthodox Church. Some ninety-eight percent of Greeks today consider themselves part of the church Paul brought to Mars Hill on that fateful day twenty centuries ago.

How could this Jewish rabbi be so effective in reaching Greek philosophers?

Paul learned the ways and customs of a society that had been completely foreign to him just a few years earlier. And he was able to take the gospel to that culture so effectively that the “West” would become synonymous with Christendom for centuries.

Years ago I heard a wise mentor state, “The Holy Spirit has a strange affinity for the trained mind.” The more prepared we are, the more usable we are.

What is your Kingdom assignment? In other words, where do you have influence today? With whom do you have the relational capital and personal credibility necessary to help people follow Jesus?

What do you know about those you are called to serve? Do you know their needs, wants, and challenges? Their interests and passions?

Paul’s strategy was simple: “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). How will you prepare today to reach someone tomorrow?

THESSALONIKI

SERVE WITH URGENCY

October 31

From Philippi, Paul next made his way west to Thessaloniki. Today this is the second-largest city in Greece, a major center of commerce and culture. We toured the ancient Church of St. Demetrius, the ruins of the Agora, and the fascinating antiquities museum.

Paul’s experience was less positive than ours. After he reasoned in the synagogue for three consecutive Sabbaths (Acts 17:1-3), a large number began following Jesus. But the religious authorities stirred up opposition, forcing Paul and his team to leave (vs. 4-10).

Later, he would write 1 and 2 Thessalonians to the infant congregation he had established. One of their questions had to do with the timing of Jesus’s return. Some of their number had died since he left, and they were confused with regard to their status.

In response, the apostle penned his famous declaration: “The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Our purpose is not to debate the various theological theories built upon these verses. Rather, it is to note the urgency Paul conveys. Jesus is coming back, and no one knows when. Thus everyone must be ready, today. We are one day closer to eternity than ever before.

This fact makes our Kingdom work more urgent than we may know. The next person you meet will spend eternity either with God or separated from him. You only have this day to share the love and grace of God with those you influence. While we should not live with frantic turmoil, we should live with earnest commitment.

Jonathan Edwards began every day with the resolution that he would live as he would wish to live if he knew the Lord would appear that day. Many missionaries have been motivated by the fact that they could be forced to leave their assigned fields at any time.

If Paul could be driven from Thessaloniki, the future is guaranteed to no one. Jesus is coming back. What if it were today?

THE CHURCH OF LYDIA

LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT

November 1

A single vision changed the course of Western history.

Paul and his ministry team were traveling through Asia (modern-day Turkey) in the midst of his second missionary journey. They intended to return to the cities where the apostle had established churches during his first tour of ministry, but they were providentially hindered from fulfilling their plan. So they made their way to Troas, a city on the Aegean coast not far from the location of the Trojan War.

There the apostle “had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (Acts 16:9). As a result, “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (v. 10).

Macedonia was a district in the northern part of Greece. Where should the team begin to minister there? Paul was always strategic, seeking to influence the greatest number of people in the most effective manner possible. So he made his way to Philippi, because it was “a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia” (v. 12).

At the time of his visit to the city, Philippi was famous the world over for the battle that took place in her vicinity in 42 B.C. On one side stood Brutus and Cassius, fighting to keep Rome a republic. On the other stood Marc Antony and Octavian (the nephew of Julius Caesar), fighting for an Empire. With the victory of Antony and Octavian, the Roman Empire was born. Octavian eventually became Caesar Augustus, the emperor ruling at the time of Jesus's birth (Luke 2:1).

No one in Paul's day could have predicted that Philippi would soon acquire a different fame. Today, who do you know that is familiar with the Battle of Philippi? Who knows the Apostle Paul? The missionary would eventually be executed by Nero, a successor of Caesar Augustus and most powerful man in the Western world. However, today we name our dogs Nero and our sons Paul.

