



INVITATION

Exploring the Mission and
Message of Jesus

Ron Pickell

Journey...

is the life we were made for
and have always wanted.

Who was Jesus? What was his mission? What can Jesus teach us about ourselves, the meaning of life, and our relationship with others? Invitation, the first of the Journey series of life group bible studies is an introduction into the life and mission of Jesus. It is a personal journey into the life God has in mind for all of us. The purpose of the Journey Bible Study Series is to learn about God together with a small group of friends through the life and ministry of Jesus and to embrace him fully. If you're ready for the ultimate adventure hold on tight and let's see where the living Christ and a journey with him will take us over the next few weeks together!

Titles and Topics Covered in <i>Invitation</i>	1. Come and See! The Journey Begins
	2. Who Am I? Journey to Self-discovery
	3. Jesus, Our Good Shepherd: Guide for the Journey
	4. The Hound of Heaven: Search and Rescue
	5. Jesus on Message: Where Are We Going?
	6. The Stone Kingdom: Jesus' Mission Rooted in History
	7. Heaven Now! The Two-Phased Kingdom
	8. Kingdom Architecture: Defining the Kingdom of God
	9. Dressed in Royalty: New Clothes from the King
	10. Kingdom Transactions: Passports to Freedom
	11. Giving Away the Kingdom: Sharing the Good News
	12. The Main Thing Is Keeping the Main Thing, the Main Thing

Getting
the most
out of
Journey

Here's what you're going to need for the journey:

- Good soil—an open and receptive heart
- Working the soil—determination and diligence
- Hunger and thirst—desire for God

Best Practices: The five S's of hearing and discerning God's voice

- **Seek**—Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
- **Soak**—Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections, or anything God says to you about the passage.
- **Seal**—Seal God's word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.
- **Script**—Journal or write, if even only a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or group time together. This will help you keep track of God's voice and the way he is speaking through Scripture.
- **Share**—Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in *Journey*. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God's word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what he has revealed to you to bless others.

Journey Covenant

I want to grow in my understanding of Jesus and the life he has for me. I want to participate in Journey to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and life group meetings.

Signature _____

My best times of availability are

Morning: _____

Evening: _____

Email address _____

Cell Phone _____

Breaking Down Journey

Journey was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study.



- **Journey Together** helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions.



- **Road Map** is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading Journey, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leaders guide.



- **My Story** has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using Journey in their daily life. These groups should be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the amount of questions are limited in the My Story section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.

Come and See!

The Journey Begins

As Frodo Baggins left the safety of the Shire on an adventure to get rid of the Ring, we are embarking on a journey together with Christ in which God will take us where he chooses. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is the resurrection and the life. He came that we might have the more abundant life with him.



1. What's the best trip you have ever taken?

2. Describe your greatest childhood fantasy adventure.

3. How can we relate the Christian life as a great and exciting adventure?

Note: When John describes what it was like having been with Jesus, boring was nowhere in the vocabulary. Notice his reflections on life with Jesus...

"1 From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. 2 The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. 3 We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ." 1 John 1:1-3 (Message Bible)



John 1:35-51

1. John and Andrew wanted to hang out with Jesus. What do you think impressed John, Andrew, and, in turn, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel, to want to know more about Jesus? What indications did they have that he was, in fact, the Messiah? What was Jesus' response to them?

2. Why did Nathanael question if anything good could come from Nazareth? What might have been questionable about Jesus' background?

3. Jesus showed an interest in each of these early followers - especially Peter. What nickname might Jesus give you?

4. What are some obstacles in the way of you discovering more about Jesus?

5. What intrigues you most about Jesus? What seems to be drawing you to want to know more about the life of God? What great things do you want to see from God?

6. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

7. How can this group pray for you right now?



1. How has God been using *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

2. What were the Jewish expectations of the Messiah? What were some of the promises that Jewish messiahs were making?

3. As you meditate on verse 39, what does Jesus want you to come and see about him?

4. What further questions do you have from this week's journey?

Who Am I?

Journey to Self-discovery

Who really knows you? How can we truly even know ourselves? Most of us are afraid of being known by anyone so we hide and pretend to be something we're not or what others want us to be. One of the greatest evidences of the Fall is our own sense of inadequacy - self-doubt and self-hatred - and so we wear our masks to cover up. Is it possible to know ourselves truly and to love ourselves? Doing so begins by seeing ourselves the way God sees us. This is why our journey with God begins not by self-examination, but by examining God. In this week's, roadmap of Scripture, we will focus on God and what he knows about us. God is before all things so his knowledge of us and his love for us is key to knowing and loving ourselves. If he already knows and loves us, understanding this is the first step in knowing and loving ourselves.



