



The Kingdom Story

A LIFE GROUP SERIES

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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A Life Group Series

A 42 Day Devotional

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This devotional is intended to be a companion to “The Kingdom Story” teaching and Life Groups series at Oxford Vineyard Church in the Spring of 2022. That being said, keep this book, make notes in it, and refer back to it at any time. It stands alone as a great devotional to deepen your journey into understanding the gospel of the kingdom Jesus preached and what it means for us.

This book contains six weeks of content with a guided devotional for six days each week (Monday-Saturday). The seventh day is intentionally left blank. There is no devotional content for Sundays, just space for you to make notes in the book during the talks that correspond with each week of the series. Each day of the devotional will include a scripture or two, some thoughts from each week’s author, a prayer, and journaling prompts for each day. Our hope is that 10-20 minutes daily in this material will make way for some significant encounters with God and result in your growth as a disciple of Jesus in community with others.

Each week’s material looks forward to the talk that will be given at the Vineyard on Sunday. Here’s an example of how this will work:

Week one’s content is intended for February 21-26. Those days of the devotional will correspond with the teaching on February 27. Then, the week of February 27, your group will discuss the material you studied on your own from the week prior.

Participating in a Life Group will enhance your experience with this book! For six weeks beginning February 27, 2022 groups will meet weekly in and around Oxford to discuss the contents of the study from each day, ask deeper questions, share meals, worship, and pray together. It’s our deep desire and sincerest hope that you’ll join one of the groups and challenge yourself to engage with friends and strangers in a meaningful way around the idea of God’s rule and reign in the world around us and how Jesus invites us to understand it.

Week 1:
February 21-26, 2022
The Gospel of the Kingdom
Parker Frey

A More Christlike Gospel

February 21, 2022

"...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

1 John 1:5

God's essence is love. He created the universe in love and love is the bond that holds together the three persons of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Spirit. The gospel of Jesus Christ is revolutionary because it has made known to the world for the first time that, in fact, God is not far off, he's not impersonal, and he's certainly not one of the angry gods of pagan polytheism. Consider John's words here, "this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." Given the opportunity to summarize the message that Jesus brought, John chose to describe it like this.

Sometimes the world (and even the church) paints a complicated picture of God's intentions and how he feels about his creation, but John's claim here is simple: there is no darkness in him at all. God is love. That means the evil we see in the world - death, disease, war, famine, injustice - is not orchestrated by God, but by the adversary! God does not need to use evil means to achieve his ends. How might we think and act differently if we were conscious of this fact all throughout our days?

Prayer:

Thank you, God, that your beauty, truth, and goodness are beyond anything I could ever find on this earth. I ask for your Holy Spirit to grow me up in my understanding of what it means that there is truly no darkness at all in your being. I trust you to love your creation.

Journaling Prompt:

Spend some time reflecting on today's scripture. What stands out to you? What do you think God might be inviting you into through his word?

The Image and Likeness of God February 22, 2022

'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

Genesis 1:26a

'Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. '

Colossians 3:9-10

Just as there is no darkness in God's essence, he desires for his creation made after his image and likeness to be renewed. He doesn't despise you and I for our imperfections, he is looking for partnership with us to see us become who he intends us to be. By the work of the Holy Spirit living within us, God desires to grow us up in righteousness and to see us "put on the new self" as we meditate on the scriptures and allow Jesus access to the parts of our lives that are still in need of his light.

Each of us are still being perfected in love. Perfection is not a destination we'll ever reach. Allowing the Holy Spirit to refine our hearts is a lifelong journey! As much as we might want to believe or seem like we have it all together, there are some corners of each of our souls that the light of Christ hasn't quite reached. The project of becoming like Jesus is about doing the work of giving God access to more of our inner lives. When we work on our inside life, we have more opportunities to proudly bear the image and likeness of God and put his love on display to those around us.

