

**Seize the Kingdom of God**  
**GFC – 12/29/2024 - Pastor Deborah Oakley**

As you know, the New Year begins this Wednesday. This is the time of year that most people make New Year's Resolutions that they never keep. Recent research has shown that just 9% of Americans actually keep their resolutions throughout the year.

I believe that can change for us today. If we will allow God's to help us apply the message I'm about to share, we will have accomplished one of the most important New Year's Resolutions ever.

My message today is called Seize the Kingdom of God. I mean seriously, what could be more important. Jesus said in Matthew 11:12

***From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.***

Some people misunderstand what this verse means. We can gain better understanding by looking at different translations. The NIV says –

***The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.***

The Amplified Version says –

***...seize it by force (as a precious prize--a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion).***

God is telling us how His kingdom is advanced. It doesn't just happen. It takes motivation and perspiration.

That's because seizing the kingdom will not happen without difficulties, sacrifice, and challenges. But no matter what you're going through just remember... you are going through. Acts 14:22 says:

***We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.***

Luke 8:10 says:

***The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you.***

God has shown us in His word how to live in His kingdom. He's given us the keys to the kingdom. But that means that we must do something. We must seize the kingdom. Matthew 6:33 says:

***Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.***

You see our first priority should be the kingdom of God. You can't say that you are seeking God's kingdom and spend all your time seeking your own kingdom.

You can't say that you are seeking God's kingdom and rarely go to church or pray or read your Bible.

You can't say that you are seeking God's kingdom and live any way you want to.

You can't live like the world and say you are seeking the Kingdom of God. Romans 14:17 says...

***The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.***

You see you were created for righteousness, peace and joy.  
You were designed for success, not failure.  
You were built to go forward not backwards.

But going forward does not happen by accident. It is not automatic. It comes when we follow the ways of God. All it takes to go backwards, get behind, or drift apart – is to do nothing. Moving forward takes effort. We must seize the kingdom.

Seizing the kingdom of God requires four things. We must:  
Press In  
Press Forward  
Press On and  
Press Through

### **1- Seizing God's Kingdom requires us to press in.**

The word press means "to act on with a steady force." Not occasional force, but steady force. Not intermittent force, but steady force. Not force when you feel like it, but steady force.

To seize God's kingdom, we must learn to act with steady force. We must steadily press in, press forward, press through, and press on.

To press in means to pray and seek God until you hear from Him and then act on what He says with steady force. Listen – you can't drift your way into the presence of God. You can't coast your way into His promises.

- You will never possess what you are unwilling to pursue.
- You will never advance by chance.
- Blessing is the result of choices, not chances.
- You change your life by changing your choices.

If you want to receive from God – you've got to press in.

If you want to seize the Kingdom of God – you’ve got to press in.

Luke 8:42-48 tells about a woman who had been sick for 12 years.

***When she heard Jesus was in town, she pressed into the crowd to touch Him. "Who touched Me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against You." But Jesus said, "Someone touched Me; I know that power has gone out from Me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at His feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched Him and how she had been instantly healed. Then He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."***

I want you to see that the things of God are not automatic. The door to the kingdom of God is marked PUSH.

Pray Until Something Happens.

Press in Until Something Happens.

You must press into the things of God. This woman pressed into Jesus until she got her miracle. If you are going to receive the blessing of God, you must press in.

Some people think – “If God is in something, it will just happen.” No, it won’t! Faith without works is dead. Seizing God’s kingdom takes work. The things of God’s kingdom require force. Sometimes we must get violent with the enemy. We must war! Fight! Overcome!

The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advanced. This principle of forcefully advancing is true in every area of life. It takes force to advance spiritually, mentally, physically.

Remember force means effort, energy, action, zeal, intense exertion.

It takes effort to have a good marriage and family.

It takes effort to get your finances in order.

It takes effort to succeed.

People don’t succeed by accident! Many times, we excuse our own lack of success by thinking successful people got all the breaks. That’s usually not true.

You can advance, but first – you must learn to press into God. You must hear from Him and then act on what He says with steady force.

## **2- Seizing God’s Kingdom requires us to press forward.**

Philippians 3:12-14 says:

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made***

***perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

Notice Paul said he did one thing – but that one thing had two parts: Forgetting what is behind and pressing forward toward the goal. Too many people allow the things of the past to hold them back.

Most of you know I grew up in an abusive home. As a result, I had a lot of shame and rejection. This led to having panic attacks when I was in public. Every time I had a conversation, I would feel stupid or rejected or afraid and that would cause a panic attack. So, I became terrified of leaving my house. The technical name for this is agoraphobia which is an irrational fear of being in public.

My past was definitely holding me back. But I was determined to press forward - so I got help. And I worked extremely hard to overcome my shame and rejection. I did breathing exercises and learned how to relax in public. I started taking better care of myself. I had to renew my mind and pray and trust God. It took years but I pressed in and pressed forward to put my past behind me.

You see God wants us to move forward. Past hurts, past sins and past mistakes will hold us back. But we must choose to set aside all the things that are holding us back and press forward.

We must not allow any excuse, any person, any circumstance, or any devil in hell to hold us back from seizing the kingdom. We must let the past go and press on into our destiny.