When Paul came to Philippi, he and his team soon won to Christ "a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14). Purple was the most expensive material in the ancient world; she was the Rolls Royce dealer of her day. Her conversion as the first European Christian set the stage for all who would follow. In a very real sense, we are all Lydia's children.

The coming of the gospel to Macedonia was the result of one man's unconditional commitment to the leading of God's Spirit. If Paul had not listened to the voice of God and followed his call, would the gospel have come to Europe? If he had persisted in his plan to turn east, would the Chinese be sending missionaries to us?

Here we discover our next step into Kingdom Christianity:

Listen to the Spirit.

I grew up in a very self-reliant culture. Texans value the "self-made" person, the rugged individualist who "pulled himself up by his boot straps." When I became a Christian, I learned that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity and that my body is now his temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), but I had no idea why or how to rely on his power in my life.

After Janet and I were married in 1980, we moved to Arlington, Texas, so I could attend Southwestern Seminary. During my second year, I read a book by R. A. Torrey titled, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*.

For the first time, I came to understand what Paul meant by his command, "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). I learned the literal translation of the Apostle's phrase: "be continually being controlled by the Spirit." Every day I need to submit myself to the power and leading of God's Spirit. He honors the freedom God has given me, and can use me fully if I first surrender to his use. He can lead me only if I will follow.

As a power drill is not much use unless we connect it to the power source it is intended to utilize, so our lives are not much use to the Father unless we are connected to the power of his Spirit. Human words cannot change human hearts. We cannot convict anyone of sin, save anyone's soul, or change anyone's life. Scripture is clear: "'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6).

Now I begin each morning by submitting that day to the Holy Spirit. I pray through my day, asking him to be in charge of everything I will experience. On my good days, I stay connected to him all day. I ask for his leadership when facing decisions, strength when facing temptations, and cleansing when I sin. On my bad days, I fall back into the self-reliance that hinders the Spirit from working through me for God's glory and my good.

When was the last time you submitted your life and day to the control of God's Spirit?

THE PHILIPPIAN JAIL

SING HYMNS AT MIDNIGHT

NOVEMBER 1

After Lydia's conversion, Paul and his team continued their ministry in Philippi. One day they were met by a slave who was possessed by a demon. This spirit enabled her to predict the future, bringing great profit to her owners. When the apostle cast the demon out of her, they were enraged and dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates. They were stripped, flogged severely, and thrown into prison.

At midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the other prisoners listened. Suddenly a violent earthquake shook their doors open and their shackles loose. The jailer assumed they had escaped and prepared to execute himself. But Paul stopped him, extending the grace he had been denied. The jailer and his family were soon converted; the city magistrates apologized for their unjust treatment of Paul and Silas, and the gospel progressed in Philippi.

Here we meet our next step into Kingdom Christianity:

Sing hymns at midnight.

God redeems for greater good all he allows or causes. Paul could never have imagined the future significance of his trust and obedience on that terrible night.

His beating had been severe, his treatment humiliating. If he could sing hymns at midnight in a Philippian jail, so can we. In fact, your joy may be your greatest witness for the Kingdom.

Joy in a jail cell remains Paul's legacy from Philippi. The epistle he later wrote the congregation is often called "the letter of joy." Its central theme is captured succinctly: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). The apostle's joy in the face of adversity convinced skeptics that his faith was genuine and his God real.

Such joy can still be our most impactful witness today. As you seek to fulfill your Kingdom assignment, be sure your spirit matches your message. Joy is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22). It is evidence that your Lord is at work in your life. The greater your adversity, the greater your opportunity.

During the Thirty Years War, Martin Rinkart buried 4,000 people in one year, including several members of his family. That was the year he wrote the hymn, "Now Thank We All Our God."

What hymn will you sing today?

PERGAMUM

SERVE IN GRATITUDE FOR GRACE

November 3

Jesus describes Pergamum as that place "where Satan's throne is" (Revelation 2:13). Why would he describe the city in this way?

