

## ***How to Make Your Life Count***

IN THE SERIES “REAL TALK: HONEST CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD”

Luke 17:20–21 • Matthew 13:31–32 • James 2:1–13

Most people want their lives to count.

We may not say it in those big philosophical words every morning. But the question shows up. It sneaks in when you’re driving home after a long day, or lying awake at 2 a.m., or standing at the kitchen sink wondering, “Am I getting any of this right?”

If you’re in your twenties trying to figure out your direction, or raising kids and wondering if you’re giving them what they need, or in midlife feeling like the things you chased didn’t deliver what you hoped, or retired and asking whether your best days of contribution are behind you — the wording changes. But the question underneath is usually the same: Do I still have something to give? Does my life count?

And if we’re not careful, we answer that question with the scorecard the culture hands us. A life counts if you’re successful enough. If people notice. If your kids turn out right. If your résumé, bank account, or social media profile looks impressive enough.

Churches aren’t immune to this either. We can measure worth by who gives the most, who’s been around the longest, who seems most useful. And we bring all of that into prayer. We ask God to bless our plans, protect our people, and make life go the way we hoped.

Those aren’t bad prayers. Ordinary life matters to God. But in the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus points us toward something bigger — and honestly, something more satisfying.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9–10)

That is a big prayer. Honestly, it is a dangerous prayer if we mean it.

Because when we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we are not asking God to make our lives more comfortable. We are asking God to align our lives with God’s purposes. We are saying: make your priorities my priorities. Make your mercy visible through me. Make this home, this church, this neighborhood look more like what you want for the world.

Notice the word in this prayer: Thy. Not My. We’ve already prayed “hallowed be Thy name” — God’s name is honored, not mine. Now we pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.” Not my kingdom. Not my will. And at the close of the prayer, “For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever” — not mine.

When we pray these words, we’re training our hearts. We’re saying: less of me, more of Thee. This is the heart of what it means to call Jesus Lord. The word Lord means one who has authority over another. And every time we pray this prayer honestly, we’re surrendering the scorecard. We’re letting go of our little kingdoms and leaning into God’s great one.

So what exactly is the kingdom of God?

For a lot of people, “kingdom of God” sounds like heaven — somewhere we go after we die. And yes, Christian hope absolutely includes eternal life with God. That matters deeply.

But when Jesus talks about the kingdom, he’s usually talking about something bigger and closer than that.

The kingdom of God is what life looks like when God’s love is in charge.

It's where mercy is stronger than judgment. Where the overlooked are seen. Where forgiveness becomes possible. Where people aren't ranked by status or usefulness. Where power is used to serve, not dominate. Where God's will is actually being done on earth, not only in heaven someday.

So the Lord's Prayer is not simply, "God, take us to heaven someday." It is: "God, let heaven's way shape earth right now."

The Bible holds a beautiful tension: the kingdom is already here, but not yet complete. It's already here because Jesus has come. When Jesus heals, forgives, welcomes, feeds, and restores — God's kingdom is breaking in. But it's not yet complete, because we still live in a world with violence, injustice, grief, and death.

That means Christians live with both hope and longing. We celebrate that the kingdom has begun in Jesus, and we keep praying for it to come in fullness.

That keeps us from two mistakes. One mistake says, "Nothing here matters; the kingdom is only about heaven later." But Jesus teaches us to pray for God's will to be done on earth. The other mistake says, "We can build God's kingdom through our nation, party, or movement." But Jesus teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come" — because the kingdom belongs to God. We participate in it, witness to it, and point toward it. But we do not own it. No flag or government is the kingdom of God.

If we get the kingdom wrong, we get meaning wrong too. If the kingdom is about status, my life counts when I win. If the kingdom is the way of Jesus, my life counts when God's mercy, welcome, and love become visible through me.

Jesus makes that concrete in Luke 17. The religious leaders want a sign — a timeline, something observable. Jesus says:

“The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There it is!’ For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:20–21)

The kingdom doesn’t always arrive the way people expect. It’s not always loud, spectacular, or reducible to a headline. Jesus says the kingdom is already among them because Jesus is among them.

