

Kingdom Kernels: Truths that have sustained a faith-filled ministry

BY **STEVE SMITH**

Twitter: @kingreigncome

Facebook: Kingdom Kernels

Blog: kingdomkernels.com

Steve Smith (Th.D.) was part of a church planting movement in Asia. He currently leads a global effort to catalyze biblical church planting movements in every unreached people group and place by 2025. He is the author of *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* with Ying Kai (WigTake Resources, 2011) and *Hastening and Rebirth* in the “No Place Left” saga (2014 Ventures, 2015 & 2016). Steve serves as VP of Multiplication for East-West Ministries and Global Movement Catalyst for Beyond.org.

Editor’s Note: Please keep Steve, his wife Laura, and their family in your prayers as Steve battles liver cancer.

As I write this article, I find myself in a medical battle for my very life and the outcome is uncertain. This has given me many hours to pause for reflection.

As I’ve pondered how I’ve spent my life, and called others to spend their lives, I’ve found deep satisfaction with the path that Father has drawn me on from a very young age—a desire to live completely for His glory. In pursuing the glory of God with zealous fervor, it is easy to become disillusioned, burned out or defeated.

For three and a half decades the following values and truths have helped me maintain a level path in the pursuit of God’s kingdom (Isa. 26:7-8). These are the things I would share with anyone in ministry— young or old.

Two undergirding VALUES under the glory of God

Under the overarching objective of trying to bring the greatest glory to

God with this solitary lifespan, two values have guided me in this path.

The first is the pre-eminence of God’s WORD.

My lifelong call has been to shepherd God’s people to love Him by being completely obedient to His Word. There is a huge difference between basing every decision and action on the Word of God and rubberstamping our actions with Bible verses that seem to validate those.

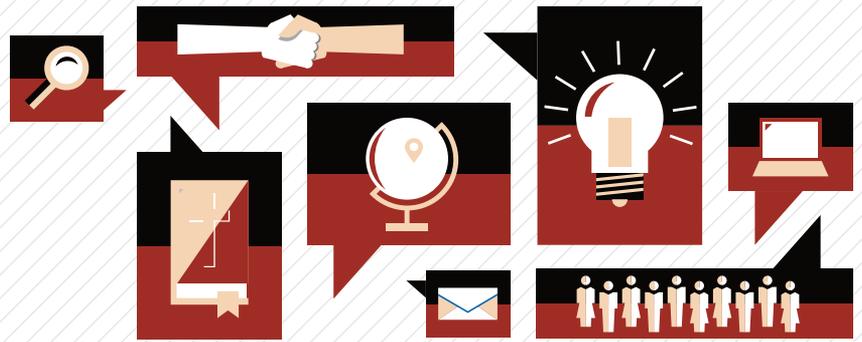
Every decision, methodology and expectation in my life has been subjected to the rigorous question: “Does this live perfectly in line with God’s Word.” Any discrepancies get jettisoned or adjusted. Also, I have resolved never to stand before any group apart from the foundation of the Word. Even when you lack experience in what you practice, you can live it and teach it if you know it is true from the Word. I have yet to find any group of disciples unchanged by spending enough hours under the convicting work of the Word (Heb. 4:12-13).

The second undergirding value has been FAITH in the majesty of a God who is the same yesterday, today and always (Heb. 13:8).

That God still acts consistent with His work in the past fuels my trust that He will work in power today. I try not to pigeon-hole Him but trust whatever way He shows up. I happen to believe in movements because I believe that the God of the Bible still shows up. It is my faith in His consistent character that drives me, not cute or clever methods.

When I was a 20-year old pastor, a precious 80-year old church planter said to me, “I just love young preacher boys! Because they don’t know what God can’t do!” I found myself asking the question, “Does there come a time in ministry when you start to doubt that God can do something?” I vowed to never get to that point. I am consumed with movements. I am consumed with the majesty of God and want my efforts to match His majesty. He is worthy of nothing less.

TRUTHS that result and sustain me
Emerging from these two values are



GOD WANTS US WEANED OFF SELFISH AMBITION SO THAT WE DELIGHT IN HIM AND HIS GLORY (PSA. 131). FRUITFULNESS COMES AFTER GOD HAS PURGED US, AND THIS PURGING CAN TAKE YEARS.

truths that have kept my internal fires of love for God hot while keeping me from burning out these last 35 years.

1. **It is Jesus’ Great Commission, not our Good Idea (Mat. 28:18-20).**

A few weeks ago, our family gathered to take stock of what will happen if Dad doesn’t survive this medical challenge. I expressed to them my desire to continue to help lead the charge to fulfill the Great Commission, but wanted God to do what would bring Him the greatest glory. My sons assured me they would carry the baton even if I passed on.