Pergamum was home to the massive altar of Zeus, where sacrifices burned continually. It was also the first city permitted to worship the living Roman emperor (29 B.C.). Such idolatry crowns Satan the king of the culture. Wherever we worship anyone but Jesus, we fall into the same trap.

In Pergamum we encounter the difference between transactional religion and transformational relationship. The Greeks placed sacrifices on the altars of their gods to secure their favor. If they were going to sea, they sacrificed to Neptune (known by the Romans as Poseidon); if they were going to war, they sacrificed to Ares (Mars). They did not seek a personal, intimate relationship with their gods. Rather, they placated them in order to receive what they wanted.

Christianity, by contrast, offers a transformational relationship with our personal Father. Paul considered himself “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) and taught us to surrender our lives every day to God (Romans 12:1-2). We worship and serve God, not so he will love us but because he already does. Not so he will bless us but because he already has. We love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Here we identify our next step into Kingdom Christianity:

Serve God in gratitude for his grace.

Obey his word and advance his Kingdom, not so he will bless you but because he already has. Otherwise, we fall into Greek transactional religion. And we miss the joy of knowing and serving God with intimacy and passion.

Are you motivated by gratitude or by guilt today?

EPHESUS

STAY IN LOVE WITH JESUS

November 4

The church in Ephesus was the largest congregation in the largest city in their part of the world. Paul spent three years here, longer than he stayed in any other city in his recorded ministry. The church was led by Apollos, Timothy, and John the beloved disciple.

When Jesus sent his letter to them, he began with remarkable praise:

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary (Rev. 2:2-3).

The Ephesians’ work ethic was exemplary, as was their doctrinal purity. They had suffered for Jesus, but had continued to serve him with steadfast loyalty and obedience. However, in their work for their Lord they had forgotten the most important priority of all: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love” (v. 4).

The Greek could be rendered, “the love you had at the first for me.” When Christianity first came to Ephesus, the message was new and exciting. Their faith

was vibrant and passionate. But as the years turned into decades, their relationship with God became routine and self-sufficient. They worked for God, but forgot to walk with him. They loved him, but they were not in love with him.

At Ephesus we discover our next step into Kingdom Christianity:

Stay in love with Jesus.

Since God made us for relationship with him, the intimacy of our fellowship with our Father is his highest priority for us. As with any father and his children, he cares more that we love him than that we serve him, and wants our service to come from our love. If we are not in love with him, we violate the first Great Commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). If we fail here, nothing else matters.

What do we do to regain our love for Jesus? First, “remember the height from which you have fallen!” (v. 5a). Remember when your faith was alive and joyous. Second, “repent” (v. 5b). Decide to change, now. Third, “do the things you did at first” (v. 5c). Return to the actions by which you demonstrated your love for God.

Counselors tell us to act into feeling rather than feel into action. When a couple tells me that they don’t feel love for each other, I suggest that they do what they would do if they were in love. By such actions, we eventually experience feelings. Love is a decision, not an emotion. When we act, we feel.

We make God our King to the degree that we love him. If you were more in love with Jesus than you are today, what would you do differently?

MILETUS

LIVE FOR GOD’S GLORY

November 4

Miletus was home to Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. These three are considered the first philosophers. Their speculations regarding the nature of the world established Western culture.

Thales believed that the world was made of water. His pupil, Anaximander, believed it was made of “the boundless.” He also drew the first map known to Western history. Anaximenes claimed that it was composed of air.

What matters is not their speculations, but the fact that they speculated. They viewed the world as stable and objective, not subject to the whims of the gods.

They believed that the world could be investigated, measured, and understood. Their convictions made possible the scientific revolution to come and the so-called “modern” world.

But their brilliance came at a cost. They built their worldview upon the individual, believing that truth can be known through the unaided use of the human mind. They admitted no need of God or the gods, working entirely in their ability and for the good of the individuals.

