

The Kingdom of God—this counter cultural place where we live as citizens and God reigns
We are immigrants from the world's culture into God's culture
We take our primary sense of being and direction from God in this new realm

But what are the rules of this new Kingdom—how does it operate?

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:8-9 NRSV

But what does this mean? If this is our new culture, I have to learn a new way of being
When we move to another country, we have to learn how to live in that culture

New language
New assumptions and expectations
New customs, idioms, etc.

Awkward times occur when we don't understand the new ways

Kingdom of God is no different

When we try to bring the world's ways into the Kingdom of God, we don't fit
It behooves us to think about the new methods of the Kingdom of God

Strength through weakness

The world says "be strong"
Our inadequacies whisper that we are too weak and therefore disqualified to do what we want
But 2 Cor. 12:9 says... "*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.*"
According to the world, this makes absolutely no sense!
But personally, this is good news and an enormous relief
To know that there is grace for my imperfections gives me hope
God has always done God's work through ordinary humans—humans that fail and are imperfect

Walter Wink said, "*The nonperfectibility of the world [and ourselves] does not make us passive. We still act by the best lights we have. It only makes us modest, so that we can be expectant toward God. And modesty is an enormous relief. It is the infallible sign that one has been awakened from dreams of perfection. The Powers can be redeemed, but not made flawless. And when we no longer have to believe that we must make everything happen ourselves, we are well-positioned to live in anticipation of miracles.*"¹

In the Kingdom of God, we can admit the truth about ourselves—both the good and bad
It is ok to come before God warts and all
We bring to God our very selves, including our inadequacies—and see what God will do
In fact, we must admit our brokenness and weaknesses—God only works in truth
We then rest in the sufficiency of God
We can trust God to fill in the gaps
As Walter Wink said, *we are well-positioned to live in anticipation of miracles*

Up is down

The world says we get ahead as we climb the ladder—achieving greater responsibility
It is natural to want to make our place in the world—to leave behind a legacy

¹ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, page 72

But Mark 9:35 says... "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."
Even the disciples argued about who was the greatest in this new Kingdom
Jesus response told them exactly how to be great in the Kingdom of God
Jesus never criticized their desire to be great—he simply answered the question
Be last and serve others!
It is not the world's way—but it is the way of the Kingdom of God
Jesus did not call us to give up power—and the hope of greatness
Rather, he came to unlock and release to us *real* power and potential
Jesus opened the doors of greatness to all of us common people
We are invited to share in the greatness of God
The road upward is downward
The way to "climb the proverbial ladder" is to go to the bottom and help others up
Leadership is servanthood—classic book *Servant Leadership* by Robert K Greenleaf—a Quaker
Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it Matt 10:39

Love is the ultimate power
The world sees power in a top down way and takes "power over" others
But in this upside down way of the Kingdom of God—love is the ultimate power
"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend"—Dr Martin Luther King Jr.
Jesus said, "*Love your enemies*" Matthew 5:44
Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:7-8 NRSV
Clearly God is love and love is the way of the Kingdom of God
The story of the Good Samaritan talks about others as neighbors and calls us to love them

Overcoming is done through nonviolence
The world relies on violence to create change and enforce goodness
It is all fine and good if you can do so nonviolently,
but there is always the threat of violence to enforce what is right
When Peter came to Jesus' aid and cut off the ear of the high priest, Jesus said...
"Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword."
Matthew 26:52
To Pilate, Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." John 18:36 NRSV
But it is more subtle than simply rejecting violence for violence sake—many would agree on that
We have "redeemed violence" through seeing it as the winner in good vs. evil
Even our cartoons are filled with stories of violence overcoming evil—the good guy wins
In a world that perpetuates the myth of redemptive violence, nonviolence seems impotent
It feels as if we become door mats and let the violent take over
But Scripture gives us another message
Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*
Romans 12:19-21 NRSV
Story in 2 Kings 6 where Elisha prayed that the heavenly hosts be visible and the enemy blind
Then he led them into the capital city and instructed people to feed them—ending war

Walter Wink writes, "*Jesus is not advocating nonviolence merely as a technique for outwitting the enemy, but as a just means of opposing the enemy in a way that holds open the possibility of the enemy's becoming just also. Both sides must win. We are summoned to pray for our enemies' transformation, and to respond to ill treatment with a love that is not only godly but also from God*"²

It is Jesus' way—the third way—to create pathways of transformation—create win-win

If we choose to live as full citizens of the Kingdom of God and allow God full reign

We must learn to live with God's new methods

Strength through weakness

The way up is to go to the bottom—up is down

Love is the ultimate power

Overcoming through nonviolence

We will then live with freedom and power in this new Kingdom of God culture

² Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be*, page 110.