So if we want to know what the kingdom looks like, we look at Jesus: welcoming outsiders, healing the hurting, telling the truth, making room for children, forgiving and restoring. The kingdom is not only somewhere we go someday. It’s something God invites us to embody today.

And this is where we often get tripped up. We want purpose to be dramatic. One big calling. One clear sign. One moment when everything finally makes sense. But Jesus says the kingdom is often closer than we think: in the person right in front of us, the neighbor we pass, the conversation we need to have, the lonely person who needs a visit.

Then Jesus gives us this picture: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Matthew 13:31–32)

The kingdom begins small. Small enough to overlook. Small enough to walk right past. But it grows — and eventually it becomes shelter.

That is good news for anyone who wonders whether their life matters. Because most of the most meaningful things we do don’t look impressive at first.

A kind word. A prayer for someone by name. An invitation. A meal dropped off. A child encouraged. A neighbor checked on. A quiet act of generosity. A decision to forgive. A moment of listening.

These may not look like much. But Jesus says the kingdom often begins like a seed. Small does not mean insignificant. Hidden does not mean powerless. Ordinary does not mean unimportant.

And we can actually see this.

Think about Howland United Methodist Church in Warren, Ohio — just a couple hours northeast of here. Back in 2020, in the middle of a pandemic, their church built a new multipurpose room and launched a sports ministry. A quiet beginning. Nobody was sure how it would go.

Today, over 150 families come through that building twice a week — not just for volleyball leagues and basketball clinics, but for a community they didn't know they were missing. Most of the kids aren't from church families. They're from the neighborhood. And through skills training, character development, and weekly devotions woven into the program, those kids and their parents are experiencing something the world doesn't sell: a church that went to them, made room for them, and said "you belong here."

A multipurpose room. A few volunteers. The willingness to begin. That's how mustard seeds work. That's "Thy kingdom come" in gym shoes and cheerful chaos.<sup>i</sup>

Or think of Highline United Methodist Church in Burien, Washington, sitting in a neighborhood where many families had little access to fresh food. Years earlier, a pastor dreamed of a community garden on the church property, and though the dream did not happen right away, it stayed alive. Later, the church started digging — literally. Volunteers built raised beds, cisterns, and accessible pathways. Soon

families in the neighborhood were growing food that felt like home. A forgotten dream, a patch of dirt, a few people willing to begin, and over time it became food, community, dignity, and shelter. That is “thy kingdom come” in raised beds and shared harvests.<sup>ii</sup>

Or consider Mount Hebron UMC in South Carolina, they host something called a Memory Café. It’s a quarterly gathering where people living with dementia, their caregivers, and others who simply want to help come together for food, conversation, and joy. In a world that can so easily isolate people who are struggling, this church is making room for them at the table. They are saying, in effect, *you are not forgotten, you are not a burden, and you do not have to walk this alone*. That is a picture of the kingdom of God: a community where dignity is restored, burdens are shared, and love makes space for everyone.<sup>iii</sup>

The kingdom becomes visible when ordinary people do ordinary acts of mercy with extraordinary faithfulness.

And I think that matters for us at Monroe UMC.

We may not be the largest church in the region. We may not have the biggest budget or the flashiest programs. But a church doesn’t have to be huge to be kingdom-shaped. A mustard-seed church can still become shelter: welcoming well, feeding hungry neighbors, noticing children, visiting the lonely, making room for people who are new, uncertain, grieving, or searching.

That kind of church makes life count.

But James gives us a warning.

James 2 imagines a gathering where a wealthy person walks in wearing fine clothes and gets the good seat and the warm welcome, while a poor person gets pushed aside. And James says: that is a contradiction.

You cannot claim faith in Jesus and rank people by worldly status. Most of us don't think of ourselves as people who play favorites. But we can still do it without realizing it. We gravitate toward people who are like us. We listen more carefully to people with influence. We overlook people who are quiet, new, struggling, or unsure how church works.