Their worldview became companion to another, equally formative for our fallen culture. Orpheus was a legendary philosopher-poet living six centuries before Christ. For reasons lost to history, he came to believe that our “souls” existed in a pre-incarnate state but “sinned,” as we would say, and were punished by being placed in our bodies. The point of life is to purify our souls so they can return at our death to their eternal homes. We do this by focusing on the “spiritual,” rejecting the “secular” (from Latin for “world”).

This idea influenced Pythagoras, who studied mathematics and music because they are immaterial (how much does the number weigh? What color is a C scale?). Pythagoras influenced Plato, and Plato changed the Western world.

The Platonic worldview separates the “spiritual” from the “secular,” Sunday from Monday. Linked with the Miletians’ emphasis on the individual, it helped produce the culture you and I have inherited. It’s easy to think that even our faith is a means to our good. We trust Jesus so we will be saved. We serve so we will be blessed. It’s all about us.

Biblically, it’s all about Jesus.

When we remember that we are a means to his Kingdom end, we position ourselves to be most fully used and blessed. When we work for his glory rather than our own, we advance his Kingdom rather than ours.

Here’s the paradox: the more we serve Jesus, the more our lives are significant as well. It is when we live for his Kingdom that our lives are most fulfilled.

If it’s all about you today, you’re living in Miletus.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION

KNOW YOUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION

November 4

On the way to and from Miletus, we reviewed the Seven Churches of Revelation. Most were not among the most significant cities of their day. I believe they are included in Scripture because their condition is relevant to our own. When you identify which church is yours, you will know what to do next in fulfilling your Kingdom assignment with Jesus.

As we have seen, the church in Ephesus lost its “first love” (Revelation 2:1-7). If you’ve fallen out of love with Jesus, you’re in Ephesus.

The second congregation addressed by Jesus was the church in Smyrna (vs. 8-11). “Smyrna” comes from the same word as “myrrh,” meaning “bitterness.” Their experience mirrored their name.

Their problem was “a synagogue of Satan” in their midst. The term refers to a group which was turning Christians in to the Roman authorities, in exchange for a percentage of the goods confiscated by the Empire. If you’re facing slander and gossip for your faith, you’re in Smyrna.

The third church was in Pergamum (vs. 12-17). As we have seen, they faced external persecution from those who worshiped idols and the Emperor. Antipas, one of their number, had already been martyred; others would follow. If you’re facing external persecution, even unto death, you’re in Pergamum.

The fourth church was in Thyatira (vs. 18-29). Here the church faced “that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (v. 20). Here’s the background: trade unions dominated the economy of Thyatira. Workers were required to join these unions and to participate in their idolatrous and immoral practices.

A leader in the church apparently taught that believers could compromise with the culture, “going along to get along.” If you’re tempted to compromise your integrity and witness, you’re in Thyatira.

The fifth church was in Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6). Their congregation has “the reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (v. 1). Jesus warns them to “wake up” before it is too late (v. 3). Twice, watchmen had fallen asleep at the city gates, allowing enemy troops to sack their city.

Now the same thing was happening to their church. If your faith is complacent, superficial, and routine, you're in Sardis.

The sixth church was in Philadelphia (vs. 7-13). This is the only church to whom Jesus offered no criticism, only commendation. They were the smallest of the seven churches, with "but little power" (v. 8b). Yet Jesus "set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut" (v. 8a). Their witness would advance the Kingdom for all time.

When I visited this site while researching a book on the seven churches, I met a Turkish government agent who gave me an unusual brochure. It contained an exposition of Revelation 2-3 and a presentation of the gospel. A church in the States supplied him with these booklets, which he gave to tourists in exchange for donations. So it was that at Philadelphia, the "church of the open door," the gospel is still being proclaimed today.

The last church was in Laodicea (vs. 14-22). This church was prosperous and successful, but spiritually "lukewarm" (v. 16). The city had no natural water source. As a result, it piped water from hot springs at Hierapolis, but the water became lukewarm by the time it arrived. They also piped water from a nearby cold mountain spring, but it likewise became lukewarm by the time it came to Laodicea. Now the church was in the same condition.