Prayer:

Jesus, I know I have a long way to go. I pray for the gift of your Holy Spirit to be refining my mind. I invite you into my thought life, my relationships, and my work today as you help me to leave behind the practices of my old self and become more and more like you. Help my private life match my public image. Help me put on the new self to better love you, God, and to better love my neighbor.

Journal prompt:

Set a timer and spend five to ten minutes in silence. Do not write or listen to music. If you get distracted, that's okay! Reflect on what it means for you to "put on the new self". At the end of your time, make a few notes about what came to mind and what you might have heard the Holy Spirit saying.

Liberation of the Captives
February 23, 2022

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...”

Isaiah 61:1

“And he [Jesus] healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.”

Mark 1:34

There are four aspects that make up the good news, the gospel of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached; liberation of captives, forgiveness of sins, power to live in victory over sin, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. These make up the entire gospel Jesus preached, but we’re often tempted to narrow it down to the second one alone – the forgiveness of sins. The truth is, Jesus came to do a whole lot more than just forgive your sins. Jesus’ life, ministry, and resurrection are just as important to the gospel as his death, but we don’t act like it sometimes.

Just think about it. If the whole gospel were captured in the statement, “Jesus died for your sins so you can go to heaven,” then Jesus himself never preached the gospel! That message isn’t false, but it’s far from complete. As the prophet Isaiah predicted, Jesus went around healing the sick and casting out demons. He brought revelatory teaching that liberated people from evil ways of thinking (sometimes we call these ‘strongholds’), and just as much as God wants to do this work in our lives, he’s extended the invitation to us to partner with him to do the same for others.

Prayer:

Jesus, just as you healed the sick, raised the dead, and cast out demons during your ministry on earth, I ask that you would free me from evil ways of thinking and habits that I am enslaved to, whether I recognize them or not. Renew my mind and set me free so that I can do the same for others!

Journal prompt:

Things we've struggled with in the past are often part of the calling God has for us to partner with him and see others set free. Take a minute to reflect on some things God has set you free from (or that you're in process with). Maybe it's something like a hot temper, addiction, or a physical ailment. Dream with God about how you can partner with Jesus to bring freedom to the people around you!

The Forgiveness of Sins
February 24, 2022

"I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins."

Isaiah 43:25

'And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"'

Luke 7:48-49

Jesus has forgiven your sin! At the Vineyard, the way we understand atonement (which is just a fancy word for 'what happened when Jesus died on the cross') was that Jesus died for all. He died to forgive every sin past, present, and future. The forgiveness of Jesus is so powerful that God has forgiven you before you've even sinned. What a gift!

Like any gift, this gift of forgiveness must be accepted. It does not simply take effect without us even knowing or doing anything about it. God's face is turned toward us! To receive the forgiveness of Christ, we repent (turn away) from sin and accept the gift given by Jesus. Forgiveness doesn't end there. Jesus invites his apprentices to be like him - to do the works he did. That includes forgiveness! Of course, you and I can not atone for other people's sin, but we can forgive them. Not because they deserve it or even because they've made the wrong they've done right. We forgive because we've been forgiven.

Prayer:

God, I ask for the grace in my life to recognize where I've misstepped. Show me where I've harmed your image and likeness in others by treating them poorly. As I reflect, give me insight about how I might also make things right with my neighbor. As you open my eyes to my own sin, show me who I might forgive, deserving or not. Give me wisdom to understand what it means to forgive and have healthy, appropriate boundaries with people who have hurt me in the past.

Journal prompt:

This can be a challenging exercise, so be patient with yourself and embrace the challenge. Matthew 5:23 says if you are offering a gift at the altar and remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar, go and be reconciled, then offer your gift. Is there someone you have something against or has something against you? Even something minor? Consider this an invitation to put the word into practice. Stop reading this devotional right now and reach out (even if they haven't apologized first)! ¹

¹ I'm sure you immediately have a number of objections about this not being practical or being too sensitive of a thing to approach this way. We tend to think in extremes. If there's someone who has severely wronged you or you have lifelong pain, don't start there. Start with something minor! Extending forgiveness is a muscle we exercise and sometimes it's a hard obstacle to overcome.

