



# Installing a Kingdom Filter

*Based on a message preached by Mose Stoltzfus*

I came across a phrase in the book *Charting a Course for Youth*, by Bro. Gary Miller, that served as the inspiration for this message. This book is about helping youth get a good start in life. A certain phrase jumped out of his book at me: installing a kingdom filter.

He starts by giving the story of how he had an affinity to airplanes ever since he was a little boy. He grew up in California, later moved to Washington, and now lives in Idaho. As a little boy he would press his nose to the window whenever he would get close to an airport, looking for planes. It was just something in him from little up to love airplanes. Even as a little boy he had a desire to fly. When he learned to read, he would read about airplanes, and when he had a chance, he would try to talk to pilots. And like many boys, he dreamed of the day in which he could fly himself. He said:

I imagined the thrill of taking friends on rides and being the envy of my peers. The day finally arrived when I had enough money to begin flying lessons. Eventually I received my flying lessons. Flying was as exciting as I imagined! You could take off from one location and in just a few minutes could land somewhere that would have taken much longer to drive to. Life was great! I had longed for and finally selected something from my canal of options.<sup>1</sup>

As time went on, as he was basking in his personal enjoyment of flying, he began to hear a small, inner voice. He said this voice began to challenge the use of his resources. To get to the airport of the local town where he

<sup>1</sup> Note that the quotes here and following from Gary's book may not be verbatim due to this article being adapted from a spoken message.

lived, he had to drive through a low-income area. And as he drove past, he began to wonder: was flying really where the Lord wanted him to use his resources? Gary then says:

Of course I tried to rationalize my flying. I thought, "If these folks would just manage their money better, and hold down a steady job like I do, they wouldn't be in this mess."

It is something we all try to do sometimes; I know I have done so. And there *is* an aspect of truth in people not holding down a job, etc. However, Gary continued:

In spite of my arguing, the Lord continued to prod. Finally, I knew something had to go. I was going to have to choose between my love of flying and my love of the kingdom. I wish I could say this was my last battle with my use of resources in the kingdom. But it wasn't. The battle continues. More than 25 years later, the sound of a small airplane flying overhead pulls at something in me, and I am reminded that the battle is not over yet.

Gary has a message for us in that paragraph! The first part of the message is "The Kingdom Call." He realized that as he was spending his life doing what *he* loved to do. I want to say here that there may well be valid uses for flying airplanes in the kingdom of God. I do not doubt that. But to become a good pilot and get into the professional realm, one has to spend many, many hours and very much money to accomplish that. Professional pilots also usually need to spend a lot of time away from home and the family. I know that has been a great source of trouble for many who have gone down the road of becoming a professional pilot.

On the other hand, there are a few men who have become missionary pilots and used their training for the kingdom. I am thinking of the mission in western Ontario where some of my friends have learned to fly, and they have taken the gospel to the Indian reservations way up north in Canada. In such cases, I cannot say that it was wrong for a young man to learn to fly an airplane.

But Gary views the whole thing from a perspective that we need to hear: it was a waste of his resources for a personal pleasure. He looked at the whole thing and decided 25 years ago that he would give it up for the kingdom of God. Even so, he is human enough to still feel the tug in his heart when he hears a small airplane fly overhead.

I have to say, he made a wise decision!



### Installing a kingdom filter

This phrase, which Gary uses in his book, came home to me on a recent return flight from Bolivia. Because of some problems on the way down, I was gratuitously given an upgrade to first class on the return flight. I normally fly in the cabin, but since it was given to me, I used the opportunity.

I got into an interesting conversation with a man sitting beside me who worked as a repairman on natural gas compressors. He told of some of his experiences, including a time when he flew north of Japan into Russia, and then took a helicopter offshore to a drilling rig. His job there was to install a compressor which the company had failed to coat well enough to stop the corrosion from the salt water. The Russians on the rig could not speak English, and he could not speak much Russian. But they managed to let him know that they were very unhappy with the situation. He tried to explain that the company would make it right ... but they ended up holding him there against his will for days. They did not trust him, and so they gave him some food and a television to watch until they could be assured everything would be okay.

