

UPSIDE DOWN

(A SMALL QUIET TIME SERIES AND SOME ADDITIONAL PASSAGES FROM THE BIBLE TO STUDY FOR AICC 2023)



Jesus stood before Pilate: “My Kingdom is not of this world.”

— He meant it.

INTRODUCTION

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:12 NLT

Many of Jesus' teachings challenge the way we think and do things. Some of his teachings feel unrealistic and impractical. It's hard to even understand them sometimes and much difficult to live up to them. We live in this world and are taught by this world about everything - what to think, what to believe, and how to live. When God calls us into His kingdom, He calls us into a different world, here and now. A world where He is the king. He is on the throne. But not everyone realizes it. Not everyone sees Jesus as the king (though one day everyone will). We (Christians) are under His kingship even as we live in this fallen world.

However, though we are called into a new world, the old world is still within us. God wants to remove that out. He wants to transform us into the people that is fitting in the new world that God is creating. Both the worlds are co-existing right now but one day there will be only one world, God's good world.

When we obey Him, everything about us starts changing, starting from the way we think. Our beliefs and our way of living starts becoming like that of the new, **upside-down** world we're called into. Thus, everything about us seems completely strange to this world. We go against the famous beliefs of this world, and even against our own worldly desires until that day when the kingdom of God is here and visible to the whole world.

What is shared in this quiet time series will help you understand and embrace this profound truth.

Regards,

Campus Mentors

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1) CONFIRM OR TRANSFORM?

Romans 12:2 (Memorize)

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We are constantly influenced by the world and are bombarded with all kinds of beliefs that seem right and we tend to give in. Which is why we need to keep our eyes always on Christ and be in continuous fellowship with him. Only then can we be wise & discerning Christians, resisting all ungodly ideas and beliefs that the world throws at us.

God wants us to be transformed and have a renewed mind. As your mind is being renewed, you'll be able to recognize thoughts that don't agree with God's Word. When they come, you can take them "captive into the obedience of Christ." In other words, you can throw aside any thought that doesn't line up with the Word and replace it with the truth.

Ephesians 4:22-24

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Every day we need to take time to study the Word so we can purposely think according to what it says. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can have the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16), know who we are in Christ, and be free of strongholds that will keep us from God's "good and acceptable and perfect will" for us.

1 Corinthians 2:9

However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—.

One practical way you can accomplish this is to have a "think session" every day. Take some time to just sit and think about what God's Word says about you—about His love for you, His good plans for your future, and how He wants you to live and behave.

If you are struggling in a certain area, use a concordance to find verses that address these issues. I encourage you to even write them down and put them in places where you'll see them every day, like the bathroom mirror or the refrigerator

It's so wonderful to understand that you can have what God says you can have if you learn to think the way He thinks. It's also important to realize this transformation is an ongoing process—it won't happen overnight, and you'll need to be patient with yourself.

However, I can assure you that if you'll make a commitment to set your mind on God's Word, renewing your mind with the truth, then you will experience the fullness of everything that is yours in Christ

REFLECTION:

1. What are the patterns of the world you're conforming to today?
2. What step can you take today to put yourself in a place to be transformed?

2) GO DOWN TO GO UP

Matthew 23:11-12 (Memorize)

11 The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Humility is a greatly under-emphasized quality among humans. Some don't know what it means, don't know how to appreciate it, don't know how to love with it, and aren't all that sure they want to have it.

Culturally we're much more drawn to the energetic, dynamic, charismatic, crowd-drawing leader. That's who gets the headlines and the attention. But if we listen closely and watch carefully, we can see in Jesus someone who is humble, but strong; humble, but charismatic; humble, but crowd drawing; humble, but dynamic.

You see, the same Lord who stilled the storm and spoke to the crowds is the Lord who washed feet and died on a cross and held babies in his arms when it wasn't politically correct.

So maybe we need to rethink humility and live it like Jesus did. Come to think of it, that's exactly what we need to do; no "maybe" about it! Let's be like Jesus, and the humility comes along with the character!