The Power to Live in Victory

February 25, 2022

'But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, '

Titus 3:4-6

When we become followers of Jesus, we don't remain the same! Jesus invites all to come as we are and be regenerated and renewed by the transformational presence of the Holy Spirit. The mercy of God doesn't give us permission to remain as we were before we knew him, it empowers us to become new creations who know God, love our neighbor, and live in victory over sin. So many Christians live their lives trying to manage their sin and never get on with the project of partnering with God to bring life to those around them. Not a very hopeful picture!

However, when we are washed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live in victory over sin! Not only are we forgiven, but we're in process and the door is open for us to become someone new. This doesn't happen because we try hard to do better. This is a supernatural work of God, transforming us from the inside out as we allow him to renew our minds. The gospel isn't just forgiveness, it is the power to be transformed and to live a different way!

Prayer:

Jesus, I want to be transformed by the renewing of my mind, but I can't do it alone. I know you've called me to a higher calling than simply managing my sin. Make me more aware of the power of your Spirit living inside me. You aren't fixated on my sin, you're making me a new creation. Give me the power to live in victory over my bad habits and tendencies and partner with you to bring the kingdom!

Journal prompt:

Today's passage from Titus talks about the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. Reflect on some ways God has regenerated and renewed you in the past!

The Empowerment of the Spirit
February 26, 2022

'When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.'

Psalm 104:30

'For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;'

Romans 15:18-19

It is by the Holy Spirit that God created everything and it is by the same power that he transforms us. What's more, God puts this same Holy Spirit inside each believer to guide us and empower us to do the works Jesus did! This passage from Paul's letter to the Romans reveals that he believed the gospel was incomplete without the power of the Holy Spirit to transform hearts and perform signs and wonders. The gospel must be proclaimed and demonstrated! The gospel is word and power.

This empowering of the Holy Spirit is something the New Testament writers encourage all believers to pursue and desire! Without the empowerment of the Spirit, we have no ability of our own to truly change our desires or renew our minds, let alone pray for the sick or receive prophetic words of encouragement for our friends. Throughout the scriptures, the instruction from these early apostles is clear: be filled with the Holy Spirit! No matter how many times we've experienced this, it should be our desire to be filled again and again.

Prayer:

Lord, I pray for your Spirit to be in, around, and upon me. Stir up the fruit and gifts of the Spirit in my life and make me more aware of your awesome, powerful presence throughout the day.

Journal Prompt:

Have you experienced the baptism (infilling) of the Holy Spirit recently? Ever? When the scriptures say to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the connotation is to be *continuously* filled - repeatedly, over and over again. The baptism of the Holy Spirit wasn't meant as just a one time experience. Reflect on your experiences of being filled with the Spirit and make some notes. God gives us new insight when we reflect!

DAY 7: (SPACE FOR SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES)

Week 2:
The Kingdom Will Come
Parker Frey

Sacrifice & Atonement
February 28, 2022

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

For today's devotional we're sending you to the Bible Project! Point your smartphone's camera at the QR code below and click on the link that appears to watch the video, or type in the link:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_OIRWGLdnw

Prayer:

God, allow me to be a conduit for your love. Thank you for making me clean and forgiven – a space for your Spirit to dwell! Thank you that my sins are not just covered up, they are erased. Thank you that I died with Jesus on the cross, I am raised with him, and I am seated with Christ in heavenly places! This is what it means to be born again!

Journal prompt:

When Christians take communion, we're not just having a strange, tiny snack. The bread and wine are a symbol of our participation in his death. That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 writes, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Has communion ever been explained to you this way? When you reflect on this reality, does it bring a new depth of meaning to the practice? ²

² I (Parker) encourage all of us to make communion a regular practice in our everyday lives! It's a powerful, symbolic act and a fantastic reminder about who we are in Christ. God's presence meets us there! Take communion at home, with your families, in small groups, even by yourself in a moment of contemplation. Don't just wait for the once-a-month communion at the weekend service!