When the new parts finally arrived, he was released. But the whole experience—as can be imagined—caused him to do some reflecting. He told me, “I have four teenage daughters. I told them to do what they *liked*. I took this job because of the money, not because I like it. **Don’t do what I did!**” He had let big money guide his decision.

In my own life, I remember working for Tyson Foods as a young man. I had fairly well mastered the cooling/air-conditioning trade. I would get a weekly paper from the cooling industry, advertising new products ... and high-paying jobs overseas. I so remember sitting at my job looking at those jobs in Saudi Arabia and other places with wages two or three times what mine was. I remember the tug in my heart for that.

But I had a kingdom filter in my life. This filter could be called “a commitment to Jesus Christ and a local congregation, and to my Christian wife.” When I looked at going halfway around the world and earning that big money, I realized the negative side. My “kingdom filter” allowed me to look at those ads and never answer them. I always said, “No!”

Looking back now as an older man, I am thrilled that that filter was in my life, and that I was able to not yield to the call of that money and jeopardize my soul. For that reason I want to lay out my concerns, especially to the young men once they have mastered a profession. As I sat beside that man on the airplane, listening to his regrets, I was so grateful for not having succumbed to the lure of

a bigger wage. That kingdom filter was a real blessing in my life. For Gary Miller, the kingdom filter would not allow him to fly an airplane, and for me it would not allow me to go after a higher wage in conditions that would draw me away from Christian fellowship and my family.

## What says the Bible?

Various Scriptures came to my mind that supported the whole concept of a kingdom filter. Now we know that the Bible directly addresses many issues and situations in life, and we love to talk about those things. But in addition to that, we recognize that there are a whole lot more specifics that are *not* mentioned explicitly. For this reason it becomes imperative that we have kingdom filters installed in our lives to help us come to some practical applications.

## Children of the kingdom

We are indeed—if we are born again—a member of the kingdom of God. In the New Testament, various phrases are used: “kingdom of God,” “kingdom of heaven,” “into His kingdom,” etc. We should make sure, and rejoice greatly, that we are a child of the kingdom, a part of the kingdom of God on earth.

We are not only here to have a goal of reaching heaven; we are also here to live out the kingdom of God on earth. I appreciate so much how Bro. Dean Taylor has touched upon this concept in his recent teachings here on Anabaptist history. As well, Bro. John D. Martin has been an inspiration to me through the years, as he teaches a lot about the kingdom of God: God wants us to be members of His kingdom on earth, in the here and now. We are to live out the life of Christ—a literal following of His teachings—right in the area where we live, right here and right now.

## Pressing in

Luke 16:16 tells us that “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” Matthew 11:12 gives a similar instruction: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” This can be boiled down to the idea that someone who has the opportunity to enter the kingdom of God should do so with all their might before the opportunity passes away. They should grab it, rush into it, and not spare any energies to make sure they enter in. The word violent, as used here, does not refer to violence as we normally use it today, but

to a very energetic movement. It would be the opposite of lethargic.

In Matthew 21:32 we read: “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.” Sadly, many of the Jews did not press into the kingdom and rejected Jesus, even though they saw the “sinners” repenting and also the miracles that Jesus did. Mark 1:14-15 then informs us, “Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Here was the announcement of the kingdom into which we were to be born.

Later, in Acts 8:12 we find, “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Here we see the Samaritans becoming a part of the kingdom of God through faith and repentance. Then Paul informs us in Romans 14:17 that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” I rejoice in the fact that God has called me into His kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost!

