

I don't watch a lot of shows or movies. I honestly don't know what is good, popular, or trending. I don't know much until my son tells me what he's interested in watching. He told me about this show that I might like. It has 80s references, there were some actors that I liked, and since he knows me, he thought that I would enjoy the storyline. We began watching Stranger Things together and I was immediately hooked! I loved the nostalgia of the 80s and it reminded me of growing up in the 80s. This show also opened up new conversations and adventures for my son and I.

The central message of Stranger Things is about an upside down world. There is a world or another dimension that is present and is part of our timeline waiting to break in. The show discusses a dark world, the upside down, which is the opposite of the present world. The more you journey with the characters in the show, you learn about this dark world. It's kind of scary.

There are plenty of things that are scary or we are taught are dark. I remember the issue with Dungeons and Dragon where the Evangelical Church stated it was a gateway to Satanism. I liked how Stranger Things has the main characters play Dungeons and Dragons, but their knowledge of the game helps them in their conquest to destroy or prevent the upside down world taking over their current world.

We probably all experienced something scary in our life. Maybe there are things or experiences that scare us. Some people are scared of snakes or spiders. We could be scared of public speaking or trying new things. Maybe we've been scared because we don't know what an outcome will be or there was an experience that scared us to our core. Being scared is something we experienced.

In Stranger Things, you see how being scared and darkness could traumatize someone. You also see characters who overcome their fears in order to find and rescue their friend, as well as prevent evil and darkness from taking over their community. In the show, you also see people who are trying to use darkness for their benefit and will cover up what is going on.

I think in a way, Stranger Things resonates with how we are called to not be scared or fearful. We are also called to prevent evil and darkness from taking over our community and the world. Stranger Things also reveals the darkness that is already formed in this world, by unjust corporate and government practices, as well as illegal medical testing. Even in darkness and evil form of practices, it can be overcome.

We will explore what it means for God's upside down kingdom to break through and how we are called to overcome evil and darkness in community.

Turn with us to Matthew 6:7-14

This is Matthew's writing about Jesus' teachings and he provides a model prayer. This prayer is most likely the type of prayer that was prayed in Matthew's community and also provides specific themes of Jesus' teachings we read in Scripture. We probably know this prayer. But let's pay attention to what this prayer expresses for how we are to let the Spirit of God breathe us into the world as a Christian community, in order for God's will to be done and to help usher in the coming of God's kingdom.

“When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon.

May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

‘If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.’”

—Matthew 6:7-14 NLT

In *Stranger Things*, the Upside Down is dark and is a parallel dimension to the human world. Things that look familiar to the present world are broken, destroyed, decayed, and in disrepair. This alternate dimension is explained in season 1, episode 5 where the Upside Down is compared to the Vale of Shadows. Dustin explains, “The Vale of Shadows is a dimension that is a dark reflection or echo of our world. It is a place of decay and death. A plane out of phase. A place of monsters. It is right next to you, and you don't even see it. An alternate dimension.” Even prior to this, their science teacher, Mr. Clark explains the plane, of where you could get to the Vale of Shadows, theoretically. You could certainly create a gate to reach this place, but requires a lot of energy, more than what people can create. The boys ask, “what if this gate already exist?” Mr. Clark replies that if this gate already exists, “I think we'd already know.” He explains that it would certainly disrupt our world.

I think sometimes we understand that this world is dark, broken, and in disrepair. We understand that this is a fallen world. But, God calls his creation, “very good.” Time and time again, God has worked with His people to redeem, restore, and reconcile his broken people and fallen world, His “very good” creation back to Him. So, maybe, we need to see the world as God sees it. We must have an upside down way of seeing this world and how we participate in this world to have God's kingdom come to light. We cannot give up and think that this world is so bad, without hope. We cannot think that we will just be taken out of this world because it is so bad. Even Jesus prayer expresses this, “I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.” (John 17:15 NLT) Stay with me as we make this big jump to understand God's upside down world. We have an understanding of what opposites are. Good and Evil.

Light and Darkness. Love and Hate. Can you imagine not a dark world of decay and death, but imagine flipping this world back to what God intended? God's upside down world is a light world that brings about revitalization and life.

