

SEEK FIRST

Happy New Year - Here we are 2026 in Middletown, DE – look around we come from all different nationalities, and perspectives, and walks of life. Each of you has a story within His story (history) of how you come to be here today. If I could see into the hearts of each one here I would sense... Many of us have reflected upon the year in review. And here we are in the first Sunday of the New Year – in church – some may still be wondering about all this and have just showed up. We are happy you have joined us. Wherever you are in your journey with God, we trust He is going to meet us and speak to our hearts something of great value. I'm Stefanie Griffin, a disciple member along with my husband Gary here at this family we call Connection Com church I'm also an ordained minister and hospice chaplain. It's my honor to share in God's word together today. Let's pray. --- Holy Spirit, we need you. We don't want to move into 2026 without you – help us stay close to Jesus. Cause us to hear your lovingkindness, cause us to know the way to walk, for we lift up our souls to you. In Your Holy and Matchless Name, Amen.

Coming off of the Advent season – Pastor David and Emily Layser helped us to IMAGINE - We prepared for and celebrated His earthly/birthly “Arrival” as we continue to prepare our hearts for His second arrival. We were

challenged to use this time as a RESET. During this Christmas season, Gary and I watched a few of those Hallmark movies. Anybody get into those? We watched a few this season that were mysteries where the main characters were following the clues left behind by some clever mind. As I reflect upon this past Advent season, I couldn't help but think of how it seemed as if during the whole Advent story God was hiding clues about Himself, about Jesus and the nature of His kingdom. I thought - Could it be that God was giving us clues to reveal insights about His heart? I got to thinking it makes sense... Jesus spoke in parables and said He who has ears to hear, let him hear...(Mt 11:15).

Did he choose the obscurity of the hidden life of a young virgin and the small town of Bethlehem because the good things of God can often be found hidden and tucked away in that which is least expected. Perhaps He appeared to shepherds because He would reveal Himself as the Great Shepherd who knows how to best care for his flock.

Could it be that He came to us as a humble child in a manger with the intention that we would come to Him in humble, child-like faith. When I think of God leaving us these clues along the way and it reminds me of Proverbs 25:2 **It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. Prov 25:2 NIV**

God hides and humankind searches. On Christmas Eve Pastor David acknowledged that many are searching... for something or someone. Our Pastor encouraged us, – “Look no further than Jesus – God is here. Emmanuel God With us.

He found us – and we’ve Found Him – now... are we ready to follow Him? For there is a seeking that still remains even after finding Him. This is our journey with God and going after the things of God. The Psalmist writes in Ps 84, Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage...they go from strength to strength till each appears before God in Zion. We are on a pilgrimage, a journey with God as we become disciples, learners, Christ-followers of His Way.

This is the seeking we now speak about in today’s emphasis SEEK FIRST. As Christ-followers there are many things around us pulling us in so many directions. In this time of end of year reflection many have considered New Years Resolutions or yearly goals. Chat gpt says that up to 42% of adults will make new resolutions. How many here are? How many set them and find them difficult to follow through? Common themes include exercise more, eat healthier, improve finances, focus on mental health/well being. OK – these sound like good things...but as we look to our scripture focus

this morning, Jesus actually gives us a clue on what we should really be seeking.

Jesus says, **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matt 6:33 NIV**

This is a verse many may have heard before - it may have a familiar ring to it – but what does this actually mean? [CENTER]

As I look at this scripture...a few things jump out at me right away. BUT seek first indicates I'm missing something that goes before it. All these things – we aren't sure what things he is talking about. So, best practice is to take a closer look at the scripture in its context. We understand that this portion of scripture comes from Matthew's gospel – the book of Matthew, who was one of the orig 12 disciples of Jesus. He recorded many teachings of Jesus and this verse in Chapter 6 is part of a larger representation of teaching from Matt Chapters 5 – 7 which has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. Some theologians have said we can look at his teaching as sort of a manifesto of what it is to participate in God's kingdom, of which Jesus Himself models for us. We see Him living this out and showing the way for right relationship with God the Father and right relationship with others. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus teaching about the kind of people who are going to see and experience the

