

*Slow Kingdom Coming: Practices for Doing Justice, Loving Mercy and Walking Humbly in the World*

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*“Kent Annan is doing some of the most redemptive work on the planet. His newest book is a breath of fresh air – he steps back from all the action to consider the practices, prayer and disciplined reflection that sustains the work of justice. Slow Kingdom Coming is about going slow in a fast world, going deep in a shallow world and going far in a world that likes shortcuts. Brilliant.”*

– Shane Claiborne, speaker, activist, author of *Executing Grace*

## Paralyzed by the Complexity of Trying to Help Others

Over the past twenty years, I’ve personally and professionally succumbed to various failed justice shortcuts instead of living the freedom of faithful practices. I’ve been paralyzed by the complexity of trying to help others. I’ve huddled in bed during daylight because of the sadness and discouragement. I’ve rushed to get good things done and so didn’t treat people as well as I should. I’m still confessing regularly my faults and my longing to better participate in justice – that God’s kingdom would come on earth as in heaven. I confess that I wish this weren’t such a slow kingdom coming.

I’ve also seen people be incredibly generous with their time, talents and money in ways that inspire about humanity and are testimonies to God’s love. I’ve seen people in brutal circumstances make the best of new opportunities. I’ve seen hope stay tenaciously alive when by almost any measure it should be dead. I’ve seen ingenuity and humility in service of love.

All this has happened as I’ve been working for justice through education in Haiti for the past thirteen years. Before that I worked for a couple of years with refugees in Europe. I’ve been on short-term missions trips and have led some. I’ve had the photo of a sponsored child magnetized to my fridge. I’ve worked for and been a director of nonprofits. I’m a small donor and also a board member on a foundation that gives away millions of dollars each year.

Out of these experiences I’ve written this book about doing good without hiding from the bad – both around us and within us – because we’re called to be part of God’s kingdom coming. We’re invited to confess our vulnerabilities in serving justice so we can avoid dead-end shortcuts that damage others and ourselves. We’re invited to accept the grace and responsibility of living into our deepest longings for God’s kingdom. We’re invited to a responsible approach to helping other people flourish in our neighborhoods and in our world where there is too much suffering. We’re invited to be part of deep, lasting change.

I’ve been seeking to understand how we can best stay faithfully committed to humbly doing justice and loving mercy in our world. This has led to the five practices in this book. Where can they apply?

These days racial injustice and the threat of climate change are top of mind. No big issues are more important right now. Well, except human trafficking and endemic violence against women also must be added to the list. Then there is the growing chasm between the wealthy and poor, with the resulting disenfranchisement and the long-term fracturing of society. The

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# BOOK EXCERPT

*“Slow Kingdom Coming is deeply truthful and beautifully rendered, with stories drawn from the lives of collaborators around the world alongside important research. Smart, accessible, theologically rich and sociologically engaged, this book deserves a close read by all those drawn to live out Scripture’s commands to do justice in our broken world.”*

— **Brian Howell**, professor of anthropology, Wheaton College, author of *Short-Term Mission*

latest refugee crisis. Access to education and clean water. Protecting the rights of people who are vulnerable because of their sexuality. Cruelty toward animals in factory farming. Nuclear disarmament. And the list keeps multiplying all too easily.

And then without even touching that list, think of your daily life. Your neighbor who has emotional issues and is deeply lonely and latches on every chance she gets but even if you were to give her all the attention you had to give for the rest of your days, you still wouldn’t meet her heart-rending, unquenchable need.

So you feel guilty avoiding her as you drive to the grocery store and then along the way at an intersection stands a man in a tattered, too heavy coat holding a cardboard sign that says, “Homeless Vet, Will work for food.” And then the sign says, “God bless you.”

It’s hard to feel God’s blessing in this moment. It’s tempting to respond with, “Hey God, I’m willing to skip the blessing if we could get a little more help down here — because it’s more than we can handle!”

Yes, it is more than we can handle. The five practices in this book can help you find the freedom to handle *what you can* and *what you’re called to* — and then handle it *well* — as we respond faithfully to needs and opportunities of justice around us.

— Taken from the preface



**Kent Annan** (MDiv, Princeton Theological Seminary) is a writer, speaker and co-director of Haiti Partners, a nonprofit focused on education in Haiti. He is the author of *After Shock* and *Following Jesus through the Eye of the Needle* and has spent fifteen years working with people in difficult situations around the world, including in Europe with refugees and in Haiti. Kent is on the board of directors of Equitas Group, a philanthropic foundation focused on ending child exploitation in Haiti and Southeast Asia. His writing has appeared in publications including *Christianity Today*, *Utne Reader*, *Subtropics*, *Geez*, *Adbusters*, *The Sun*, *Orion*, *The Huffington Post* and *Sojourners*. He has been featured on national TV and radio shows.