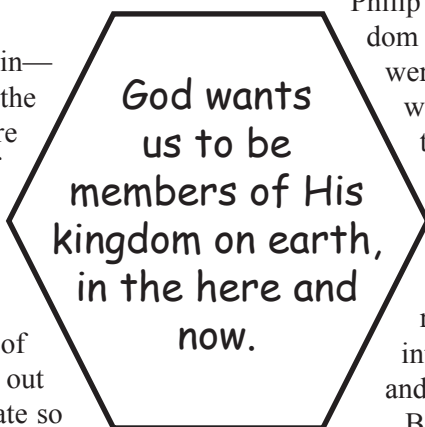
Back to Gary’s book ... He has written the following:

Think about your own life. Do you have competing interests and desires? Do you have a competition, a fight, going on in your heart and life as to what God’s kingdom is calling you to? What is compatible with God’s kingdom, and what are selfish desires in your life?

This is a war that has gone on in the heart of every believer in Christ. Young girls look at the question of whether they want to be a mother and wife, or—as goes on in modern Christianity—do they want to seek a career and “make something” of their life? The conflict rages! It happened in my life when I had to choose between going abroad and making a large salary or staying with my family and local church. The kingdom filter did not allow me to choose the big salary.

Gary continues, saying:

Have you installed a kingdom filter to help you screen out opposing options? If you are really serious about living for the kingdom of Jesus Christ, you will need



to screen your options and you will need to develop some personal discipline to do this.

## Various filters

The oil filter on a car needs to get changed occasionally, since the air filter does not do a 100% job of keeping out the grit and grime that can harm a car's moving parts. As well, the combustion of the fuel leaves carbon in the engine that the oil filter needs to remove. The close tolerances of the fast moving parts will not tolerate dirt and grime, so an air filter and an oil filter are necessary to keep the engine from getting ruined from the things that are entering it.

We also have filters on our furnaces at home, to keep the dust from circulating through the house by the forced air spreading the heat through the house. Yet, a little still gets through and dusting is necessary. We also have water filters that take out minerals and impurities in the water.

We also need filters on our spiritual lives, to screen out those things that are harmful or just a waste of time. We will not look at all of them, but as we look at Scripture and consider what is best for the kingdom of God to prosper in our lives, we know that there are a lot of things that need to be run through a filter to see whether it would benefit or harm us. Installing a kingdom filter is so important!

## Whatever you do ...

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Co. 10:31). This is the “glory of God filter.” We could rename it to the “compatible with God's kingdom filter,” the “fits the Christian life filter,” or the “not harmful to your soul, spirit, nor body filter.” Imagine a filter fine enough that it filters out even what you eat or drink when you open the refrigerator or sit down at the table! God is so interested in us—and we in Him—that we run everything through the “glory of God filter” before we partake of it.

Now, if our eating and drinking is important enough to need a “glory of God filter,” what could there be that is *not* important enough to need a filter? Not very much is more important in our physical life than our eating and drinking. Thus 1 Corinthians 10:31 ends up being a general filter for every aspect of our lives—doing all for the glory of God.

Is there anything that lies outside of “whatsoever”? Any schemes, desires, ambitions? Anything you want to see accomplished in your life? Everything about your life is supposed to be run through that filter, so that at the end of life you and I will have no regrets or deathbed confessions, nor have to say—after we have four teenage daughters—“I missed it; I went after money instead of what is important.”

Have you ever considered what this world would be like if 1 Corinthians 10:31 were followed? Even just one county, like Lancaster County, if professing Christians allowed this filter to cleanse their lives? What if we would

cut out all those things that cannot be done to the glory of God? You know, one cannot buy a sports car and rip around on the roads with it to the glory of God. One cannot dress immodestly or flashily to the glory of God. One cannot serve the god of sports, nor listen to ungodly music to the glory of God. If all these things were to be purged out by a kingdom filter of professing Christians here in Lancaster County alone, imagine

what a world we would live in!