Amid many tears, in a sweet time of prayer, my youngest son prayed, “Dear God, thank you that this is not Dad’s Great Commission—it is Jesus’ Great Commission.” Immediately, I began laughing with joy. It is *Jesus’* Great Commission, not the good idea of anyone else in history. *Jesus* will see His Commission through. It is freeing to know that no human agent is indispensable. You are just a bond-

servant of Jesus Christ (Phi. 1:1).

2. **The key to fruitfulness is a life of abiding in Christ—walking with His Spirit.**

Proper biblical methods and strategies are important, but it is the Holy Spirit (abiding in Christ) that produces fruit (Joh. 15:5). In training and coaching thousands of people in biblical strategies, I have striven to never be a methodologies guy. Rather I have always sought to elevate the role of the Spirit in the process. Abiding in Christ—from the beginning to the end of your day—is the key to success. Yet I find that many Christian workers are strangely illiterate when it comes to walking in the Spirit. My new book *Spirit Walk* seeks to address this spiritual illiteracy, rather than being another book on missiological strategies.

The only way to lasting fruit is through death (counting the cost) (Joh. 12:24).

Jesus made it clear that the only way that seeds bear fruit is through

dying. No lasting fruit comes without sacrifice. Sometimes it means physical death, but it always involves dying to self, willingness to suffer and persevere when things get tough. There is no other path; there is no cheap shortcut to results. Do not strive for results if you are not willing to suffer for His Name.

3. **Most (if not all) periods of fruitfulness are preceded by wilderness purging.**

Moses did not lead the people of Israel out of bondage until he had spent forty years in the wilderness. It was in the wilderness that God met him and found a servant purged of personal aspiration, able to do His bidding (Exo. 3:1ff). God wants us weaned off selfish ambition so that we delight in Him and His glory (Psa. 131). Fruitfulness comes *after* God has purged us, and this purging can take years. He wants us to be servants to whom He can entrust His kingdom. Recently two fruitful young men told me that this was the most important advice I had given them—not my CPM training.

4. Always let your efforts match His majesty.

Though you do not dictate when you will emerge from the wilderness times into periods of fruitfulness, always let your attempts match God's majesty. William Carey said, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God!" I have found that many of our attempts match our estimation of earthly resources, not the majesty of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. If He can do all things, then let your attempts match His character.

5. When you live a surrendered life, expect the God of the Bible to show up.

I believe God put the stories of His miraculous work in the Bible to give us a proper understanding of His delivering character. He reminds us that He desires to show up and intervene. When you live a surrendered life, trust God to show up in power. God does not respond to formulas (A+B+C=D) and is not impressed by childish demands. But He loves to respond to faith in Who He is. For years, I read Acts monthly so as never to give up hope.

6. Father determines the amount of fruit, so celebrate all fruit—yours and your colleagues'.

The parable of the minas (Luk. 19:11ff) and talents (Mat. 25:14ff) underscores a critical truth: God determines how much fruit will result from your efforts. Faithfulness always leads to fruitfulness no matter how much it is (Mat. 25:23). Gratefully celebrate whatever God does through you. Also, celebrate the fruit God bears through others

because it is the same Bridegroom working through them (Joh. 3:25-30)! Never compare yourself. Ministry has never been about making a great name for yourself; all fruit is God's.

7. Your personal worth is tied to your identity in Christ, not your role, position or results.

If you live long enough, your roles, positions and organizations will change. If you base your worth on your current status or performance, you will live in bondage to the fear of man (Pro. 29:25). Jesus had little earthly status but completely fulfilled God's purposes (Joh. 13:3-4). Let your worth be tied to your identity as a child of God (Luk. 10:20) and live for the applause of heaven alone (1 Cor. 4:1-4).

8. Always be teachable and adjust your plans.

God's Word is our guide for life and godliness. Your methods and plans are *not* the Word. Therefore, always subject your methods and plans to the Word. A teachable spirit is essential if you are going to bear fruit (Pro. 3:5-7, 12:1). Always learn new truths and adapt your methods from other case studies of God working (Psa. 111:2). Turn loose of your cherished, trade-marked methods when there is a more effective, biblical way.