1. What are some funny characteristics/stories you can share about yourself?

2. Share something that best describes you to others.

3. How would your best friend describe you?

Note: Psalm 139 goes into great detail about God’s intimate knowledge of us. Notice how infinitely God knows us...

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”



John 1:1-34

This passage reminds us about Jesus’ preexistence and complete knowledge of us, which lead him to take on humanity and become our savior and Lord.

1. If you had the task of introducing Jesus what would you say about him? How does John introduce Jesus here? Who does he claim Jesus is?

2. Jesus is the WORD of God and the Light of the World. What does Jesus’ identification as the WORD tell us about him? What about light as an expression of Jesus? In what way is Jesus the Light of the World?

3. Word and light are metaphors of knowledge and revelation. If Jesus is the Word of God and the Light of the World, what does that tell us about what he knows about us? What does Jesus know about you?

4. He came from God to live and dwell with us. Jesus was Immanuel - God with us. What does moving into our neighborhood tell us about his feelings for us? Would you be open to have God move onto your campus or dorm room?

5. What role does John the Baptist play in revealing Jesus as the Messiah? What is so important about John's mission? How does he help John (the disciple) and Andrew become followers of Jesus?

6. Meditate on verses 1- 4. What does God want to say to you about the Living Word?

7. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

8. How can this group pray for you right now?



1. How has God used *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

2. Meditate on verses 1- 4. What does God want to say to you about the Living Word in your life?

3. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

Who Am I?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell's confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country house.

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely, friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Or am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were
Compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? This or the Other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!

Jesus, Our Good Shepherd

Guide for the Journey

A shepherd is one of the best metaphors we could use for the loving, constant care of Jesus. It is one thing to be known and loved. It is another thing to be cared for and protected by a trusted friend.

David reflects on this very thing in the Psalm 23. Each stanza repeats another aspect of God's watchful care. As David considers his own protection of timid and vulnerable sheep, he poses the question, "Who is watching over me?" With beaming pride, Psalm 23 provides the answer: "The Lord is my shepherd." Because the Lord is our shepherd, we are getting the best of care. "I shall not be in want."



1. Have you ever owned a pet? What are some things a pet depends on us for? (Read Psalm 23 out loud together)

2. What are some of the elements of the good shepherd's care in Psalm 23? What specific things is he being praised for? How many of these elements have you experienced in your own life and when?

3. What aspect of God's shepherding care do you need most in your life? Where do you need direction, protection, or celebration most in your life right now?



John 10:1-18

This passage reminds us of Jesus' constant care for us.

Note: In John 10, Jesus claims to be both the sheepfold gate and the shepherd. This can seem confusing to us today. However, shepherds often protected their sheep during the night by walling them into a secluded guarded area and placing themselves at the only opening to protect their sheep. In this respect, the good shepherd leads his flock to safety and stands guard over it throughout the night.

1. What impresses you most about Jesus' shepherding care?

2. What makes Jesus the only "true" shepherd? What distinguishes Jesus from all others?

3. Jesus has a very intimate relationship with his sheep. How can we learn to hear and follow his voice?

4. What does Jesus say the Father loves about him?
What makes him the Good Shepherd?

5. Jesus said he was prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. What do you appreciate most about all that Jesus has done for you?

6. Shepherds watch over and protect sheep, but they also lead sheep to greener pastures and sometimes through dark valleys. What are some ways God is leading in your life right now? How does the promise of God's leading bring peace to you?

7. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

8. How can this group pray for you right now?



1. How has God used *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

2. How has Jesus been leading and watching over you in coming to college? What are some personal examples of his leading and watch-care in your life?

3. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

The Hound of Heaven

Search and Rescue

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat – and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet --
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

So writes Francis Thompson in his famous poem about God’s pursuit of the human family. The life of John Newton (1725-1807), pastor and lyricist for the best-known hymn of all time, “Amazing Grace,” serves as a great illustration of God’s pursuing love. Born to a merchant mariner father and a spiritually devout mother, Newton fled from God with such determination that his journey away from God left him blind, lost, and enslaved to an African queen off the coast of Sierra Leone. Newton recounts the many ways that God intervened throughout his life while he avoided and resisted God. His conversion was the result of a horrible storm at sea. Afterward, he wrote in his journal how God finally got through to him in the midst of the storm and through a gracious deliverance. Newton forever praised God for his goodness and faithfulness in pursuing him.



1. What are some of the steps that God has taken to get through to you?

2. In what ways have you creatively avoided him?

3. When did you first notice God's pursuit of you?

Note: Our first glimpse in the Bible of God's persistent pursuit of us is in the Creation/Fall story, in which God comes searching for the first man and woman following their disobedience. When Adam and Eve do not come to meet him at their daily rendezvous, God calls out to them, "Where are you?" Our disobedience and rebellion from God precludes us from running after him. Fear, sense of inferiority, and self-absorption keep us locked away in a kind of spiritual prison. God is always the one taking the first step toward us.