## Whatever you say ...

We read in Colossians 3:17, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Instead of eating and drinking, Paul this time includes whatever we may say or do. That is all-inclusive! How can you make it more inclusive? One of the challenges I have had in my Christian life has been with this thought: whatever you do, can you thank the Lord Jesus Christ for it? Can you stop and pray before doing what you are about to do, “Lord Jesus! I just thank you for this thing ...” Can you imagine praying that way before committing some great sensual pleasure? Can you pray, “Lord, thank you for the chance to go to the movies tonight! I hope it is an exciting one!”

In spite of the apparent contradiction—believe it or not—people actually do those sort of things. But we should feel ashamed of it and think, “What a waste of time! Why don't I do something worthwhile, to the glory of God?” I don't know about you, but as a young man I thought about all these things, and counted the cost. And the use of kingdom filters has guided me in life.



**One cannot rip around in a sports car to the glory of God.**

My encouragement to the young men is this: whatever you do, do it with your might, with the strength and passion of your young age when you have vigor. Do it heartily, as unto the Lord! When you have a valid goal, you can then work overtime or stay up late to get some good deed accomplished, knowing that the extra money you earned will just be moved on to a good cause ... and you can do it with a free conscience!

I work in the food industry, and my conscience is free in that since people need to eat. If you would ask me to work building pool tables, like my brother-in-law used to before he got convictions otherwise ... I couldn't do that. I would not want to spend my life on such a vanity! Thus, when we run the subject of occupation through the filters of "glory of God" and "in the name of Jesus," many occupations will simply get filtered out.

In 1 Peter 4:11 we read, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." If you can sing, then open your mouth and do it for the glory of Jesus Christ. If you can preach, then do so for His glory. If you can be a good janitor, then do it for the glory of God. Throw your life into it! Choose good things and do them heartily, even such "little things" like giving a cup of cold water to someone in the name of a disciple.

## Wholly holy

Next we will look at 1 Thessalonians 5:22-23: "Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I think of abstaining from all appearance of evil in the sense of not eating in a bar, even if you are in there just eating a hamburger. It doesn't have a good appearance. People seeing us in places of ill repute—unless we are there to witness to the people—is not glorifying to Jesus Christ.

Another filter is that of being wholly holy. Is what we are about to do or say a holy thing? When we think of being sanctified wholly, again we see an all-inclusiveness about it. What escapes the all-inclusiveness of the word "wholly"?

## Getting practical

### Marriage

One of the first areas I think of when pondering all these filters is that of choosing a life companion. The Bible clearly tells us to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. The problem I see in the Evangelical world is that the standard is set way too low. While they may not choose a total unbeliever, we see Catholics marrying Protestants, or a Protestant marries a Mormon, or a Mormon marries a Catholic ... and then they run into this great problem of where to take their children to church. One should choose his companion with the thought in mind that there should be a compatibility of not only general doctrinal agreement, but with a compatible view of practical outworkings.

Even in my immature Christian days, only being a Christian for a few years, I thank God that I had already put some filters in my life in the area of choosing a companion. I knew that I wanted to marry someone who would mother children, not be a show girl or a fashion model.

The Bible doesn't give real specific examples in all areas, but we are a practical people

who need to be able to let these filters work in our lives. For example, I have always said, "I choose the church first, and the job second." I try to get a job where the church is; not get a job and then look for a church. This has been a filter in my life. I always try to find a church that I can be a part of, then I figure I can get a job wherever that church is. If I cannot find a job in that first church, then I find another similar congregation and look for the job. But one can run into real problems if the job comes before the church.

### Belief system filter

I want to address something here. I hear that in our churches some of the young people are weary of hearing the word "Anabaptist." I think of this especially in the context of Bro. Dean Taylor's four-part series on Anabaptist history that he is giving here. One may ask, "What is he doing, just lifting up a historical group and making that a model that we all have to follow exactly?" Well, I think Dean made it plain that he was not lifting up one certain group, but rather the belief system that undergirded the



**I would not want to spend my life on such a vanity as building pool tables!**

Anabaptist movement, a belief system that went all the way back to the Book of Acts. We therefore shouldn't get offended at the term "Anabaptist." One could just as well say, "Bible-practicing Christian" or something synonymous. Thus, when we say "Anabaptist," we are referring to a belief system that takes the teachings of Jesus and puts them to practice; a belief system that is uniquely different from what we see in the Protestant/Evangelical world.