The Genius of Jesus

March 1, 2022

'And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?'

Mark 6:2

Jesus is a genius. "Genius" is ordinarily a title that society reserves for great minds who move humanity forward. Artists like Banksy, Mozart, and Bob Dylan, Renaissance minds like da Vinci and Michelangelo, and modern scientists like Einstein and Newton are all hailed as geniuses. Of course now there is even a newfangled academic accolade, the MacArthur Fellowship, that is known as the "genius grant" for a great scientific discovery or paradigm-shifting idea.

I'm biased, but I tend to think Jesus was the greatest genius of them all. Just look at how the people around him processed his miracles. They didn't think he was some warlock, they connected them to wisdom and intellect! "What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" When we say we follow Jesus, we aren't just following some spiritual guru, we're following the Son of God, the Messiah, and the greatest intellect in human history. That's important because there are many teachers, thinkers, "influencers" and ideologies that vie for our attention. But Jesus is the greatest of these. His moral teaching has never been improved upon in two thousand years! The Kingdom story is our story of sharing in the genius of Jesus.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, for your wisdom! When Israel's King Solomon prayed for wisdom, it pleased God. Holy Spirit, I pray for the same kind of wisdom that rested on Jesus to be cultivated in my own life. Lord, I ask for the gift of your wisdom, that I may be entrusted with your words of wisdom for my own life and for the lives of those around me!

Journaling prompt:

Take some time to journal a prayer asking God for his wisdom for your life. Name specific situations, relationships, and circumstances you need God's wisdom for! Watch for new insight to come to you and be open to new ideas. They might even seem like your own thoughts (the Holy Spirit lives inside you, after all).

Becoming Like Jesus
March 2, 2022

'I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. '

Exodus 6:7

'For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. '

1 Peter 2:21

The story of the Bible is the story of the kingdom of God - that is, the rule and reign of God both in the wider sense of being king of the universe and in the narrower sense of having a relationship with the "people of God". From Genesis to Revelation, God is calling people to himself, to love him, and to be transformed by his power and presence to live as reflections of his goodness, beauty, and truth. As we saw yesterday, Jesus is a genius and we want to imitate him!

In Exodus 6, God calls the people of Israel to be his covenant people in a special relationship with him. Through Christ, God extends this invitation to all the peoples of the earth, only this time the instructions are even more specific; to become like Jesus. 1 Peter says we've been called to follow in the steps of Jesus. That means doing the works Jesus did as well as sharing in the kind of relationship Jesus had with the Father! 1 Peter also invites us to share in the suffering of Christ. This is daunting, but it is what Jesus himself said would set his followers apart - their love for one another and a willingness to lay down their lives for others just as he did.

Declaration:

I am a child of the King. I am a new creation in Christ. The old has passed away; all things in me are new. I am in Jesus. Jesus is in me. Greater is He who is me, than he who is in the world. I have been crucified with Christ. I died with Him. I was buried with Him. I was raised with Him. I am now seated with Him in the heavenlies far above all rule, all authority, all power, and above every name that is named.

Journaling prompt:

What does it mean to you personally to be a friend of God and among the chosen people of God? Reflect and write down some thoughts.

Living As Apprentices
March 3, 2022

'So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. '

John 5:19

'You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. '

2 Timothy 2:1-2

The journey we are on with God is one of lifelong learning. I (Parker) am always disappointed when I come across someone who thinks the concrete is set - that is, someone who believes they're set in their ways and there is nothing they can learn that would change the way they think or act. Our apprenticeship to Jesus is always ongoing. It never ends. In John 5, Jesus says something that has long defined the way we try to do ministry at the Vineyard. He says he does "only what he sees the Father doing."