Philippians 2:5-11

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature[a] God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature[b] of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

If Christ, being God, humbled Himself to become a servant for others, then how can we as His followers, who are not God, in any way exalt ourselves? If He died for others, how can we fail to live for others?

We tend to look for that one BIG experience where we can demonstrate our faithfulness to God, demonstrate our servanthood by giving of ourselves in some heroic fashion. But in reality, that is not usually how it happens. In reality, it happens in the small, every day, somewhat uneventful occurrences of our lives.

This attitude, this mindset of serving others instead of being served, of giving rather than getting of obeying rather than dominating is lived out in the interpersonal exchanges we encounter every day. How we treat the person at the grocery store, how we talk to the man collecting our garbage. It is, most often, not seen in how we treat those who are socially above us, but how we treat those who are socially beneath us.

REFLECTION:

Q) How does being great in God's Kingdom look like after reading the above verses?

Q) How is your relationship with people who are of no benefit to you?

3) LOVE THOSE WHO HATE YOU

Matthew 5: 43-48.

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Loving those who hate you seems illogical and irrational in this broken world. As much as it sounds idealistic, it's hard to live up to. Jesus came into this world to call us into His upside-down world where we do things His ways that contradict and challenge this world's beliefs.

God loves us despite our sinful nature and shortcomings. Loving us is a representation of HIS character not a response to our actions. We don't deserve His love, yet He loves us because that is who He is. Paul Washer says, "To me the greatest act of faith is to look in the mirror of God's word, and see all my faults, all my sins and all my shortcomings, and to believe God loves me exactly as He says He does." We have done nothing to make Him love us, thus, we can do nothing to make Him not love us.

To love those who hate us is displaying God's Character. Jesus came to show us what it means to be the kind of "human" God created us to be. He didn't only show us, He also expects the same from us. He wants to transform us into His likeness through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God became man. Not a rich man, but a poor man. Then He did an act of a slave by washing the feet of humans and eventually died on the cross as a criminal on our behalf. Oh, how much the Son of God humbled Himself! This is insanity of God's love, it is unfathomable! Only when we truly understand God's love for us, can we love others like Him.

If we live in surplus (i.e., filled & secure in his love) only then we can love others despite their wrong actions. If we are living in deficit (i.e., Depending on others to fill us, empty, not filled by him), then we cannot love unconditionally.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (Memorize)

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again

Paul says, Christ's love compels him. It's the knowledge (learning & letting it sink in our hearts) his profound love for us that compels us to obey him and love others.

Romans 12:17-21

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," [d] says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [e]

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The idea to overcome evil with good is a crazy and yet revolutionary idea. Jesus proved that this works by winning us over who were once His enemies. He did not use fear or punishment to turn us around but simply by his goodness.

REFLECTION:

1. What will it look like to love those who hate you?
2. Do you trust God for justice or do you sometimes feel God is unjust

4) FROM SCARCITY TO ABUNDANCE

In **Matthew 14:13-21**, the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand, the disciples view life through the lens of scarcity: "We only have five loaves and two fish."

Over here the disciples' resources appear scarce compared to the need.

A similar story is told in **I Kings 17:7-16** where Elijah encounters the widow of Zarephath. She is about to run out of food, but because she submitted to Elijah's request to feed him, her small amount of flour and olive oil never ran out.

The disciples would have surely known of this story. Observant Jewish boys started their education at age five, memorizing their Hebrew Scriptures. By the time they fourteen, they would have memorized much, if not all of their Scriptures. Yet, they failed to remember what God had done in the past and therefore failed to see why Jesus was capable of dealing with this situation in the here and now.

Scarcity or Abundance.

Ultimately God wants us to choose what kind of life we are going to live. With a spirit of scarcity, there's only one pie with 8 pieces. But with a spirit of abundance, there's more pie in the oven. In fact, there is the belief in an abundant supply.

With a spirit of scarcity, there's never enough. With a spirit of abundance, there's more than enough. With a spirit of scarcity, you have to be stingy because there's only so much to go around. With a spirit of abundance, you can be generous because you know there's more to give.