Jesus counseled them to repent before it was too late. With this promise: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (v. 20). What a promise of personal intimacy with the King of Kings!

If your faith has become lukewarm and self-reliant, you're in Laodicea. But you don't have to stay there.

I love Holman Hunt's painting, *Christ the Light of the World*. It pictures Jesus from Revelation 3:20, standing at a door, knocking. A little girl stood before the painting as it hangs at Oxford University, her hand in her father's. Finally she turned and asked, "Daddy, did he ever get in?"

PATMOS

LIVE “IN THE SPIRIT”

November 5

Patmos is the Jerusalem of the Aegean. To many, it is the second-holiest place on earth. Here Jesus made his last appearance on our planet, when he gave John the *Revelation*.

The apostle John was Jesus’ best friend and “beloved disciple.” By A.D. 95, he was the last living apostle, and may have been the last living eyewitness to the risen Christ. Exiled to this Alcatraz of the ancient world by Domitian, he must have assumed that his ministry was over.

But on “the Lord’s Day” (the only time Sunday is called by this name in the Bible), John was “in the Spirit” (Revelation 1:10). As he worshiped and prayed, he heard a voice he had not heard in sixty years. He turned to see a face he had not seen in six decades. And he was given a vision for the Church across all time. He could not leave Patmos, so Jesus left heaven to come to him.

Here we discover our last step into Kingdom Christianity:

Stay “in the Spirit.”

We have the *Revelation* because John was “in the Spirit,” yielded to God, open to his word. The Spirit came “into” John at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), as he came “into” you at the moment of your salvation. Your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). The question is not whether the Spirit is in you—the question is whether you are in the Spirit.

When was the last time you made time to listen to God? How can you? The Spirit speaks to us through God’s word, our worship, and the world.

The Bible is “God preaching,” according to J. I. Packer. St. Augustine called it “love letters from home.” Make time every day to meet God in his word. Read Scripture systematically, whether you study a chapter a day, ten verses, or follow another plan. Ask God to speak from his word to your mind and life. Keep a journal where you write down the thoughts that come to you as you read the Bible. And know that God will speak from his word to your heart.

Worship him each day. Make time every morning for your Father. I recommend the “ACTS” method: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Take time for adoration—read a psalm of praise to God, sing a hymn or chorus, and tell your Father that you love him. Then come to confession—ask the Spirit to bring to your mind anything in your life that displeases God, and confess all that comes to your thoughts. Claim his forgiving grace (1 John 1:9).

Thanksgiving comes next: “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Be specific as you thank the Father for his goodness to you. Supplication follows, as you give him your needs and trust him for his help and grace.

God also speaks from his world. As you go through the day, stay in touch with the Spirit. Pray about your problems, opportunities, and decisions as you encounter them. Seek his help when you face temptation. Ask his forgiveness and cleansing grace when you sin. Stay close to your Father through the day, and his Spirit will guide you.

According to Mother Teresa, when she began her religious life she spent 90% of her prayer time talking to God. At the end of her life, she spent 90% of her prayer time listening to God. When last did you listen to your King?

A father came home from work. His girls ran from the house to meet him. The oldest caught him as he stood between two hedges framing the sidewalk from the driveway to the front door. Her little sister came up behind, but could not get to her father. The older sister then taunted her, claiming “I’ve got all of Daddy there is.”

The wise father then reached down, picked up the little sister, and held her in his arms. She looked down at her big sister and said, “Daddy’s got all of me there is.”

Does Jesus have all of you there is?

