

## ***ENDANGERED GOSPEL STUDY GUIDE***

### **PART ONE: THE CASE FOR A BETTER PLACE**

#### **Ch. 1 – Yearning for a Better Place**

Deep inside, do you yearn for a better place than we often experience in this broken world? If so, what about life in this world do you find most unsatisfying? If not, what do you find most satisfying?

What do you think of the idea that lasting change in this world requires a strategic partnership between powerful elite persons and organizations?

In what ways have Christians partnered with elite powers to make this world better? What have been the results of such partnerships?

What do you make of Nugent's claim that, in the Bible, God doesn't really direct his people to partner with the elite powers of this world to accomplish his kingdom purposes?

#### **Ch. 2 – Incomplete Visions of a Better Place**

What is the heaven-centered approach to a better place? Where have you seen it in action? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

What is the human-centered approach to a better place? Where have you seen it in action? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

What is the world-centered approach to a better place? Where have you seen it in action? What are its strengths and weaknesses?

Do you resonate more with one of these approaches than with the others? Why or why not?

#### **Ch. 3 – Toward a Better Vision of a Better Place**

According to this chapter, what are the weaknesses of the world-centered approach?

What do you think of Nugent's point that the new creation has already begun among God's people in a way that it has not already begun with nonhuman creation? Can you think of any Scriptures or life experiences that challenge this point?

The thrust of this book may be captured in the quote, "God's people are not responsible for making this world a better place. They are called to be the better place that Christ has already made and that the wider world will not be until Christ returns." In what ways does this quote bother you? In what ways does it resonate with you?

## PART TWO: THE BIBLE'S STORY OF A BETTER PLACE

### **Ch. 4 – God Creates a Very Good Place**

Nugent begins this chapter by outlining how the Bible story is often told. What thoughts do you have about this way of telling the Bible story?

What insights did you gain from how Nugent tells the story of creation?

According to Genesis 1-3 what is the nature of humanity's relationship with nonhuman creation? How does it compare with how people interact with creation both in and beyond the church?

### **Ch. 5 – Humans Corrupt God's Very Good Place**

In what ways has this chapter enriched your understanding of the fall in Genesis 3?

How do the negative consequences of sin outlined in Genesis 3 play out in the chapters that immediately follow?

What does Genesis 1-9 *say* and *not say* about human dominion?

### **Ch. 6 – God Uses the Powers to Make This World a Better Place**

Before you read this chapter, what was your view of the phrase “powers and principalities”?

Who are the powers and principalities and what do we see them doing throughout Scripture?

How has God called the powers to make this world a better place?

### **Ch. 7 – God Forms a People to Prepare for a Better Place**

According to Nugent, what was God (a) *striving to do* and (b) *not striving to do* through Israel?

How did God form his set apart people to prepare them for their mission?

How did God's mission for his people get derailed? What part did the prophets play in getting them back on track?

### **Ch. 8 – God Sends Jesus to Inaugurate a Better Place, Part I**

Why might it be important for Christians to reclaim the Gospels' frequent use of “kingdom” language when describing the good news?

What is the “who” of God's kingdom?

What is the “what” of God's kingdom?

## **Ch. 9 – God Sends Jesus to Inaugurate a Better Place, Part II**

What are the where, when, why, and how of God’s kingdom?

What have the 6 W’s added to your understanding of the good news? Which of these aspects do you think Christians struggle the most to understand?

How do you think this approach to the gospel message compares with other approaches that you’ve seen or heard?

## **Ch. 10 – God Calls the Church to Embrace a Better Place**

What does it mean to embrace the kingdom of God?

Nugent discusses numerous new things that God made possible for believers through Jesus in *this life* before we die. Was there anything surprising to you about this list? What aspects of this new life have you personally experienced the least? What factors do you believe have contributed to this lack of experience?

Nugent emphasizes the “gift” nature of the gospel in this chapter—embracing what God has *already* done through Jesus. Why is this important in a day when people often (mis)speak about the church “bringing” or “building” the kingdom?

## **Ch. 11 – God Calls the Church to Display a Better Place**

What does it mean to display the kingdom of God?

What characteristics of the kingdom listed in this chapter do you find particularly life-giving? What characteristics does your church display well and not so well?

How does the New Testament approach the subject of love? How does this compare with popular notions of love? How might it impact Christian witness if the church embraced this approach?

## **Ch. 12 – God Calls the Church to Proclaim a Better Place**

What does it mean to proclaim the kingdom of God?