Jesus illustrates God's persistent love even further in the three parables of grace in Luke 15: the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Son. The Pharisees and Scribes and their surprise about Jesus' acceptance of tax collectors and sinners who were drawing near to him serve as the backdrop for these three stories. Not only does Jesus not draw away from these outcasts, he goes even further to demonstrate God's persistent pursuit of them like we might search for lost money or a family pet. In the final story, Jesus portrays God as the running father eager to welcome home his recalcitrant son.

4. What do these stories tell us about God's deep love and faithfulness toward us? When did you first experience God's faithful persistence in your life?



John 10:1-18

John 6:22-70. This passage reminds us how God is pursuing all of us in Jesus, the Living Bread come down from God.

1. How is bread a good metaphor of God's sustaining life? What comparisons does Jesus make with himself and God's gift of manna in the wilderness? How is Jesus the "true" bread come down from God to feed the world?

2. It looks like the people are seeking Jesus, but in truth Jesus is approaching them with the real sustaining life (living bread) of God. Have you ever thought you were searching for God, only to find that it was really the other way around?

3. Describe God's pursuit of you. In what way is he pursuing you right now?

4. Jesus called for a decision from those who were following him. Many left when challenged by it. The disciples, however, sealed their commitment to Jesus. What about you? Do you see yourself moving toward God's pursuing love or away from it? Why?

5. Take some time to read again and meditate on the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. The real message in this story is that both sons are lost or fail to understand the Father's love for them. What's keeping them from their father? One son rebelled and left home. The other lived in a kind of rebellion in spite of never leaving his father's side. Which son do you most identify with? Why? Is there anything keeping you from the Father right now? What more must God do to convince you of his love other than sending Jesus to live, die, and be raised again for you?

6. How can this group pray for you?



For further study, check out Song of Songs 2:9-13; John 15:16 and John 6. These passages continue to illustrate God's patient pursuit.

1. How has God used Journey in your life and witness this week?

2. What do these additional Scripture references tell you about God's faithful persistence?

3. Do you see yourself moving toward God's pursuit of you or away from it, and why do you think that is so?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Jesus on Message

Where Are We Going?

Every four years, the United States engages in the national ritual of electing a new president. Candidates from the various parties begin lining up to convince prospective voters about their ideals for the country and how they would make the best and strongest leader. The presidential candidates develop their political platform - the values and key issues of their candidacy. In recent years, voters have become more and more disillusioned by political speeches that are long on rhetoric and short on specifics of what one candidate will do to solve the nation's ills. Voters have come to accept that we will not hear about specifics until the candidate's debate. It often takes the opposing side to bring a candidate out of his corner and tell us what he really thinks about a certain issue. Even then, we voters are often surprised at the skill of some candidates to deflect and dodge the issue and tell us nothing about their true positions.

Did Jesus have a spiritual platform? What was Jesus really trying to do? Was Jesus clear about his mission? Understanding Jesus' mission and message is a clue to understanding everything he says and does. It will also help us understand what he expects from his followers.



1. How important are the message and objective of presidential candidates?

2. How do you decide who to vote for? How important is it to understand his or her message and position in making your decision?

3. What was Jesus' message? Did he have a clearly stated mission? After listening in on Jesus conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus in John 3, what would you say was Jesus' message and mission? (John 3:1-8)

Note: Answering this question will help unlock the message of the entire Bible as Jesus himself once said that all the Scriptures directly or indirectly point to him. It will also help us understand Jesus' ongoing mission and how we fit into it today.



Matthew 5: 1-12

1. What does Mark 1:14, 15, tell us about Jesus' message? What is the Kingdom of God and how was it coming "near" at the launching of Jesus ministry?

2. Matthew 4:23-25, begins Jesus' public ministry with an assault on Satan's kingdom through miraculous healings, deliverance from evil spirits, and forgiveness of sins. How do these actions help clarify the "good news" of Jesus Kingdom?

3. In the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9, 10) Jesus taught the disciples to pray "Thy kingdom come - Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." How is heaven a good example of God's Kingdom and what would life on earth be like if God were followed and obeyed like he is in heaven?

4. Kingdom is an old-fashioned word that we do not often use in more democratically run societies. What do you think Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God? How is the ministry of Jesus establishing God's Kingdom on earth?

Note: When we think of kingdom, we often think of the medieval world of King Arthur's court and the story of Robin Hood.

5. In Matthew 12: 22-30, Jesus is a kind of spiritual Robin Hood taking from the devil and giving back to God. What are some comparisons you can make between the story in Matthew 12 and the legend of Robin Hood, and how does it help you appreciate Jesus' mission from a larger kingdom perspective?

