

7 Ways Leaders Fail to Expand the Kingdom

As someone who has been involved in teaching and implementing principles of the kingdom of God since the mid-1990s, I have observed many ways Christian leaders do not expand the kingdom. The following are the most common ways we work without kingdom effectiveness.

1. Mere political victories. The Christian Right made the mistake of focusing solely on politics. Many in this camp were ecstatic when George W. Bush was elected president of the U.S. in 2000, and the same happened when Trump was elected president for the first time.

However, elections come and go. Thus, it is a massive mistake for the church to focus only on politics. We have learned that it is possible to win elections and continue to lose the culture since politics is only one of several major cultural spheres. We need to reach all the spheres if we would genuinely see a biblical reformation that reflects kingdom values.

2. Transfer growth between churches. Many churches market themselves and their ministries via Christian media. Thus, their target audience is primarily other Christians.

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Some new church plants have initial services on Sunday evenings when most other churches don't meet so they can attract other church members with their special events. The result is that several churches have grown at an astonishing rate. But when you examine their demographic, you find that most of their people come from other churches. This does not

expand the kingdom of God; it merely expands the roles of that particular church.

3. Megachurch crowds. Some pastors are glorified event planners who know how to draw and keep a crowd. A church's effectiveness test is not how many attend on Sunday but how many are committed Christ-followers on Monday.

All churches should have a strong assimilation process for visitors, in which a new person is given the opportunity to become a disciple of Christ with accountable relationships. A gifted program-based church that offers attendees a good experience (great worship, media and oratory) but falls far short of the biblical command to make disciples does not expand the kingdom of God (Matt. 28:19, 2 Tim. 2:2).

4. Preaching an individualistic gospel. Since the late 1800s, the American church has separated the gospel from the kingdom (unlike Jesus, who preached the gospel of the kingdom; read Mark 1:14-15). The results have been disastrous. Attaching the kingdom to the gospel obligates the corporate body of Christ to steward the earth. In contrast, an individual gospel merely offers a way for people to escape the world and go to heaven. Consequently, the majority of sermons today in the global church are self-focused and don't touch systemic sin. This individual focus does not expand the kingdom influence since it doesn't restore communities and cities (unlike the true gospel, as shown in Isa. 61:1-4).

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5. Humanistic outreaches. Some Christian organizations just focus on bringing quality-of-life change to a community or village in poverty-stricken areas. One famous relief organization advertises community transformation, but when you

examine the villages they aid, the people are still worshipping idols or false gods. This is not an expansion of the kingdom because they brought systemic change without bringing salvation to their inhabitants.

6. The kingdom becomes a social movement without individual spirituality. Some church leaders in the 19th century preached the kingdom of God, but it only amounted to a progressive socialist political agenda. This is the opposite problem of most of today's preaching. Today, we preach an individualistic gospel without a corporate and systemic component. In the past, many kingdom teachings were a social gospel of liberation that neglected individual transformation and salvation. This is more akin to Marxism than true biblical Christianity, in which true transformation always starts in repentant human beings' hearts (John 3:1-8). The "social gospel" kingdom message taught that change comes from changing political and economic systems (like Marxism's dialectical materialism), but history has shown the failure of Marxist utopian goals. Actual societal change must first start from within the hearts of individual believers. (The kingdom of God is within us; read Luke 17:21.)

7. Leaders have kingdom language without kingdom implementation. Finally, many today teach the kingdom but still lack a track record of bringing systemic change to a community. Often, Christian leaders are satisfied merely preaching good messages and writing good books on the kingdom without testing their theology in the laboratory of life. In the kingdom, the word must become flesh (John 1:14), which means kingdom teaching must have an incarnation of ideas that results in systemic social change.

While I appreciate the importance of great anointed preaching, I know I have the most authority when I teach principles based on real-life models of social change I have witnessed in my

community and city. I am weary of attending conferences to hear folks who lack practical experience teaching on the kingdom. We must focus on equipping capable leaders who implement biblical principles in communities. If we don't, we are just preaching to the choir while staying in a safe zone, utilizing language acceptable to "do-nothing" saints who merely want a new teaching to stimulate them. Indeed, faith without works is dead!

Many other things could be added to this list; others can do a great job expanding further upon this topic. Nobody I know (including yours truly) has experienced or seen a biblical transformation model that perfectly matches the scriptural teaching of the kingdom of God. We are all grappling with this subject and attempting to continue growing both in education and practice. I pray this brief article aids many who desire to implement the principles of the kingdom of God in their communities, cities and nations.

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For more on preaching an individualistic gospel, see his book, "The Divided Gospel." For more on kingdom implementation and how a church transformed a community, see his latest book, "The Mandate."