Scarcity is driven by fear: Fear that there's not enough money. Not enough time. Not enough energy. Not enough love. Abundance is driven by trust. The trust that God will provide. That God is a God of providence. That what he gives is sufficient. A trust that God has given me abundance so that I can give it away. Do you have a mentality of scarcity or a mentality of abundance? Do you say things like, "There's not enough?" Or "I'm not enough?" Or do you say, "I'm taken care of. I have enough. I have an abundance; I'll be happy to share and even give away."

The True Meaning of Abundance:

We are serving a king who has abundance at his disposal. After the feeding of the 5,000, there are twelve baskets full of food. The leftovers of the abundance of the kingdom are far greater than the scarcity the world offers.

Often times abundance is confused with having all our material desires met. Scripture seems to indicate that abundance is not that, but being close to Jesus, giving him what we have, and trusting him to provide for what we need. Abundance is sufficient, enough. This truth of abundance is difficult to apply to our daily lives.

REFLECTION: Read Luke **12:22-34** and answer the following questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how am I doing in Trusting God?
2. How do we have more in life? By giving or by receiving?
3. Are you ready to fight this mindset on a daily basis and be a part of Upside-Down Kingdom?

5) LEAST WILL BE THE GREATEST

Let's say you're in a classroom and it's the beginning of class. The teacher asks, "If you desire to be great, please raise your hand." Would you raise your hand? I'm sure you would. And I'd follow your lead. The problem is, though, many of us have the wrong definition of greatness because worldly influences have plagued our minds. So, the real question becomes: What does it mean to be great?

The World's Definition:

- "Unusual or considerable in degree, power, or intensity."
- "Wonderful; first-rate; very good."
- "Notable; remarkable; exceptionally good."

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them," says William Shakespeare. Greatness, in the world's eyes, is about material possessions and accomplishments. There's nothing wrong with these things. But is this the correct definition?

Mark 10:42-43

"You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great one's exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all".

Jesus points out that these rulers maintain their power or create greatness by lording over people with power or authority. In those days it meant sending in soldiers, arresting people or executing them. They enforced fear, control & manipulation. That is how the power structure of our culture works. On the grid of greatness, you do whatever it takes to maintain your control. Individuals motivated by self-interest, self-indulgence, and a false sense of self-sufficiency to pursue selfish ambition for the purpose of self- glorification. Contrast that with the pursuit of true greatness as biblically defined: Serving others for the Glory of God. This is the genuine expression of humility; this is true greatness as the Savior defined it.

Greatness is found in serving others. Culturally, this makes no sense! In our context we view the one who has servants as great, but in the culture of the Kingdom, to put the needs of others ahead of yours and to then meet those needs, that is greatness. So, it's not the desire that's bad, per se, but the definition. And Jesus completely redefines what greatness is, which is serving others to the Glory of God.

Matthew 20:28 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Here's an amazing thing, the Greatest of All Time, The King, The Author of Life showed us what it means to be great. He showed us that a true leader serves His people for their benefit & welfare that brings Glory to God (not to Self). Jesus didn't lord it over his disciples or just gave them this rule. In fact, he demonstrated greatness by serving them and then giving his life as a ransom for many.

REFLECTION:

1. How is embracing Biblical greatness hard?
2. How can you apply this kind of greatness today in your life?

6) BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE

Genesis 1:27.

So, God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Being created in God's image means being like Him; mirroring His characters, qualities and the person He is. Sadly, when sin entered the world, we turned into broken/distorted images of God. Today, Jesus is the only true image of God. When He came as a human, He showed us to be the right kind of "humans" again.

Acts 20:35 (Memorize)

Jesus said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Blessed = I'm happy because I'm favored by God.

The scripture says we are more blessed (happier) when we give.

Worldly mindset: I will be happy if I "get" fame, possessions, attention, praises, love, respect.

Godly mindset: I will be happy when I "give" because that pleases God.

When we do something that makes us more like God, it brings us lasting joy. But, when we do what makes us happy(temporarily) but hurts God, it creates an enmity between God and us. Thus, our happiness eventually fades away. We were created for an everlasting friendship with our creator, our soul needs that. That friendship with Him is the source of true happiness.

Therefore, Pleasing God = Pleasing Yourself

John 8:29

And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."