As soon as we think we've mastered a skill (whether it's basketball, chess, carpentry, cooking, or some other thing) we stall out, plateau, or even start to get worse. That's because we need others to stay sharp! There are always new ideas, insights, and methods that come from places we wouldn't expect. We want to be like Jesus - to do only what we see the Father doing. A few days ago we reflected on the genius of Jesus. Staying in step with the Father was the source of his ingenuity!

Prayer:

God, thank you for calling me a friend. Thank you for revealing your plans and purposes to your friends! I only want to do what I see the Father doing. Make me more aware of your leading and your presence.

Journaling prompt:

An excellent practice for us to engage with that can help us see what the Father is doing is an ancient one called praying the “Examen” - just a fancy monastic word for reflection with God on your day. Here’s an example of what the prayer of Examen might look like:

1. Place yourself in God’s presence by inviting the Holy Spirit in a quiet, calm place. Give thanks for God’s great love for you.
2. Pray for the grace to understand how God is acting in your life.
3. Review your day — recall specific moments and your feelings at the time.
4. Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to God, or further away? A question I like to ask myself is, “how did I treat the image of God in people today?”
5. Look toward tomorrow — think of how you might collaborate more effectively with God’s leading. Be specific.

Now and Not Yet
March 4, 2022

'...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. '

Ephesians 1:20-21

Jesus and the New Testament writers often spoke of two “ages” - “this age” and “the age to come”. As Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, he explained that the kingdom of God, that is, the rule and reign of God in the present, was at hand. He used language like, “the kingdom of God is close enough to touch”. In the present, we only see this happening in part. We’re living in a ‘cosmic battle’ - one where authority was given over to the Satan by humanity at the beginning of human history. God is working through humans to take that authority back!

As we partner with the Holy Spirit to advance the kingdom of God, sometimes we see it happen, and other times we don’t. This is something we refer to as the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ of the kingdom. Sometimes God’s activity is clear - something happens and minds are renewed, bodies are healed, and God speaks into our situations and circumstances. Other times we experience the very real push-back of the kingdom of darkness. For reasons beyond our control, the spiritual warfare that rages around us prevents the kingdom of God from being fully realized ‘in this evil age’. Even so, we can be certain it will be in ‘the age to come!’ We live in this tension as kingdom people, between victories and moments when we do not yet see the perfect fulfillment of the restoration Jesus promised.

Prayer:

Jesus, I know you reign above the whole cosmos and everything in it. I confess that you are the absolute measure of truth, beauty, and goodness. Even so, you limited yourself to partner with humans. Give me grace to partner with you to usher in the kingdom even when we do not see it come fully in this age.

Journaling prompt:

Some people believe God has every aspect of our lives planned down to the tiniest detail. Others think God himself doesn't know anything about the future that we don't already know. Of course, some believe there is no God at all. I'm sure many of us have believed a combination of these things and even some other ideas in between.

All throughout the Bible, we see a God who is wise and has foreknowledge of world events and the events of our lives, but the God of the Bible wants partnership with humanity more than he wants to micromanage us or observe his cosmic science experiment. When you think about partnering with God to realize your full destiny and potential, what are some questions that come to mind? Write some of them down as a form of prayer.

The Hope of the Coming Kingdom March 5, 2022

'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."'

Revelation 21:1-4

In his book "Surprised by Hope" one of my favorite theologians, N.T. Wright writes, "Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny but the other, hidden, dimension of our ordinary life - God's dimension, if you like. God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever." We've been sold a picture of heaven as a place we go when we die, when the truth is more complicated than that. God, in Genesis 1, created the heavens and the earth. When sin entered the world the earth and heaven were separated. No longer were the natural and supernatural world seamlessly connected. Instead, they are separate realms.

When the kingdom of God 'breaks in', we catch a glimpse of what it's like when the two overlap again. That looks like forgiveness of sins, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, captives being freed, and power to live in victory over sin and death. The kingdom of God *is* a future we look forward to, but it is also breaking into the present - *the already and the not yet*. What that means is we can have hope for the future! We have hope for the immediate future because God's Spirit is working in us to bring Heaven to Earth. We can hope for the long term future because God is going to remake heaven and earth and reunite them.