"Anabaptist"—or Bible-practicing—Christianity is a literal, Jesus-obeying, practical way of Christianity that most of Evangelicalism does not believe in today. So we often use the term "Anabaptist" to explain this belief system. But don't be offended by that term. I hear of young people throwing it out and saying, "I don't want to be Anabaptist. I don't want anything to do with it."

Okay, we have to ask, but what *are* you going to be? One has to say something about how he looks at Christianity, and when it comes time to find a life companion, having a compatible belief system is imperative. If you want to be a "Bible-practicing" Christian, you do *not* want to marry someone who has another view of Christianity. If you want to take Christ's command literally where He says "Love your enemies," you do *not* want to marry someone who explains it away and encourages your children to be patriotic.

One of the filters in my life has been this "Anabaptist" or "Bible-practicing" belief system that filters out the Calvinistic, or the Charismatic, or the Mosaic-Law-keeping, or other belief systems that are hitting the church of Jesus Christ on all sides. This filter of a "Bible-practicing" belief system has been a protection to me all through my life. Anything that is contrary to the idea of obeying the teachings of Jesus gets automatically filtered out.

### Wherever you may go ...

Where do we allow ourselves to spend an evening, a day, a vacation, or a free week? Over the years, I have seen many of God's people take time to go visit God's creation. They marvel over it, perhaps go to some mountainous area or some area different than where they live.

I believe this to be a legitimate manner to get away and spend some time relaxing and meditating.

But there are so many other options out there that are not good: Disneyland, fairs, theme parks, beaches, etc. They beckon to people to come and have a joy ride. But these things have always hit my kingdom filter. If I can find a lonely spot of beach to watch the waves come crashing ashore, it is wonderful. But a public beach? Go to a place where nakedness reigns? These types of places always hit the filter and get taken out of the options, even though we do not have a Bible verse that specifically says, "Thou shalt not visit beaches with nudity."

And that is the whole point, as Gary writes in his book: to install a kingdom filter that will stop you 1000 times from bringing into your life the things that the surrounding culture offers and revels in. The kingdom of God is counterculture to the cultures of this world. I think of these young fellows that spend their hard-earned money on vanity: they go down the road with their \$30,000 motorcycles all chromed out. I see a diesel truck with a trailer loaded with snowmobiles or mud bikes, headed for the mountains on a Friday night to go mudding. Ripping around, wasting gas, making a lot of noise ... trying to get a thrill out of life. That stuff will never make it through a kingdom filter.

### In closing

A lot could be said in various aspects of life ... the books we read, the clothes we wear, the way we spend God's money, etc. A kingdom filter will clean out a lot of wasteful, sensual living in areas that the Bible doesn't specifically mention.

Young man—my burden is to the young men in particular—my exhortation to you is to install a kingdom filter in your life! Let all your decisions run through it: life companion, occupation, your food and drink, books you read, clothes you wear, music you listen to, car you drive. Keep that worldly grit from coming into the bearings of life, causing you to prematurely lose out and fall by the wayside. ~

## Have you tried this?

Many people go through their Christian experience with the mind-set of not allowing anything in their life that the Bible specifically calls evil. If the Bible does not specifically treat a topic, they consider it "okay."

Try this: Spend the next week of your life only allowing into your life what the Bible expressly calls us to do.

Don't worry ... you will not run out of things to do! Blessing, giving, sharing, praying, and spreading the gospel of the kingdom will fill your days. And, you will be freed from the nagging question, "Should I really do this or that, since the Bible doesn't specifically address this issue? If we only put into our lives what the Bible tells us to, life will suddenly become a lot simpler. Try it!