Jesus, the true image of God, found joy in pleasing God and in steadily walking with God. He came on earth, lived every single day and gave up His life pleasing His Father in Heaven. We are called to be like Jesus. We are called to be givers. This world teaches us to do what pleases us, what makes us happy. It teaches us to think how we can benefit from every situation and relationship even at the cost of hurting others & God. The world teaches us to be takers in order to be truly happy. But Jesus teaches us that true and lasting happiness is in giving because that reflects the true image of God that we're called to be. Friendship with our creator is the source of eternal joy. Our Soul thirsts for that.

REFLECTION:

1. In your everyday life, are you a giver or a taker?
2. Can you identify if there is anything in your life that is making you happy(temporarily), but not pleasing God? How can you change that?

7) BLESSED ARE THE POOR

Matthew 5:3.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed means extremely happy. Blessed are the poor? Isn't that an upside-down statement?

This scripture doesn't talk about material poverty. This beatitude does not call actual material poverty a good thing. Instead, it talks about spiritual poverty. Today, we will see what it means to be spiritually poor and why Jesus says that it is blessed be poor. The word poor in the above scripture can have two meanings. The Greek language has two terms for poor, "Penes" and "Ptochos".

1. "Penes" describes a man who has to work for a living; a man who serves his own needs with his own hands. In simple words a man who is not rich but works hard to meet his needs.
2. However, the meaning of the word poor used in this scripture, is "Ptochos" which describes absolute and abject poverty. In simple words, it's someone who is so poor that he has absolutely nothing. A beggar who depends on others for his/her needs.

Jesus is saying that those people who are poor in Spirit are blessed, what, then, does it mean to be spiritually poor?

To be poor in spirit means to recognize your true condition before God. You might say that being "poor in spirit" means to recognize one's spiritual bankruptcy or acknowledge their own helplessness in the eyes of God. It is understanding that you have absolutely nothing of worth to offer God. We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't really need God. This clears the picture for us when Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit.

The Kingdom of heaven means Salvation, eternal life, and a right relationship with God. The real humbleness is understanding that we cannot make ourselves worthy of it. Salvation is by grace through faith, not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Your absolute Spiritual poverty makes you put your trust and faith in God that he can fill you by his grace. And because of this, you can be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

REFLECTION:

1. Do you consider yourself as spiritually poor/broke, not enough to make it to heaven?
2. What would a spiritually poor person look like?

Ephesians 2:8-9 (Memorize)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

8) WEAK AND YET STRONG

2 Corinthians 12: 9,10

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In the world today, showing your weakness means you are weak. There are a lot of phrases like, “do not let others see you are weak”, “they will take advantage of you” etc. Weakness threatens people in the world. They try to hide, fit in, compromise, pretend, just to let others know that they are strong. Everyone wants to show themselves strong and it became like a rat race. As Christians, we too join the race and feel defeated at the end.

What we fail to understand is the people who show their weakness are really stronger than the ones hiding it. It takes courage/guts to express you are weak and that is the reality too. Paul asked God to take his weakness away but God refused. God said that “my grace covered you, so don’t worry about your weakness, I will give you strength”. That has changed Paul to delight in his weaknesses and to be strong. Jesus taught us things against the teachings of this world. To accept/show your weakness means you are strong and not a coward.

REFLECTION:

- Q) Why is it hard to accept that you are weak?
- Q) How God’s power is made perfect in your weakness?

Memorize: Hebrews4:16

Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

9) BLESSED ARE THE HUNGRY

Matthew 5:6 (Memorize)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

In Matthew chapter 5 Jesus was preaching to people on streets and this was the beginning of his Ministry on earth as a human. To understand Hunger and Thirst in the context of that time, we need to understand that in the ancient world, a working man’s wage was the equivalent of three pence a day, and, no man ever got fat on that wage. A working man in

Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine, the working man and the day laborer were never far from the borderline of real hunger and actual starvation. It was still more difficult when they were thirsty. Jesus was preaching to these people. He is not talking about hunger which can be satisfied with a quick snack or thirst which can be quenched by an iced cold drink or a glass of water. **It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food till death and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.**

When speaking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, "...but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Salvation through Jesus Christ is the way to provide food that will nourish the soul, water that will fill it, and have everlasting life.