6. When asked about the whereabouts of the Kingdom by a group of Pharisees, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." How was Jesus' Kingdom already "in their midst"? Where do you see the continuing presence of God's Kingdom today, and where do you most need to experience God's rule in your own life right now?

7. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus made it clear that his kingdom was different from the nations and kingdoms of this world and that entering his kingdom demands a new birth experience. What do you think Jesus meant by this new birth experience and what is the relationship between it and entering his kingdom? How do you relate to the new birth and in what way is it like a change of kingdoms?

8. How can this group pray for you right now?



1. How has God used *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

2. Surprisingly the “good news” or gospel, as it is often referred to in the Bible, is almost always the “good news of the Kingdom.” How does seeing the good news from God’s “kingdom” perspective broaden your understanding of the gospel?

3. Read Luke 12:32. How have you experienced the Kingdom of God this week? What are some ways that God might be directing you to help advance his Kingdom?

The Stone Kingdom

Jesus' Mission Rooted in History

John Lennon's song *Imagine*, released in 1971, considers a world in which differences do not divide and in which people coexist in a state of mutual support and love for one another. The truth is God does more than imagine such a world. A world in which love reigns supreme is the goal of Jesus' mission.

Last week, we explored the mission and message of Jesus in the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The gospel or "good news" of Jesus is actually more often than not referred to as the good news of the Kingdom. The world that Lennon could only imagine was the world that Jesus gave his life for.

The coming of God's Kingdom - a kingdom literally built by God was not really a new concept with Jesus. Jesus message of God's Kingdom was a very well-established hope embedded in the Old Testament prophets. This week, we are going to look at an ancient story from the Prophet Daniel that helps explain what Jesus meant when he announced the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.



1. Describe your most memorable dream.



Read Daniel 2

1. What impresses you most about this story?

2. Describe the details of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What successive kingdoms are presented before the King and how are they differentiated? What do we know about these kingdoms?

Note: The learning of the Chaldeans" (Dan. 1:4; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7,11) comprised the old languages of Babylonia, some knowledge of astronomy and astrology; mathematics, which their sexagesimal system of numeration seems to have facilitated; and a certain amount of natural history. To this must be added a store of mythological learning, including legends of the Creation, the Flood (closely resembling in all its main points the account in the Bible), and apparently also the Temptation and the Fall.

3. What is so different about the fifth and final kingdom - the "Rock" kingdom?

Note: Luke 20:17, 18 seems to identify this last kingdom as the kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating - a kingdom so different from all those represented in the king's dream that it smashes and crumbles all others that come before: "Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

4. How does the message of the Kingdom of God introduced through Jesus help us understand Jesus' mission as something more than just salvation from sin? What are the implications of the "good news" or gospel of the Kingdom?

5. Ultimately, the reality of God's Kingdom on earth is in process. It is something God is accomplishing through Christ. It is also something Jesus encouraged us to pray for as we mentioned last week: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," Jesus said. How is the Kingdom of Jesus a source of good news for you and what evidence do you see of the presence of Jesus' Kingdom already at work in your life and in the life of others?

6. How can this group pray for you this evening?



For further study John 3:22-36.

1. How has God used Journey in your life and witness this week?

Note: In John 3:22-36, the disciples of John the Baptist are jealous of the new attention people were giving to Jesus, which was drawing them away from John. Notice how John handled the shift from himself to Jesus.

2. In what areas of your life does Jesus need to become greater?

3. How can we best participate in God's Kingdom rule right now today?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Heaven Now!

The Two-phased Kingdom

Last week, we looked at a disturbing dream given a pagan Old Testament king concerning God's Kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar was given a pre-screening on the development of history and his place in the context of God's Eternal Kingdom. This dream revealed that Jesus came not only to deliver from sin, but also to completely overturn Satan's rule on earth.

One of the very surprising lessons we learn right away about the setting up of God's Kingdom is that it did not come in one climactic event, as some had expected. Jesus introduces us to this two-phased pattern in a couple of his most famous stories – the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven that works its way through the dough.

To illustrate, we have special celebrations or holidays, like Christmas, for instance. We have the beginning of the Christmas season, Christmas day, and the winding down of Christmas with the New Year's celebration. In a way, it is all Christmas.



1. What is your favorite holiday of the year and why?

2. Describe something you have had to wait for a long time.



Note: In Matthew 13: 31-33, Jesus also explained the Kingdom as a multifaceted event. He relates the Kingdom to a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds that also becomes the largest of shrubs in which the birds of the air nest. He then makes another expanding comparison of the Kingdom with leaven working it's way completely through the dough of a loaf of bread.