Prayer:

Thank you, God, that you have a plan to redeem the world through Christ!

Journaling prompt:

It's easy to become hopeless about our circumstances. Think of some situations where you could use a word of hope. They could be relationships in your life, a nagging physical ailment, or geopolitical conflicts. Reflect on the heavy situations in your life in light of Revelation 21:1-4. What might God want to do to redeem them?

DAY 7: Space for Sermon Notes:

Week 3:
The Kingdom Has Come
John Richter

“Tetelestai” - It Is Finished

March 7, 2022

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30

On the cross, Jesus breathed his last and then made the declaration, “it is finished”. The Greek word is Tetelestai. This is a powerful statement that has multiple meanings to it. First that it is complete and finished. Secondly, it is paid in full. This begs the question: what is complete? Over the next six days we will be exploring this statement and the fullness of the finished work of the cross of Jesus Christ. In Jesus the kingdom has come. He ushered in a new era, a new season, a new age, a new covenant. His life, death, and resurrection are complete. Sin is abolished. We are set free, healed, delivered, new creations, partners of God, children of God! Jesus ushered in a new age. The age of the kingdom of God at hand and available. It will take a lifetime to fully comprehend the height, the width and the breath of all Jesus did for us at the cross. Do we live in this reality? Do we live in the reality that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection are the answer to every problem we face?

Prayer:

The death and resurrection of Jesus was so great that it paid the penalty for the sins of the entire world – past, present, and future! By faith in Jesus, I am completely free of sin and I get to live in his loving grace and mercy which follow me wherever I go!

Journaling Prompt:

Repentance (changing the way we think) begins by identifying lies or areas of our lives that do not reflect the reality of the finished work of the cross. Jot down some areas of your life or statements you may have made in the past that do not align with the truth that Jesus is the solution to every problem. Ask the Holy Spirit for help renewing your mind in those areas.

The New Covenant

March 8, 2022

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

Hebrews 8:6

Throughout the Bible we see God making covenants with humanity. We see this perspective played out throughout scripture and specifically in the beginning when God gave us authority! God was looking for partners, not puppets. People he could have a loving partnership with to bring forth his kingdom into the earth. He establishes these partnerships through covenants. In Christ we see the establishment of a "New Covenant". A new and better covenant with better promises. Promises of the word being written on our hearts. Promises of his presence holy spirit dwelling inside of us. The new covenant reestablishes our relationship with God, restores our identity as rulers in the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, and reestablishes our destiny to rule and reign in partnership with God.

Prayer:

Father God, You are good. Your covenant with me is amazing! Father God, You love me! Father, You will always love me! Father, You like to be with me. Father, You enjoy me. Father, You love to partner with me to do the same works Jesus did on the earth! I am your friend and your child. I am your ambassador to the earth.

Journaling prompt:

Yesterday we wrote down areas where we don't believe or trust in the finished work of Jesus. Now, write down some declarations of truth based on the finished work of Jesus for each one of these areas.

The 'Now' of the Kingdom March 9, 2022

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Colossians 2:15

You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2:7-9

On November 11, 1918 the Armistice was signed ending World War 1. The Allied Powers had won. It was finished. Even so, for the next several months fighting ensued and many soldiers died even after the war was over. This is a great metaphor for the cosmic battle we are in! This is the "now" of the Kingdom. It is finished. The rule and reign of heaven has been re-established through Jesus. But just like in WW1, the fighting ensues. We are in the time period of the "now and not yet". It is called the "Last Days" in the Bible. Battles are still being fought until "His enemies are put under His feet." As believers, it is important for us to grasp this worldview so that we can process the events around us properly. Satan is defeated and he knows it, but he is still putting up a fight. Through Jesus we now know the will of God and we have the "documents in hand" – the authority to enforce heaven on earth. This is why Jesus commanded us to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Prayer:

Take a few moments to verbally thank Jesus for all that He has done for us. Thank him for the victory in your life (whether you see it fully manifested or not), thank him anyway and ahead of time.