9. Balance emphasizing integrity of heart and skillful hands (Psa. 78:72).

Fruitful people who serve God's purposes like King David (Act. 13:36) are people with the right

heart (Act. 13:22) and are effective in their ministry skills. Despite his shortfalls, David was a man who tried to live with integrity of heart and skillful hands. Depending on the needs of my listeners (or myself), I emphasize heart or hands to keep them balanced. Effective ministry skills are essential, but are nullified by lack of integrity of heart. On the other hand, many sincere godly people prove unfruitful because they use ineffective approaches or lack proper equipping (Eph. 4:11-16).

10. Thank God for the bad stuff (Eph. 5:20).

You *will* have tough times. A freeing reality is to thank God not just *in* all things (1 The. 5:18), but *for* all things (Eph. 5:20). This robs the enemy of His power over you and results in a life of joy despite the circumstances. In this season of greatest personal challenge, my heart is more *filled* with gratitude than ever. My family and I daily thank our Heavenly Father for every difficulty because He is omnipotent and perfectly good.

11. Prayer sustains and carries the day.

Every movement of God starts simultaneously as a prayer movement. God moves His people to seek His face and then responds to their faith-filled efforts in power. Prayer must be accompanied by lots of hard work in the trenches daily. But it is mere human effort without the prayer of intercessors (Jam. 5:16). In addition, it is aimless ministry without the discernment God gives you in the prayer closet. And in recent weeks when I have been too weak even to

DESPITE SOME AMAZING RESULTS AMONG HIS DISCIPLES, JESUS CAUTIONED THEM AGAINST LETTING THEIR JOY RESIDE IN RESULTS (LUK. 10:20) THAT CAN TOSS YOU LIKE WAVES OF THE SEA.

pray coherently, I have found myself brought to the feet of Jesus by the prayer ropes of faithful friends (Mar. 2:3-4). Thank you, intercessors!

12. Urgency is more real than ever

So teach us to number our days, That we may present to You a heart of wisdom. (Psa. 90:12, NASB)

A life lived with zealous urgency is critical to living a wise life. Our Lord Jesus was remembered for the zeal that consumed Him (Joh. 2:17). Zeal, properly tempered under the mission of God, leads to wise living, not burning out. As I wonder whether I can continue my earthly service, urgency is more real than ever (Rom. 12:11).

13. Trust the Holy Spirit in the good, faithful people around you.

When I assumed a role over about 500 missionaries in a new region, a wise mentor told me, “Don’t take any of your old pals with you but trust that God has faithful leaders to raise up there.” Bringing your leadership team to a new context communicates to new colleagues that you do not trust them. Look for and develop faithful, God-called leaders to present each of them as complete in Christ (Col. 1:28-29). They have the same Holy Spirit and standing of faith as other believers (II Pet. 1:1), so trust the Spirit in them.

14. Walk the journey with life long friends.

This is not contradictory to the previous point. While the apostolic team of Barnabas and Saul did not yet know *where* they were going, they knew they were going *together* (Act. 13:1-3). With the number of high priority, unreached places on earth, do not get hung up on the “ideal match” so much as walking the journey with like-hearted friends. At times, you will serve on the same team, and at other times on separate teams. These lifelong friends will help you walk with integrity and be there for you decades later.

15. Your joy must be that your name is written in heaven and your food must be doing God’s will.

Despite some amazing results among His disciples, Jesus cautioned them against letting their joy reside in results (Luk. 10:20) that can toss you like waves of the sea. Despite the results, your joy must be in your salvation. End each day with a full heart that you heard your Father speak, did His will and accomplished His work (Joh. 4:34).

16. Let love alone serve as your motivation.

The most widespread movement in Acts (based in Ephesus) was chided decades later not for losing its diligence but for losing its motivation—first love (Eph. 2:4).

Love for Jesus and a desire to offer all ministry as a thank offering to Him (Rom. 15:16) is the sole motivation to keep you on track. When pride, selfish ambition or works-based esteem creep in, it shows. Keep rekindling your love so that every act of service is prompted by your love for Jesus. Live only to please Him.

17. He is worth it! Why give your life to anything less than his absolute glory?

I am thankful that at the age of 18, God saw fit to instill in me a value to let my life bring the greatest glory to Him. Each next-step decision in my life has been guided by whether it gave him the fullest honor. This has led our family to some lonely places and impoverished circumstances as well as positions of influence and more comfortable locales. The circumstances have never guided us—only His worship. He is worth it. Why give your life to anything else?

18. You will always be delivered, whether through life or death.

It is my earnest desire to continue on in this life to serve the purposes of God in my generation, but the constant prayer has been that God would heal *or do something better*. No matter the circumstances, God *always* delivers His saints—whether through life or death (Phi. 1:18ff). Praise His Name! 