God wants everyone to come to Him and have a relationship, and has put eternity into the hearts of all people. When someone acknowledges their need for God, and desires to be justified before God, that person is desiring the things of Him. Salvation comes to those who want a relationship with God – which can only be had through Jesus Christ – and having His righteousness credited to a sinner.

"...Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" John 7:37b-38

This Beatitude is also most comforting in its own way, in the background there is the meaning that the man who is blessed is not necessarily the man who achieves this goodness, but the man who longs for it with his whole heart. If blessedness came only to him who achieved, then none would be blessed. But blessedness comes to the man who, in spite of failures and shortcomings still holds to the passionate love of Christ.

That is so amazing! The true wonder of man is not that he is a sinner, but that even in his sin he is haunted by goodness, that even in the mud he can never wholly forget the stars. David had always wished to build the Temple of God; he never achieved that ambition; it was denied and forbidden to him; but God said to him, "You did well that it was in your heart" (1 Kings 8:18). In his mercy God judges us, not only by our achievements, but also by our dreams. Even if a man never attains goodness, if to the end of the day, he is still hungering and thirsting for it, he is not shut out from blessedness. Whoever has that hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus says that they will be filled.

REFLECTION:

Q) What are some of the most satisfying moments of your life?

Pray to cultivate a deep desire to be Righteous.

10) MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT

Matthew 5:7 (Memorize)

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

AS WE BEGIN

A 70-year-old woman named Marinella Beretta was found dead in Prestino, near Lake Como in northern Italy. She was seated at her table in a mummified state when police discovered her remains more than two years after she had died. Marinella's neighbors, it turns out, had not seen her for at least two-and-a-half years. She was "loneliness personified," wrote Massimo Gramellini, a journalist covering the story. "People die alone. And we live alone, which is almost worse."

The closing words of his article are convicting: "The mystery of Marinella's invisible life behind the closed gate of her cottage teaches us a terrible lesson. The real sadness is not that the others did not notice her death. It is that they did not realize Marinella Beretta was alive."

After receiving God's mercy, we must recognize the needs of others. It's easy to ignore the needs of our family members who live under the same roof, to say nothing of unseen neighbors and friends. But we are called to notice.

Jesus calls us to notice others, to compassionately acknowledge their need. "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). This is the heartbeat of our Beatitude—what Calvin understood as suffering with our neighbor, or what today we might call empathy.

Manifesting God's mercy will produce not a small trickle of mercy, but a massive deluge. "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'" (Matthew 18:21).

Forgiveness is not an example of mere benevolence; it is an eschatological act of faith and hope. In other words, by extending forgiveness to others, we demonstrate our belief that Christ will return and mercifully set all things right. Our salvation enables us to face the most grievous forms of evil with hope. "Where sin increased," says Paul, "grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20).

Because God alone can fully heal our wounds and revive the dead, we need to acquire His merciful heart if we are to forgive others. In view of this, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Should we say anything less?

Let us pray that the Lord would transform our hard, unforgiving hearts. Every time we extend mercy, forgiveness, and compassion in the name of Christ—a love that pardons another of his guilt—we reach forward to his coming reign, a kingdom blessing that we enjoy here on earth as it is in heaven.

James 2:13 (Memorize)

13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Additional passages to study and understand what upside-down kingdom is.

(Note: quiz questions will be asked from these passages and the quiet time series)

1. Matthew 5:3-12 (The Beatitudes)
2. Matthew 5:21-48 (The Upside-Down Standards)
3. Matthew 23:11-12. John 13:1-17 (Least is The Greatest)
4. James 1:2-4, Romans 5:1-5 (Rejoice in hardships)
5. Matthew 10:39 John 12:24 (Die in order to live)
6. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 1:27-29; 3:19-19 (Being wise by being a fool)
7. Luke 6:27-36, 1 Peter 3:9 (Loving those who hate you)
8. Philippians 2:5-11 (the ultimate humility)
9. Philippians 3:4-8, 2 Corinthians. 12:7-10 (God's Power Perfected in Weakness)