James says that kind of ranking doesn't belong in the community of Jesus. Because in God's kingdom, people matter before they are useful. People matter before they can give. People matter before they agree with us or know how church works.

James ends with a line that sounds like a summary of the whole kingdom:

“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” — James 2:13

The world teaches us to sort people quickly: important or not, insider or outsider, my kind of person or not. But the kingdom teaches mercy first.

So if we're going to pray, “Thy kingdom come,” our lives need to start looking like that prayer. Here are three simple ways to practice it this week.

First: pray “Thy kingdom come” over one ordinary place.

Choose somewhere specific — your home, workplace, school, kitchen table, or the route you drive every day. Pray: God, let your kingdom come here. Let your will be done here. Show me one way to be part of it. Then pay attention. God may invite you to encourage someone, apologize, listen, serve, invite, or notice someone you usually overlook.

Second: do one mustard-seed act of mercy.

Not something impressive. Not something that needs to be noticed. Just one small act of kingdom love. Because small acts are not small when God is in them.

Send the note. Make the call. Bring the meal. Ask the question. Invite someone to sit with you. Small acts become shelter. That is what Jesus said.

Third: refuse one act of favoritism.

This week, notice where you're tempted to rank people. Who do you dismiss, avoid, or treat as an inconvenience? Who do you overlook because they can't do anything for you? Then do one thing differently. Speak. Listen. Make room. Offer mercy. Treat someone as beloved before they've proven anything. That is kingdom work. And it is available to you today, in the ordinary place you already are.

So how do you make your life count?

Not by becoming impressive.

Not by being noticed by everyone.

Not by building your own little kingdom of success, comfort, control, or approval.

Your life counts when God's love becomes visible through you.

When someone is seen because you noticed.

When someone is fed because you shared.

When someone is welcomed because you made room.

When someone receives mercy because you remembered the mercy God has shown you.

That is kingdom work.

So when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," we are opening our lives and saying:

God, start with me.

Let my ordinary words, choices, tables, relationships, and days become places where your kingdom can grow.

Let mercy triumph over judgment.

Let small seeds of love become shelter.

Let your will be done here.

Because a life that counts is a life through which God's mercy becomes visible.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Our Father,  
let your kingdom come.

Let your will be done  
in our homes,  
in our church,  
in our neighborhoods,  
and in our hearts.

Teach us to notice where mercy is needed.  
Teach us to plant small seeds of love.  
Teach us to welcome without ranking,  
serve without needing attention,  
and trust that your kingdom can grow  
through ordinary acts of faithfulness.

Make our lives count  
by making your love visible through us.

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://eocumcnews.com/2026/05/20/sports-ministry-introduces-children-to-church/>. Accessed 06/26/2026.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://umcmmission.org/story/earthkeepers-community-garden-grows-with-support-from-umcors-food-security-program>. Accessed 06/24/2026.

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.advocatesc.org/features/mount-hebron-memory-caf-welcomes-all-touched-by-dementia/article\\_9d6120cd-00e3-46ff-b9ea-476b1a8a7b49.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawSrdqhleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETFuazMybkY3dWxvWIB3ZXAwc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHhTKXpZcx0i-iKQ1JdhejFFI6tMztzMUSy9BFqCdaEQVtJTE4YE0wtumZzaj\\_aem\\_ROjPpfJbAPOF9215ikE0sA](https://www.advocatesc.org/features/mount-hebron-memory-caf-welcomes-all-touched-by-dementia/article_9d6120cd-00e3-46ff-b9ea-476b1a8a7b49.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawSrdqhleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETFuazMybkY3dWxvWIB3ZXAwc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHhTKXpZcx0i-iKQ1JdhejFFI6tMztzMUSy9BFqCdaEQVtJTE4YE0wtumZzaj_aem_ROjPpfJbAPOF9215ikE0sA). Accessed 06/25/2026.