1. How do these parables help explain the two phases of the Kingdom?

2. Jesus made the official announcement of the arrival of the Kingdom in Mark 1:15. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" What are some of the evidences Jesus gave that the Kingdom of God had begun with the authority of God already at work in verses 16 - 45?

3. What additional evidence did Jesus give in Mark 4:35-41, of who he is and the presence of God's rule on earth? What other evidence can you think of in Jesus' life and ministry that demonstrates the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus' life?

4. Revelation 21 - 22:7, describes the second phase of God's Kingdom on earth in the coming of the New Jerusalem down from God out of heaven. What are some notable differences between the Kingdom described here and phase 1 in Jesus' First Coming?

What do you look forward to most about the New Jerusalem and the final establishment of God's Kingdom rule?

5. How does a two-phase Kingdom provide a better explanation of Jesus' overall ministry and mission? Some have referred to the Kingdom of God as here and not yet - meaning that the Kingdom has already begun, but also is not yet fully realized. In what way do you already see yourself living in the Kingdom? What are you most looking forward to about God's Kingdom that is still yet to come?

6. How can this group pray for you this evening?



Note: In Matthew 13: 31-33, Jesus also explained the Kingdom as a multifaceted event. He relates the Kingdom to a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds that also becomes the largest of shrubs in which the birds of the air nest. He then makes another expanding comparison of the Kingdom with leaven working its way completely through the dough of a loaf of bread.

1. Paul often referred to himself as Christ's ambassador - meaning that he belonged to God's Kingdom while representing God's affairs in a foreign land. In the verses above, he also reminded us that we are waged in a spiritual battle of conflicting kingdoms. The Kingdom of God has come and we are victorious

in God's strength. However, the Prince of Darkness still fights on against God's rule. How are we most vulnerable in this battle and what weapons do you most need to win your current struggles?

2. How does this fuller reality of God's Kingdom both present and future give real perspective for your spiritual life right now?

3. How is God using *Journey* your life and witness this week?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Kingdom Architecture

Defining the Kingdom of God

In our study last week, we read about the dimensions of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. John says it measures six hundred miles high and is as long and wide as it is high. Today, we could probably care less about the dimensions. We are really more concerned about the quality of life in the city.

Which raises the question - what does the Kingdom of God look like now? Some Pharisees once asked Jesus when the Kingdom of God would come - more like where is the kingdom you keep talking about? Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God will not come with our careful observation, nor will people say, "here it is" or, 'there it is, because the Kingdom of God is among you." Jesus' very own presence constituted the reign of God on earth (Luke 17:20, 21). Jesus also described the kingdom in its present form as a mustard seed - the tiniest of seeds- (Mark 4:30-32). In another private description to his disciples, Jesus actually referred to the inauguration of his Kingdom as a secret that only a few were beginning to unpack (Mark 4:10, 11).

This means that the Kingdom of God could actually be all around us yet invisible to those not spiritually in tune (as portrayed in the C. S. Lewis's children's book series about the land of Narnia). Jesus, in fact, once told a Pharisee named Nicodemus that he would never see the Kingdom without being born again. The present manifestation of God's Kingdom is apparently a spiritual dimension that can only be spiritually discerned.



1. What's a difficult thing you have ever had to explain to a child?

2. What do you find the hardest to understand about heaven?



Spirituality, unfortunately, can be rather vague. What else did Jesus say about the nature of his Kingdom already growing and taking shape on earth? This week, we are going to look at three very important and tangible aspects of the Kingdom life that is even now sprouting and growing through the work of Christ.

Authority: In Luke 10:17-20, Jesus talked about how the establishment of his Kingdom is bringing down the rule of Satan. We see this very thing happening in many people's lives, but perhaps none more clearly than in the life of the demon-possessed man discussed in Mark 1:21-28.

1. Have you ever seen someone that you thought might be possessed by a demon? How would you describe this person?

2. Have you ever been enslaved to a bad habit that you just can't seem to kick? What is the worst part about addiction - the habit itself or the frustration and impotency of knowing you just can't break free?

3. Jesus came to deliver us from our sin and painful addictions. Has Jesus ever helped set you free from a bad habit? Describe how it happened and share a bit about the freedom you have experienced through him.

Forgiveness: In John 8:1-11, Jesus forgives a woman brought to him caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus is launching his new Kingdom where every citizen will know and enjoy the blessing of Gods forgiving love.

4. What is the first thing you remember being forgiven for?

5. What is the most difficult forgiveness you have ever had to offer?

6. When and how did you finally accept God's forgiveness in your life?

Justice: Justice is an often-repeated theme in the Old Testament. It was because of Pharaoh's unjust treatment of the Israelite slaves that God intervened for their deliverance. Jesus also demonstrated God's justice on many occasions, but perhaps none more dramatically than with the cleansing of the temple (John 2: 12-17).