kingdom: the poor and spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers and the persecuted...he talks about what His disciples look like in the world and how they relate to others. He gives teaching on prayer and fasting including what we may know as the Lord's Prayer or the Our Father – and then we arrive at the last third of Ch 6 where he addresses anxiety – Do not be anxious for your life - He uses examples of the birds of the air - or the lilies of the field and how God provides for them - and will He not value you and me more than these? Let's pick it up here at verse 31 – with Jesus saying...**So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'** ³² **For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.** ³³ **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matt 6:31-33 NIV** He addresses the human condition to worry about provision – many people in this time period were poor and dependent on the harvest. He contrasts the pagans – unbelievers, who are anxiously running after these things – food, drink, clothing... with those believers who trust that their heavenly Father sees them and knows their needs. Jesus teaches those in His kingdom to prioritize something else – thus he encourages his listeners in a different

way – not like the pagans - BUT seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things (in the immediate context -food, drink, clothing, things one worries about) will be given to you as well. In the larger Sermon on the mount context – He could mean not only provisions like daily bread but also intangibles like mercy and forgiveness, and lasting rewards in His kingdom.

[CENTER] Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...wow – what does this mean? Well, let's see if we can get a basic overview. SEEK – The word here in this sense is one that indicates to seek in order to find something or to seek in order to discover by thinking, meditating, reasoning, or inquiring - to seek after, seek for, aim at, strive after, or earnestly desire. This is not a passive word – but a word that indicates we are to intentionally pursue and go after something.

FIRST - foremost (in time, place, order or importance): before, beginning, best,

SEEK FIRST – So Jesus is getting ready to tell us what is the chief thing – the foremost matter of importance that we are to strive after and earnestly desire:

His Kingdom and His righteousness

The word for “**kingdom**” here is from the Greek root *basileia* = **God’s rule and reign**. This understanding becomes a paradigm shift for the modern reader that would not readily equate “kingdom” with God’s rule or reign. We may be thinking of a kingdom as either a physical realm or a group of people but in essence those concepts are secondary to the idea of this Greek word *basileia* -God’s kingdom being His rule and reign in power. So let’s take a look of an example from the gospel of Luke when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary about the son she would bear...

³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.

Luke 1:32-33 NIV

Here’s another: earlier in this Matt Ch 6 Jesus is instructing his disciples to pray

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Mt 6:10 NIV

When Jesus teaches His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom [*baseleia*] come, he is not telling the disciples to pray for a heavenly realm to descend but rather for the rule and reign of God to come. In our focus scripture in Mt 6:33 **[Center] But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all**

these things will be given to you as well. Matt 6:33 NIV to “seek first His kingdom” is not to look for a heavenly realm or for the church but for his kingly rule and reign in our hearts and lives.¹ We seek His Kingdom... And His *righteousness* – now this word... how I can I best explain it?

The LORD is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does.

Psalm 145:17 NIV. Righteousness is part of God’s character and nature.

Seeking His righteousness is seeking *His way* of doing and being right.

Jesus’ teachings like the Sermon on the Mount and His own life

demonstrate what kingdom righteousness looks like. **Righteousness is**

our right-standing with God and our right-living as a result of our life

in God. Vine’s Expository Dictionary describes the word “righteousness” in

this context right here in Mat 6:33 as “the sum total of the requirements of

God” –

Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of God when He obediently completed

the mission set forth by the Father in His death and resurrection. Ultimately,

our right standing with God is based on our receiving of *His* righteousness.

In his letter to the church in Rome, Apostle Paul teaches that the

righteousness of God has been made known and... **This**

righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who

¹ Ladd, *Gospel of the Kingdom*, 20-21.

believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22-24 NIV

That's the beauty of the gospel right there. As sinners we were separated from God and His glory – but now we have been reconciled back to a right-standing with God by grace through faith in Jesus (Eph 2:8-9), the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith (Phil 3:9).

Now that's a lot to digest. For some of you, a great place to learn more about God's righteousness and unpack the foundations of our faith is the Back to Basics class that Pastor David will teach coming up this month on Wed evenings. For those who want a deeper dive, you may want to explore a Bible study on the book of Hebrews or the book of Romans.

OK. Back to our scripture – **[Center]** Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness...So now with a basic understanding of this instruction – HOW do we practically do this?

Seeking the kingdom is to seek the King (repeat).