## Talking “Slow” Justice with Kent Annan

### What’s the meaning behind “slow kingdom coming”?

**Kent Annan:** In the last chapter, I wrote that the title means three things to me. First, it is a lament. We confess that there is too much suffering in the world and the kingdom that Jesus prayed would “come on earth as it is in heaven” still isn’t here two thousand years later. We each feel the sadness of this in our lives and in the lives of other people. Second, the title is a hope. We can say it’s slow coming but with the faith and hope that it is indeed coming. We see this in beautiful, life-changing ways. Third and finally, it is a commitment. This book touches all three of these aspects, but focuses on the third – a commitment to participating well in this slow kingdom coming, being faithful in doing what we’re called to. The five practices in the book reflect on the lament and hope, and ultimately point toward practices that help us to be committed to the slow kingdom coming.

### How does this new book project align with your work on *Following Jesus Through the Eye of the Needle* and *After Shock*?

**Annan:** *Slow Kingdom Coming* flows right out of my first two books, but adds something very new and, I hope, very helpful for readers. *Following Jesus* tells the personal story of moving to Haiti, and *After Shock* is a lament for suffering in Haiti and in our own lives, which can lead to an honest faith. This new book takes these experiences (and my past twenty-two years) and gives theological and practical ways for individuals, churches, charities and communities to participate in thoughtful justice. *Slow Kingdom Coming* is still personal, but I do two new things to help readers. First, I draw more widely from the experiences of different people around the United States and different parts of the world. Second, I give readers more tangible ways (five practices) to help them move forward in their own work of justice, whether in their families, neighborhoods or in any kind of ministry.

### You talk about being “paralyzed by the complexity of helping others.” Can you explain that further?

**Annan:** It’s harder to help others than it should be, right? Most of us have felt that at some point. Even when we know we want to help someone out of addiction, out of poverty, out of a thousand things, it can be hard. Then on a bigger scale, when we think of racial injustice, inequality and many other complex issues, it’s maddening how hard they are to fix, even if it’s clear they need changing to better reflect God’s kingdom. In the book, I say I (and we) can find it helpful to confess our “compassion fatigue.” When we confess this, we’re freed toward a deeper, fruitful commitment to doing justice, which these practices can help.

### Why does our commitment to change need to be deep rather than shallow?

**Annan:** We need a deep commitment because although change is hopeful and meaningful to be part of, it’s also often hard and slow. Our commitment should also be deep because it connects to the deepest part of ourselves, from which we pray as Jesus taught us for the

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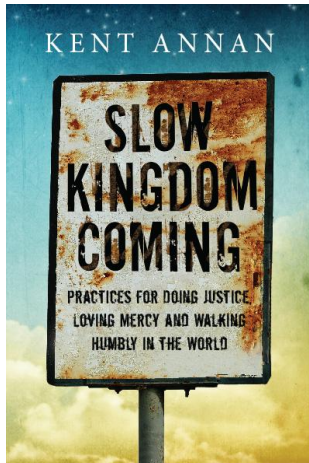
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kingdom to come on earth as in heaven. This commitment should be deep because loving well and working for justice well are part of our core calling as human beings created in God's image. I think deep commitment to joy also leads us toward the deeper joy of the kingdom coming.

**How have these spiritual practices – attention, confession, respect, partnering, truthing – been important to your own justice work? How have you seen it work for others?**

**Annan:** They've made all the difference! I've learned these practices over two decades of justice work and study and also by watching and working with great people. (And by making plenty of mistakes!) I've seen people with these kinds of practices doing justice in their lives for the long-term. As some people learn about justice, these practices are helpful. As other people still need to be encouraged to slow down and take a more thoughtful approach, these practices can guide the way. So I found these practices can help us to be thoughtful, but not scared. Help us to be patient, but not stopped. Help us to be urgent, but not taking false shortcuts. They guide us toward a hopeful way to engage for justice so we love our neighbor well and keep getting better at love. And they can help us improve our love in real ways, which means they help us with part of our highest calling.

**You've dedicated your life's work to doing justice and helping the least of these, but this book addresses how difficult and discouraging doing that work can be in light of the state of our world. How do you have the energy to write a book to help others find hope?**

**Annan:** I'm called to both doing justice and to writing. So I love doing both, even if occasionally my time and energy is squeezed and there doesn't seem to be much left! I find energy and hope in my family, my colleagues, and the people I get to work with (in the United States, Canada, Haiti and other places). I'm regularly inspired by the generosity of friends, as well as the people I get to work with who are dedicated to hope in very hard circumstances. I'm also inspired by seeing young people leading the way in Black Lives Matter here in our country, to see a young woman in Haiti work for change in the church so vulnerable children are better protected. I write in the book about practicing Attention in a way that helps to renew our commitment, so I try to do that. I write about the practice of Partnering, which is energizing because we accomplish more when we come together to make a difference. In the practice of Truthing, I'm energizing by incremental improvements.

When I'm writing (draft after draft!) I'm also energized by potential readers of this book. I want this book to be a joy to read. I want to share moments of vulnerability and laughter. I want to keep it interesting so you find it worth reading in the midst of a busy life. I want to serve you through thoughts and practices that are clear enough to be practical but also leave enough room to fit whatever your circumstances are for doing justice. When it's 10pm after a long day's work, and my family's gone to bed, I'm energized as I think of those potential readers who put in a couple of hours on this book. If *Slow Kingdom Coming* can help you to do justice in a way that is meaningful and encouraging, and that ripples out to help the people you as a reader are trying to help, then I'm honored and excited to be part of hope with you!