We read in Scripture of how God's Spirit guides us in a different way of living. Before we get to what is known as the Lord's prayer, Matthew begins with Jesus teaching the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' teaching is reflective of what God's upside down kingdom looks like.

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth.
God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.
God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.
God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.
God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.
—Matthew 5:3-10 NLT

How would you describe this world if the upside down kingdom of God broke in? It's more than living out or thinking what Jesus is teaching as ideal Christian living and it is more than forgiveness of sins. As much as we are part of this world, the kingdom Jesus proclaims is not individualistic, nor does he set himself as a personal savior. Stanley Hauerwas explains about the sermon Jesus preaches is, "What cannot be forgotten is that the one who preaches the sermon is the Son of God, that is, he is the Messiah, making all things new. The sermon is the reality of the new age made possible in time." (2006:60) In regards to the breaking in of the new reality, it is not an ethical principle, but it is the radical demand of the community of disciples to become witnesses to the word of God who became human. Because of Christ, we must consider what it means for the kingdom of God to be visible.

So let's use Mr. Clark's logic, theoretically. Instead of how do we get to the Vale of Shadows... how do we get to God's Vale of Light? Just like Mr. Clark explains, if we try to create something ourselves, it will take a lot more energy. Dr. Hauerwas, would say, we cannot get there by the list of requirements, but we can certainly get there by being a people gathered by and around Jesus. The gate we are looking for already exists. Jesus even tells us in John 10, "**I tell you the truth, I am the gate (for the sheep).**" Mr. Clark explains, if this gate already exists, "I think we'd already know." He explains that it would certainly disrupt our world. We certainly know Jesus exists and he has disrupted our world. Jesus was disruptive. Luke certainly narrates a disruptive Jesus. Jesus had women participate in ministry and had female disciples. Jesus challenged societal, cultural, political, and religious norms. Jesus had concern for the poor and marginalized. Jesus ate with

tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. When we are gathered by and around Jesus, we become the visible church. So the shift of change would be based because we no longer want God's kingdom to be invisible. It is by becoming disciples, that we become salt and light to the world.

What Jesus teaches is “a way of life of a people.” What we hear and understand of the Sermon on the Mount, is Jesus declaring why people are blessed, because it “indicates that the transformed world has begun with the proclamation that ‘the kingdom of heaven has come near... the diversity of these gifts will be present in the community of those who have heard Jesus’s call to discipleship.’”(2006:63) No one is expected to go out and try to be something they are not... because that would take too much energy. Jesus teaches us constantly how we are able to use less energy, “you have heard that our ancestors were told... but I say to you.”

We have heard about the teachings of anger, adultery, divorce, oaths or vows, revenge, hate, and judging others. These are part of the dimension that is opposite of God's kingdom. It is by such acts of love for enemies, giving to the needy, discipleship, and building on a solid foundation that reveals God's Upside-down kingdom or Vale of Light. Jesus flips our world and reveals the light reflection. Jesus says to us... Jesus now proclaims... Jesus ushers in a new kingdom not like any other. This kingdom is one of reconciliation, peace, and love. Anger and lust are flipped. Our sinfulness and revenge against our enemies is turned upside down and they become our neighbor and we come to love our enemies. Weapons are laid down. We seek reconciliation. We become disciples of Jesus.

Dr. Hauerwas explains, “To become a disciple of Jesus is to learn to see and accept the world as God's world.” (2006:84) The kingdom of God, is the upside down of the world we are part of.

We come to understand how and why we pray, “**Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.**”

We are often taught how to achieve our will and personal happiness in this world. Unfortunately, when we build our own personal kingdom in the world around us, most often we overlook the people we may have stepped on, maybe we have caused damage or harm. The Lord's Prayer is how we are willing to allow God to disrupt our lives daily. Are we willing to receive God's kingdom and are we willing to have God's kingdom disrupt our world? This prayer is not prayed so we escape this world. We pray this prayer knowing that Jesus has overcome the world's sin and power of death. We affirm Jesus' kingdom in the participation of communion, “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again.” God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.