David, described in the Bible as “a man after God's own heart” writes about such passionate longing for God in Psalm 27. **One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD**

all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. Psalm 27:4-5 NIV

What can *Seeking the King* look like for you and me? I am going to give you 5 practical ways to Seek the King in 2026. These are the 5 BE's

BE with Him (John 15:4-5, Mt 11:28-30, Psalm 23)

BEHOLD Him (2 Cor 3:18, Mt 5:8)

BELIEVE Him (Jn 6:29, Jn 11:40, Jn 20:31)

BELONG to Him (Psalm 100:3, John 10:27, Is 44:2-5)

BECOME like Him (1 John 4:17, John

13:35)

Be with Him. There are so many ways to be with Your Lord and abide in His presence. Spiritual disciplines of Prayer, Studying His Word, Silence, Solitude, Sabbath, Service, So many ways – just be sure to genuinely engage and connect with Him in these things. Don't settle for religious activity and miss HIM in the midst.

BEHOLD Him. Worship Him, Minister to Him, Seek His Face, Watch Him, Follow Him... This one may seem more vague or even unfamiliar but will

make more sense as we grow in Christ. In fact, Pastor David is getting ready to teach us in a series on the heart of worship – and I’m looking forward to learning a lot.

BELIEVE Him – He is Good. He is Always Good and You can trust Him. Believe His Word and believe His promises. Believe what He says about who He is and believe what He says about who you are.

BELONG to Him – Settle this one in your heart – Does he have your YES? Pastor David spoke to us about how God’s love language is obedience. Does he have your whole heart or is there an area you have fenced off?

BECOME like Him. We become what we behold, what we believe, who we belong to and who we spend time with. ***When we become like Him, we become love.*** This is transformational discipleship and how the world will know we are His disciples. It’s also how a hurting world will know there is a God who loves them & desires to know them.

5 BE’s - Just some practical ways to Go after God and Seek the King in 2026

Speaking of “Seeking the King,” This week on the Christian liturgical calendar is the feast day commemorating the manifestation of Christ to the World - called Epiphany. While there are notable differences in the Eastern vs Western Christianity traditions in celebration, both include the visit of the

Magi from the East who studied the stars and sought out the newborn King of the Jews to worship Him. These wise men followed a special star until they came into the presence of Jesus and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Wise Men still worship Him. Seeking the Kingdom is to Seek the King. In 2026, wise men and woman of God are prioritizing the presence of God. Followers of Jesus are spending quality time in devotional pursuit of Him. They are coming to church *to minister to Him* and His people. They are no longer just singing songs about Jesus, they are worshipping Him with the heavenly host around His throne. Around the world, Christ-followers – many in the younger generation – are meeting with Jesus in the revelation of His Word with a passion to hear His voice. Followers of Jesus desire to spend time with Him, finding out what He likes, what pleases Him. What makes Him sad – what grieves Him? Oh, He has so much He wants to tell his sons and daughters.

Putting it all together **[Center]**– Above all else, first and foremost, We earnestly desire and strive after God’s rule and reign in our lives and the right-standing and right-living that results from being with the KING of the kingdom – HE is our priority focus and – and as we seek Him in trusting obedience, everything else will fall into its rightful place. WHEW! There it is:)

Did you know He never intended for you to look elsewhere to get your needs met. The pagans – those without God – are running after this and that – but not us.

We have all we need - because we have Him.

Oh, If we only understood the more that's in store for us. [Pig in the blanket vision] - A woman once went into a restaurant...

Be overwhelmed with his vastness, His glory, His mercy, His grace, His generosity, His kindness. If we did not allow Jesus to overwhelm us this Christmas, it's not too late. 2026 is in front of us – and Jesus is still writing our story in His story.

What does it look like for you to Seek First His Kingdom and His Righteousness in 2026? **What does it look like for you to follow Him in 2026?** We are going to take some time at the end of this service to spend with Him, seeking Him.

We are a part of the story he is writing. God hides and humankind searches. All wisdom and kingly pursuit, and starlight-led journeys converge and culminate in bowing down in reverence to the King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords.

Let us pray– MAKE ROOM we don't just do Christian stuff. We want to meet with you. We want to hold space with you and listen for your voice. Help us to make room for you -