7. Why was Jesus so angry here?

8. In another story about caring for the poor and imprisoned (Matt. 25:31-46), Jesus links acts of justice for the oppressed with caring for himself. How does this parable help you understand justice and mercy and their close connection with God?

9. In the ancient story of Robin Hood, Robin steals from the rich and returns money to the poor. How is this story a helpful comparison of the work of God's Kingdom in the ministry of Jesus?

Forgiveness: When Jesus says that his Kingdom is at hand, we should expect some tangible evidence. As we embrace his Kingdom, we discover a new authority in our life, forgiving grace, and appreciation for God's justice. Extending these to others reveals and advances his Kingdom to them and us. These are some of the tangible manifestations we can expect of God's Kingdom now.

10. How can your group pray for you this evening?



1. How is God using this last week's large group study and discussion in your life and witness to others this week?

2. Where have you seen the Kingdom of God at work this week?

3. In the light of this week's study, what does it mean to seek first the Kingdom?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Dressed In Royalty

New Clothes From The King

When I was 17 I helped lead a group of early teens spelunking in a cave in northern Alabama. We spent the entire weekend living in this cave that went for miles under - ground with some vast 280 feet high rooms, narrow passages and a small stream. It was completely dark except for the light we brought in with us. We had a lantern comically named the "sun", which was only lit during daylight hours and another the "moon", which of course shown at night. These lanterns were the only way of telling the difference between day and night in the cave.

We had a blast exploring the underground caverns and mysteries of the cave, but when we finally popped out again on Sunday none of us realized how filthy we were until visible in the naked light of day. With hundreds of miles to travel before arriving back home we began looking for a way to clean up before the long trek back. Someone got the bright idea of renting a motel room so we could all take a shower and put on fresh clothes. We left an extra tip for the maid, but I cannot remember appreciating a shower more in my life. Clods of red Alabama mud washed off our bodies and down the drain leaving us fresh and clean for the first time in three days.

The message of John the Baptist was that everyone in comparison to Jesus is dirty. John called everyone - high and low to baptism, a kind of ritual bath in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus continued John's theme when he pressed a well-respected, notable Pharisee named Nicodemus that he too must be washed or immersed in order to enter God's kingdom. In fact, Jesus said he needed a "new birth" of water and Spirit before seeing the kingdom.



1. Describe the dirtiest you have ever been.

2. What is the best part about being clean?

3. Imagine being washed in the Spirit. What would that feel like?



Spirituality, unfortunately, can be rather vague. What else did Jesus say about the nature of his Kingdom already growing and taking shape on earth? This week, we are going to look at three very important and tangible aspects of the Kingdom life that is even now sprouting and growing through the work of Christ.

Authority: In Luke 10:17-20, Jesus talked about how the establishment of his Kingdom is bringing down the rule of Satan. We see this very thing happening in many people's lives, but perhaps none more clearly than in the life of the demon-possessed man discussed in Mark 1:21-28.

1. Have you ever seen someone that you thought might be possessed by a demon? How would you describe this person?

2. Have you ever been enslaved to a bad habit that you just can't seem to kick? What is the worst part about addiction – the habit itself or the frustration and impotency of knowing you just can't break free?

3. Jesus came to deliver us from our sin and painful addictions. Has Jesus ever helped set you free from a bad habit? Describe how it happened and share a bit about the freedom you have experienced through him.

Forgiveness: In John 8:1-11, Jesus forgives a woman brought to him caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus is launching his new Kingdom where every citizen will know and enjoy the blessing of Gods forgiving love.

4. What is the first thing you remember being forgiven for?

5. What is the most difficult forgiveness you have ever had to offer?

6. When and how did you finally accept God's forgiveness in your life?

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Kingdom Transactions

Passports to Freedom

The last time I purchased a new car. I had to sign a bunch of papers and loan documents before I could actually say it was mine and drive it off the lot. The same was true when we signed papers for our first home. In fact, when you buy a house you have to go to a completely different organization called the “title” company, where all the important papers are signed. The title company reviews all documents and guarantees that everything is in order to protect the buyer, the seller, and the loan company in a legal binding agreement.

Our goal in Journey has been to walk with Jesus and learn first-hand about him and his mission. One thing we’ve learned is how much Jesus emphasized his Kingdom and how His kingdom is something we are to enter now. “The Kingdom of God has come,” was his continuing theme.

If God’s Kingdom has already begun, then the most important issue is signing up and getting involved. The Apostle Paul actually goes through, step by step, some very important transactions God has designed to take place in our lives as we take up residence in his Kingdom both now and on into the future.



1. What is the most recent documents or important papers you have had to sign?

2. How often do you read the fine print of contracts? Why or why not?



Romans 5-8 moves us through these Kingdom transactions and reveals how the life of God becomes our own. For a brief overview:

Romans 5 – Free from wrath – The transition from condemnation (Adam) to justification (Christ).

