

For *Outcomes Magazine* 2014

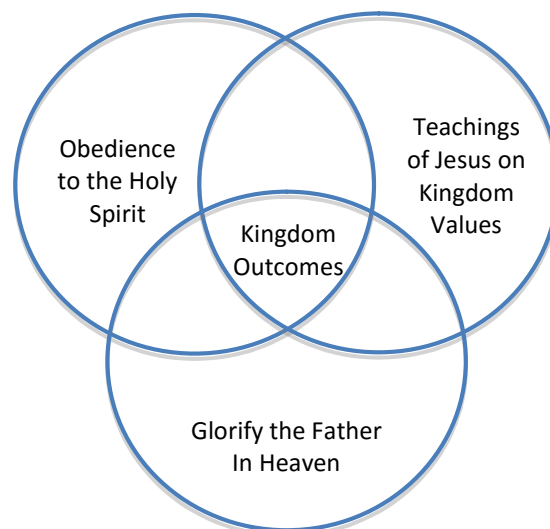
Defining *Kingdom Outcomes*

Gary G. Hoag, R. Scott Rodin, and Wesley K. Willmer

Kingdom Outcomes is the theme of the 2014 Christian Leadership Alliance National Conference. So we thought it would be helpful to explore this question: What are *kingdom outcomes*?

We propose that *kingdom outcomes* have three characteristics. First, they are the by-product of obedience to the Holy Spirit. *Kingdom outcomes* are filled, led, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Second, the process employed in achieving *kingdom outcomes* embodies the teachings of Jesus on kingdom values. In this sense, *kingdom outcomes* are the result of doing His work, His way. And third, *kingdom outcomes* bring glory to God the Father. The ultimate purpose of *kingdom outcomes* is to glorify the Father in heaven.

Below we look more closely at these three components of our definition, explore the implications for each, and suggest a checklist for pursuing *kingdom outcomes*.



Kingdom Outcomes are the By-Product of Obedience to the Holy Spirit

Kingdom outcomes are the result of submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5:22-23 Paul reminds us that it is the Spirit that produces fruit in the lives of believers. In 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 and Romans 12:3-8 he describes the gifts the Spirit distributes to empower us for ministry and service. *Do we allow God to direct our efforts or do we think we have things under control ourselves?*

The New Testament provides us no other option than obedience to the guidance of the Spirit for the production of this fruit. There is no other path for pursuing *kingdom outcomes*. Thus, keeping in step with the Spirit must be our sole focus. Reliance upon anything else – money, human wisdom or our own skills, plans and strategies – may result in worldly measurements of success, but by the biblical definition they will not produce *kingdom outcomes*. There are two implications to this first part of our definition.

1. *We must develop a listening posture as leaders.* This requires intentionality; it will not happen on its own. Along with the discipline to hear the Spirit speak we must also develop the capacity for agility in ministry settings so we are ready to do what the Spirit calls us to do. This entails far more than praying at the beginning of our meetings or holding Bible studies at a staff retreat. This is an organization-wide, systemic commitment to seek God's guidance for all decisions, and to refuse to move ahead until we confirm together that we have discerned the path we are to follow. *Is your church or ministry structured in a way that you are constantly seeking and yielding to the Spirit's direction?*

2. *We must be driven by obedience.* This starts with us as leaders. We must be willing to obey everything the Spirit teaches us as we are guided into all truth (cf. John 16:13). It requires boards who seek God's will, trust in God's provision, and will not allow the ministry to move ahead without such empowerment. It also involves gifted employees who see themselves as a discerning community on a faith journey. *What drives you as a leader? What is the focus of your board? How are your employees set free to put their giftedness to work?* The answer to each of these questions must reflect a commitment to faithfulness achieved through discerning the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction for everything we do. This is how God produces *kingdom outcomes* in and through us both individually and collectively in our ministries.

Kingdom Outcomes Embody the Teachings of Jesus on Kingdom Values

Kingdom outcomes only result from activities that reflect the kingdom values of our Lord Jesus. As important as it is that we achieve outcomes – *His work*, it is perhaps more important that we do so in *His way*. Why is this so critical? In John 15:5, Jesus announces: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” Consider the gravity of that statement. Elsewhere Jesus reminds us that with God all things are possible (cf. Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 1:37; 18:27). *Are we abiding in Christ and is Christ abiding in us?* There is no other path to fruitfulness for the kingdom.

Ironically, we as leaders of churches and ministries are tempted to operate with a striking paradox: we can actually sacrifice kingdom values in our pursuit of *kingdom outcomes*. We do this when we rely on the world’s way of thinking and use its measurements of success in our ministry. In modern terms, we try to make things happen and chart our progress using the world’s metrics. To avoid this trap here are two primary kingdom values taught by Jesus that we must observe.