Nugent lists and summarizes all the New Testament passages that speak directly about how the church should relate to the world. In what ways does this list confirm your previous understanding? In what ways does it expand it?

How does proclaiming God’s kingdom relate to embracing it and displaying it? Which of these three aspects does your church excel in? Struggle in?

## **Ch. 13 – God Makes This World the Very Best Place**

Nugent wraps up his account of how the Bible tells the story of God’s mission for his people and this world. Is there anything you found particularly compelling about this particular telling? Or challenging?

Based on Nugent’s telling of the Bible story, what is the kingdom-centered approach to a better place?

How does the kingdom-centered approach improve upon the other approaches to a better place introduced in ch. 2?

### **PART THREE: A BETTER PLACE IN ACTION**

## **Ch. 14 – The Better Place in Action**

In this chapter, Nugent states that the church “bears the meaning of world history.” What does this mean? How could that be misconstrued?

In Matthew 18:1-4, what did Jesus mean in saying that kingdom people must become like children?

How does becoming like children enhance Christian witness to unbelievers?

## **Ch. 15 – Discipleship**

What does discipleship have to do with membership in the church?

According to Nugent’s discussion of Jesus and Nicodemus, how does genuine discipleship move beyond incomplete approaches to spirituality?

Nugent shares three ways that believers can be disciples of a better place. Which of these do you find most urgent and why?

## **Ch. 16 – Leadership**

How does leadership function in the wider world today? Give specific examples.

How does one’s approach to a better place impact one’s view of leadership in the church?

According to Jesus, what does leadership in God’s kingdom look like? What steps can churches take to obey Jesus more fully in their approach leadership?

## **Ch. 17 – Fellowship**

How does Christian fellowship compare with worldly fellowship?

How can small group structures help churches foster genuine Christian fellowship?

What can your church do concretely to foster the kind of fellowship that Nugent describes at the end of the chapter as a precious gift from God?

## **Ch. 18 – Family Relationships**

What is the tension we find between different strands of the New Testament's teaching about family?

How does Jesus' relationship with his own family show us to keep both strands together as a unified kingdom worthy approach?

What can you do personally to better embrace and display a kingdom view of family? What can your church do to encourage its members to do the same?

## **Ch. 19 – Friendship**

How does friendship work in the world, and is your experience in the church significantly different from that?

How does Jesus reframe our notion of friendship in John 15? How does the rest of the New Testament expand upon this notion?

What kinds of limits does the New Testament teaching on friendship set around the relationship between believers and unbelievers? What kinds of possibilities remain?

## **Interlude**

## **Ch. 20 – Vocation**

How does our culture view the place of work (occupation) in a person's life?

Besides providing space to form relationships that can lead to evangelism, how might a person's job be connected to their witness to God's kingdom?

How can you approach your own vocation in such a way that it more intentionally bears witness to God's kingdom?

## **Ch. 21 – Missions**

In what ways have Christians divorced missions from the church's ordinary life?

Why is it important for missionaries to keep the church central to their service? What should that look like?

How might parachurch missions fit within a kingdom-centered approach to Christian mission?

## **Ch. 22 – Witness to the Powers**

What is the key difference between the part that churches play and the part that governing authorities play in God's mission in this world?

In this chapter, Nugent outlines various differences between the agenda of the state and the nature of God's kingdom. Do these differences resonate with your experience of modern nations throughout the world?

How can the church be a witness to governing authorities without overstepping the bounds of God's calling for the church? How does a priestly posture empower such a witness?

## **Ch. 23 – Conclusion**

This chapter recaps the argument of *Endangered Gospel*. What is the core argument of the book?

Looking back on the entire book, what is the most important truth or lesson that you have taken away from it?

This book was meant to be a conversation starter. It doesn't answer every question, but it was meant to raise them. What questions did *Endangered Gospel* raise for you?

## **Appendix: Answers to Practical Questions**

It is easy to overlook an appendix because many appendixes don't add significantly to the argument of the book. This appendix is different. It answers several pointed questions that people raise after reading this book. Read the appendix carefully.

Were any of the questions raised questions that you had after reading the book? Which ones?

What Q&A's did you find most helpful? Why?

What questions still remain? What new questions do you have?

Nugent's personal website, [www.johnnugent.net](http://www.johnnugent.net), has a Q&A page where you can submit additional questions for John to answer. He actually answers them. You will also find the answers to questions that other people have submitted to the website.