Romans 6 – Free from sin – The transition from sin to righteousness.

Romans 7 – Free from Law – The transition from being married to the Law to being married to Christ.

Romans 8 – Free from death – The transition from death (flesh) to life (Spirit).

1. In our flesh or in Adam we live under the tyranny of sin, condemnation, and death (Wrath of God). But through our new life in Christ Jesus we live in righteousness, justification, and life (Grace of God). We have a super abounding life in Christ that overcomes the curse from the Fall in Adam. In Christ, we are living in the “jet stream” of God’s Kingdom life. In Romans 5, Paul describes this new life as “standing in grace.” How would you describe your experience of being at peace with God and standing in abundant grace and life through Jesus Christ?

2. If our old life in Adam was already buried in Jesus’ death on the Cross why is it necessary that we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God? Why is it so important that we understand our solidarity with Christ and his Cross and move from death to life?

3. How does the Law figure in to our new life? What relationship does the Law have with sin and disobedience to God? Why is the Law no help in living this new life of victory? How does the burial of our old life in Adam or the flesh free us from the endless cycle of sin, condemnation, and death in our dysfunctional relationship in the Law and allow for a new rhythm of righteousness, justification, and life in marriage to Christ?

4. Jesus came that we might have life in him. This life is new in that it is through him and it is a life through the Holy Spirit's indwelling. The fruit of the Spirit is listed in Galatians 5:22, 23. These are some of the best tangible evidences of Christ's life taking shape in us. Characteristics of the new life in Christ through the Spirit:

Note: Signing legal documents in owning a car or a house can be complicated and difficult to understand.

5. How do these 4 chapters in Romans help explain the intricate transactions from our life in the old age to living the new life of the Spirit in the Kingdom of God?

6. What transactions still need to take place in your life for the Kingdom to be real for you? How can this group pray for you?



1. How is God using *Journey* in your life and witness to others this week?

2. The gospel of Jesus is about freedom. We have been freed of God's wrath, sin, law, and death. Which of these freedoms is most meaningful to you right now and why?

3. Which fruit of the Spirit are you most grateful for right now, and which one would you most like to see developed?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

Giving Away the Kingdom

Sharing the Good News

I was so happy when Panera Bread, a pastry, sandwich and coffee shop, opened a restaurant in Knoxville, Tennessee, where I was a chaplain at the university. I could literally walk down the hill in the morning to a scrumptious Danish or bagel, latte, and good conversation with a friend. Imagine my delight when I noticed these large garbage bags of discarded Panera morsels early one morning waiting to be carted off to the dumpster. Having gotten to know the manager a bit, I asked about the bags and he told me they were day old bagels and pastries slated for the trash.

This formed an idea of how we could make these day old delicacies available for our students. I quickly loaded the bags into my van and carted them up to our student center to be enjoyed by all. Thus began a daily pick up of day old pastries from Panera Bread. I was quickly becoming the best-loved pastor on campus. However, I soon discovered that my rescue was even more than our students could handle, so I began looking for other places where I could share. Next, I was driving up to married student housing and dropping garbage bags full of day old delights to graduate and international students. This, of course, brought me into contact with lots of people I would never have met without the Panera freebees.

What if sharing the story of Jesus was really as easy as giving away sweet rolls? What if this is what Jesus meant when he sent out the disciples two by two with the instructions to drive out evil spirits, anoint the sick, and proclaim good news to the poor? Is this what it means to evangelize, to announce the good news of Christ and his Kingdom by introducing others to his new authority in their lives, God's forgiving grace, perfect justice, and a new birth?



1. What do you like most - to hear or secret or share a secret? Why?

2. What's the best news you have ever been privileged to share?



Luke 10:1-24

1. Jesus' instruction to the seventy disciples in verse 9 was "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'" How does care for others translate into a taste of the Kingdom? What have you learned about the benefits of God's Kingdom that are revealed in acts of kindness and justice?

2. Why were the Disciples so excited that even the demons were subject to them? What does this victory over evil reveal about the overall purpose of Christ? Why did Jesus caution them to be more grateful that their names have been written in Heaven than their trampling down of Satan? Why does Jesus express such joy in the Disciples' experience here?

3. What benefits of God's Kingdom have you received or been blessed with that you can happily share with others? When has giving away the Kingdom produced great joy in your life?

Surprised By the Kingdom: One day while I was walking our dogs, a woman with a black mid-sized dog stopped me and asked me to share a treat with her dog. It seemed a rather strange request, so I questioned her. She explained how this was part of the dog's rehabilitation therapy after being used as bait in attack dog training and pointed to the dog's missing ear. Getting the dog out on walks was helping her overcome her fear of other dogs - a fear that was now being transferred to men, the real cause of her terror. Having different men stop and give her a treat helped the dog realize that all men were not so cruel.