1. *God and not money is our sole security and power for ministry.* This central teaching of Jesus from Matthew 6:24 should guide us: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” This is likely the most important area for honest reflection in our lives as leaders and the ministries we serve. If our thoughts are dominated by money-related fears and our board and staff meetings focus more on issues of money than ministry, it is probable that we have shifted from serving God to serving mammon. Jesus calls us to live differently; with God alone as our trust. We are called to exhort God’s people to put to work the resources He has provided, sacrificially, while trusting Him to provide. *To what extent do we believe that money is the answer to the challenges we face? Is God our sole Provider and security?*

2. *Success is measured in terms of faithfulness not results.* In Romans 12:12, Paul exhorts us: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world.” As leaders we face the conflict between the world’s values and kingdom values. The former relies on self-determination and places our

destiny on our shoulders. The latter calls us to a posture of dependence on God, surrendering control and following Him in obedience as He determines our future. Consequently, we believe we must employ qualitative metrics linked to faithfulness rather than quantitative metrics that look at results alone for measuring success. We must assess how we serve people in a manner that aligns with the teachings of Jesus and not just the number of people served. We must look beyond measuring our church in terms of numbers, our schools in terms of enrollment, and our evangelistic efforts in terms of conversions. *Are we willing to create new metrics that measure faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus on kingdom values in every area of life and work?*

Kingdom Outcomes Glorify the Father in Heaven

Jesus declared that the aim of His ministry was to bring glory to the Father in heaven, and His followers desired this as well. Consider Paul's prayer for the church in Philippi: "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:9-11

By definition, *kingdom outcomes* will always build the kingdom of God for God's glory. In contrast, we can try to build earthly kingdoms for our own glory. Pursuing *kingdom outcomes* continually brings us back to a fundamental question we must ask of everything in our organization: "To what end are we doing this?" What would it mean to have the glory of God drive everything we do? We have the pattern – everything Christ did had the singular purpose of glorifying the Father who sent Him (cf. John 17). Here are two steps we believe may help ensure that God gets the glory in all we do.

1. *Avoid Personal Kingdom-Building.* If our work in any way builds our own, personal kingdom then we will get some of the glory. This kingdom building can include reputation, control, accomplishments, and accolades. Misplaced identities are a major source of leadership and ministry failure. When we yield to the temptation to prop up our personal reputation, promote our plans, and pursue worldly applause, we may be finished as effective leaders in God's kingdom. It can also be the building of our organizational kingdoms comprised of numerical growth, increased income, widening influence, and notoriety. In whatever form, when we seek

to build our own kingdoms, glory is stolen from God and *kingdom outcomes* are lost. *Do our efforts reflect the building of our own kingdom or God's kingdom?*

2. *We are stewards and not owners.* In Psalm 24: 1, David proclaims: "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. The world and all who live in it." Have we embraced God's ownership of everything in our work? If so, it may be time to drop the possessive language. Let's stop calling the place we serve 'our' church or 'our' ministry. Why? This language may reveal a deeper issue. Such language can lead us to think that we are in control of our ministry and that it belongs to us. As a result, we can't help but focus on expanding our earthly kingdom rather than God's eternal one. *What language do we use to describe the place where we serve and our relationship to it?*

Conclusion

What are *kingdom outcomes*? When we look at Scripture we find (1) they are the works God produces in us and through us in response to our obedience to the Holy Spirit; (2) they embody the teachings of Jesus on kingdom values; and (3) they glorify our Father in heaven.

Over the past year the three of us have been wrestling with these ideas and challenges, which has produced a new book published by ECFAPress, *The Choice: The Christ-Centered Pursuit of Kingdom Outcomes*. We pray it will inspire further discussion into this critical topic for everyone in churches and Christian ministries who seek to be instruments of God to produce *kingdom outcomes* for His glory.

Sidebar Copy

Kingdom Outcomes Checklist

- √ Make abiding in Christ your highest goal
- √ Create intentional listening and discerning processes to attune to the Spirit
- √ Keep obedience to Spirit's leading at the center of all you do personally and collectively
- √ Study the teachings of Jesus so that your life and leadership reflects kingdom values
- √ Trust God, not money, as your sole source of security and the power for ministry
- √ Create ways to measure success in terms of faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ
- √ Use the vocabulary of a faithful steward, rather than ownership language

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- √ Cultivate a steward's mindset by studying biblical stewardship principles
- √ Identify where you are building personal kingdoms and take action against it
- √ Align your plans with the instructions of Jesus to maximize your potential for fruitfulness

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