CONCLUSION

Through our pilgrimage we have encountered ten ways to make God our King—ten steps into Kingdom Christianity:

- Serve God with courage (Corinth)
- Take Christ to the culture (Mars Hill in Athens)
- Work with urgency (Thessaloniki)
- Listen to the Spirit (Lydia's church in Philippi)
- Sing hymns at midnight (Paul's imprisonment in Philippi)
- Serve in gratitude for grace (Pergamum)
- Stay in love with Jesus (Ephesus)
- Work for God's glory (Miletus)
- Know your spiritual condition (the Seven Churches of Revelation)
- Live "in the Spirit" (Patmos)

As we make God our King each morning and each day, we join the fifth Great Awakening now sweeping the nations. But note: None of these commitments earns God's favor. Rather, they position us to receive all that our Father's grace intends to give. When we make him our King, we experience the "abundant life" Jesus offers his followers (John 10:10). And he uses us to extend his Kingdom where we live and around the world.

Kingdom Christianity is all about loving the God who loves us. Someone asked Jesus, "How much do you love me?" "This much," he replied, as he stretched his arms wide—and died.

Will you live for the King who died for you?

ADDENDUM

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Throughout our pilgrimage, we encountered one of the largest Christian communions on Earth—the Orthodox Church. Many wondered who they are, what they believe, and how they contrast with the Roman Catholic Church. Here are some brief answers to these questions.

Their history

“Orthodox” means “right belief.” The “Orthodox” church believes that it preserves and practices historic Christianity in its most biblical and correct form.

This tradition locates its origins with the ministry of the Apostle Paul throughout Greece, beginning in A.D. 50. Dionysius the Areopagite, won to Christ at Mars Hill (Acts 17:34), is considered the patron saint of their communion. The Orthodox Church claims leadership in succession from the time of Paul to the present day. In fact, it believes that it predates the “Roman Catholic Church,” as this movement traces itself to Peter’s ministry in Rome but cannot substantiate a true papacy until the fourth century.

When Constantine the Great legalized Christianity, he soon established a “New Rome” by founding the city of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) in A.D. 330. Here the Christian church began to thrive. Pastors of the churches at Constantinople, Antioch of Syria, Alexandria, and Jerusalem became the preeminent leaders in the eastern half of the Empire. Rome continued to lead the western side of the Christian movement.

Over the centuries, theological divisions between East and West became more apparent. Eastern Christians grew less willing to submit to the preeminence of the Roman pope. Arguments regarding the origin of the Spirit and value of icons in worship began to intensify. Finally, in 1054 the Great Schism came, dividing the Roman Catholic Church from the Orthodox Church.

Over the centuries, the Orthodox Church developed various communions specific to the cultures it represents: the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, and so on. Some 300 million people are part of the Orthodox communion today.

Differences between Catholics and Orthodox Christians

The Pope leads the Catholic Church, while the Patriarch of Constantinople is seen as the preeminent voice in Orthodox Christianity. However, the bishops of the Orthodox Church retain far more autonomy than in Catholic Christianity; the Patriarch is more a coordinator than a ruler.

Both baptize infants, but the Orthodox do so by immersing the baby three times. Both Catholics and Orthodox believe that the bread and wine of Communion becomes the body and blood of Christ at Mass, but the latter reject the word “transubstantiation” for this doctrine. Both believe in a progression beyond death to heaven, but the latter see this phase not as a Purgatory for sins but as a time of spiritual growth.

While many Catholics believe that hell is the abode of those who commit “mortal” sins, most Orthodox believe that all people will eventually progress into heaven. They pray for the souls of departed loved ones as they continue on this journey.

Catholic priests are forbidden marriage, but Orthodox priests can marry before entering the priesthood. Bishops, however, must be celibate. Catholic monastics practice their vows in a variety of orders (Franciscan, Benedictine, etc.), but Orthodox monastics are not divided into such sects. They practice their lives and ministries in the same way wherever they live and serve.

Orthodox Christianity is growing quickly in the United States, especially on college campuses. The historical rootedness and liturgical tradition of this communion is attractive to young people living in a chaotic, relativistic world.

The body of Christ has many parts (1 Cor. 12:14-27). Whether people are Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, what matters most is their commitment to Christ as Lord. If they have asked him to forgive their sins and made him their king and Lord, they are his children and our sisters and brothers.