I stooped down and offered the dog a treat from my hand while gently stroking her head as she would allow. As I walked on, I could have sworn hearing the whisper of God in my ear that I had just witnessed the presence of the Kingdom. Maybe acts of compassion are the subtle gentle workings of the Mustard Seed Kingdom - a mustard seed that will one day develop into a large bush offering nest and shade for all the birds of the air. If so, I want to belong to that Kingdom - where the hurts and abuse from the Fall are transformed by acts of tender compassion into missions of mercy and grace.

Advancing the Kingdom: Matthew 25:14-30

4. What is the relationship between investing God's property and giving away the Kingdom?

5. What is a talent? Why does the third manager hide his talent? What does hiding our talent translate into in this story? What great investments have you already made or can you make for advancing God's Kingdom?

6. What excites you most about giving away God's property?

7. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?

8. How can this group pray for you right now?



1. How is God using *Journey* in your life and witness this week?

2. We have all been affected by the Fall and injustice of Satan's rule in our lives. Talk about a hurt or painful experience in your own life that helps you appreciate the coming of the Kingdom.

3. How has the simplicity of advancing the Kingdom changed your perspective on sharing the good news?

4. How can this group pray for you right now?

The Main Thing...

is Keeping the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

Discipline has never come easy for me. I was the first in my family to enter a four-year degree-granting institution and never considered myself an academic. By the first mid-term semester of my freshman year I had a .075 GPA. I suddenly woke to the reality that unless I made some drastic improvements I was going to be a college dropout. How important was it that I attend college? Learning and making the grade had to become a greater priority if I was ever going to make it.

Obviously things had to be different. At the time I was working a part-time job and living off campus with my brother and his wife who, were not yet relocated to the area. Basically, I was living alone with few boundaries or accountability. I was also busy making new friends and becoming more and more involved with a charming young female freshman. However, after the startling GPA, I assessed my priorities and decided that I did feel called to ministry and that I wanted to pursue a college degree that would lead into full-time service for Christ. So I found a stable balanced roommate, moved into the dorm, quit my job, and actually stopped seeing the girl friend – for a while anyway.

Jesus said we have to know our priorities. On many occasions, he reminded the Disciples that the Kingdom of God was the most important thing of all. In Luke 14, Jesus emphasized the cost of being a disciple. He never made discipleship seem easy, just full of grace. In Luke 9, he talked about gaining the whole world while losing our soul. He said the Kingdom was the greatest priority, that it was like finding treasure hidden in a field and that upon discovery a person must be prepared to sell all they have to own the field and the treasure in it. Or he compared the Kingdom to someone in search of fine pearls, after finding the precious pearl sells everything to own it. The emphasis is on selling all because the treasure or pearl is worth more than all we now possess.



1. What was your most prized childhood possession? Why did it mean so much to you?

2. What would you find the hardest thing to part with in your life right now?



Matthew 19:16-30

1. What did the rich man have? What did the young man want? Why was he coming to Jesus? What did Jesus have that he wanted?

2. Why did Jesus quiz the man about goodness and refer him back to the Law? Why did he question him about calling him "good?" What was the young man assuming about Jesus?

3. Did Jesus turn this man away? Why didn't the man recognize the greatness of Jesus' Kingdom? What keeps people from selling all for the Kingdom today?

4. Why were the Disciples fearful of losing out on the Kingdom? How will it take to obtain the Kingdom?

5. Who are you most like in this story: The Rich Man, Jesus, or the Disciples, and why?

6. What is the main priority in your life?

7. How can this group pray for you?

For further study read Matthew 6:33.



1. Where have you seen evidence of God's Kingdom this week?

2. In what way has the Kingdom become the main thing in your life?

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3. What is your greatest distraction in seeking first the Kingdom?

4. How do you see yourself advancing the Kingdom among your friends, at work, or at home?

5. How has God used the *Journey* in your life over the past few months?

Note: Have you ever wanted someone or something so badly that you went to bed and woke up thinking about them. You can't get them out of your mind. You imagine what it would be like to be with that person or to have that thing. Maybe it's a new car, a new outfit, or a special person you are falling in love with. Jesus likens the Kingdom to our most prized possession - the greatest dream or desire we could have for ourselves. In Matthew, he advises us - no commands us -- to seek the Kingdom first, and in finding it we will find everything else. So, you see, the Kingdom is not a replacement of our basic needs. It is the key to them and all that we need. When we possess the Kingdom, we become a king, and the king lacks for nothing. In giving us the Kingdom. Jesus is reinstating us with the dominion lost in Adam's Fall and enabling God's rule our lives again in Jesus' name.