Listen – you can't drift your way into the kingdom of God. You can't coast your way into success.

- You will never possess what you are unwilling to pursue.
- You will never advance by chance.
- Success is the result of choices, not chances.
- You change your life by changing your choices.

You just need to realize that what got you to where you are won't necessarily get you to where you need to be! If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got. And if you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else!

Vision is extremely important. Proverbs 29:18 says

***Where there is no vision, the people perish.***

Fortunately, God wants to give you vision. Vision gives motivation – a sense of purpose – a sense of direction.

- Vision is what motivates you to get going.
- Vision keeps you going when times are tough.
- Vision energizes you when you're feeling tired.
- Vision lets you know if you are on track or off track.
- Vision keeps you moving forward.

And remember – God wants you to move forward. But without vision you will never move forward.

So – what's your vision? When you get to the end of your life, what do you want to have accomplished?

When Saul was saved on the Damascus road and became Paul – he received a vision from heaven. Later in life he was able to say in Acts 26:19

***I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.***

You see – God will never move you beyond your last act of disobedience. You've got to get serious about following God. About hearing from Him – getting His vision for your life and then going after it with all you've got.

You must press in to hear from God and then press forward to accomplish what He's told you.

### **3- Seizing God's kingdom requires us to press through.**

Seizing God's kingdom is not easy. It is not without obstacles. It is not without cost. You must give up to go up.

There will be mountains to climb, valleys to cross, devils to defeat, and obstacles to overcome. But you must press through them all. God gave the children of Israel the Promised Land, but there were enemies they had to press through and defeat to possess the land.

Likewise, we all have a God-given destiny and we have an enemy who wants to steal it from us. There are enemies in the land of promise. We have a choice to make. We can be like those who choose fear and go backwards. Or we can be like Caleb who said in Numbers 13:30

***Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.***

Pastor Joe and I and the Elders at Grace have a vision from God for land and a building. We believe that God wants us to be landowners and not renters.

For many years we have prayed, fasted, consulted with experts, had a building campaign, given financially, looked at every available piece of land, looked at every available building, and even designed a floor plan.

Pastor Joe spent countless hours calling, faxing, and emailing Hobby Lobby to get approved for a program that helps churches buy buildings. As soon as we got approved to pursue a building, we found out another church already had a contract on it. So now we have a choice. Either we give up or we press through. You see we thought we'd be in our building by now.

We've had to fight the devil when he's tried to discourage us. We've had to press through and trust God. We've had to press through and fight fear and discouragement. It hasn't been easy... but we are not afraid because God's word tells us we are well able to overcome... and overcome we will. We will have our land and building. We will have our destiny. We will possess our promises. We will go forward and not backwards. Because it's impossible to advance and retreat at the same time!

To advance, you must press into God and press through every obstacle.

#### **4- Seizing God's Kingdom requires us to press on.**

Remember, the word press means "to act on with steady force." To press on means that there will be times you are tempted to quit, but you keep going. You persevere – which literally means to go through the severe.

If you want to advance – you must press on.

In the face of opposition – you must press on.

If you want to advance, you must press in, press through, and press on.

For most of my life I've had a dream to travel. In 1996 I went to work for Southwest Airlines. Employees traveled free so Joe and I took approximately 50 trips in the 4 years I worked there. When I got the job, I was so excited I could hardly contain myself. But my excitement didn't last for very long.

The training was one of the hardest things I've ever done.

First of all, it took 3 weeks of 10-12 hour days for training.

You were tested constantly and had to make a 98 to pass.

Your tests were timed so it was incredibly stressful.

There was a ton of memorization – like city codes – with on rhyme or reason.... Kansas City is MCI or Orange County CA is SNA. Then there were zillions of airline rules and exceptions to the rules.

It took about 6 months of on-going training to actually learn the job. I was so stressed and exhausted that I remember falling asleep sitting straight up while out to dinner with friends.

There were many times when I just wanted to quit.  
But I didn't... I pressed on to seize the opportunity to travel.

Likewise, seizing the Kingdom of God isn't easy.  
There will be times when you feel like giving up.  
There will be times when you're exhausted and tired of fighting.

But to seize God's kingdom you must press in, press forward, press through, and press on.

First, you must press in!  
There will be times you need strength from God, so you press in.  
There will be times you need a word from God, so you press in.  
There will be times you need help from God, so you press in.

Then you must press forward!  
When the enemy tries to hold you back, you press forward!  
When your past tries to hold you back, you press forward!  
When fear of failure tries to hold you back, you press forward!

Not only do you press in and press forward, but you also press through.  
There will be enemies who try to stop you, but you press through!  
There will be obstacles to overcome, but you press through!  
There will be difficult circumstances, but you press through!

You press in, you press forward, you press through and you press on.  
There will be times you think you should quit, but you press on!  
There will be times others think you should quit, but you press on!  
There will be times when you think you'll never make it but you press on!

You may fall, but you get back up and press on!  
You may fail, but you learn from it and press on!  
You may get tired, but you press on.  
You keep on keeping on!

Do you want to seize God's kingdom?  
Then press in, press forward, press through, and press on!