Journal prompt:

Read the Bible verses for today quietly and slowly. Then read them again but out loud. Write down words or phrases that stick out to you and any thoughts that these phrases bring into your mind.

What Is Finished?
March 10, 2022

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

It will take eternity to fully grasp the greatness and awesomeness of what Jesus accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection. Our worldview needs to grow and change with the amazing reality of what Jesus did for us. It blows my mind when I read this verse, “reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” Jesus purchased freedom for every person—past, present, and future! Jesus is the answer to every problem. In recent years, I have been challenged to change my thinking in any area where I believe the lie that “Jesus can’t.” This is a challenge!

In these verses we see that we are completely forgiven, completely reconciled to our Father and in loving relationship. We are called righteous. We are new creations and have a new life in Him. We are His ambassadors with authority to enforce heaven’s plans on earth. We are saved into eternal life, free of sin and death, healed, forgiven, loved, possessing authority and power to do the same works that Jesus did!

Declaration/Journal prompt:

Declare these statements slowly to “digest” the reality of them and so we can start thinking like Jesus.

- Jesus also bore my sickness and carried my diseases and pain at the cross. By His stripes I am healed! You are my healer and the Lover of my soul!
- Through faith in Jesus I am born again by the Holy Spirit – a new creation. Old things have passed away and all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17).
- I received the Holy Spirit, my advocate, my encouragement, and my best friend, who comes from the Father and shares the Father's Heart for me and teaches me how righteous I really am! (John 16:8)
- The Father has adopted me and given me full sonship in the kingdom and because of this I can cry out for you anytime and anywhere! (Romans 8:14-15)

How do these declarations make you feel? Be honest!

Learning to Live from Victory
March 11, 2022

"We are seated with Christ in heavenly places."

Ephesians 2:6

Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Luke 10:19

Right now, at this very moment, you as a child of the King, are seated with Christ in heavenly places. Right now! That will blow your mind! You and I are in Christ and have authority to rule and reign with him. We need to allow this reality to form and shape our thinking and our actions. I know my prayers used to be begging and asking God to do something, hoping that it was his will. When I found out that I already have the victory and I just need to declare it into my situations, it was a game changer!

If your boss came to you and put you in charge of a job, you would have the authority to make decisions to keep things running smoothly. If you went back to your boss and asked her to tell someone else to fix what was under your control, you missed the point of the assignment. She gave you the authority to do that! We have authority from Jesus and we need to start acting like we have it! We need to stop blaming God and start moving in the authority and power that Jesus purchased for us on the cross. He bought it with His blood and gave it to you, now go walk in it!

Prayer:

I know that at any time and in any place, I can draw near to you, God. You will come close to me because you love to be with me! You say that I am your ambassador to execute your plans and purposes on the earth! You have given me power in Jesus' name to free the captives, live in victory over sin, walk in forgiveness, and experience the empowerment of your Spirit!

Journal prompt:

Starting to think like Jesus is different, scary, and weird at times. Take a few minutes to jot down your feelings about this (struggles, fears, hopes, etc.)

Kingdom Power

March 12, 2022

He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

Matthew 13:31-33

These parables are packed with truths which are applicable on multiple levels. First with respect to you as a person. As your worldview begins to change and you start thinking like Jesus, you may not see impact or growth right away, just like a small mustard seed planted in the ground. Jesus promises us that impact, size, growth is coming. Often the Kingdom breaking into the present starts small but grows in impact. This goes for our prayers also. It is not biblical to believe that our prayers "did not work!" Often our prayers are like small mustard seeds planted in the ground and will bear fruit with time. We call this the slow coming of the Kingdom. It may start small but will not end small. A key to this is partnering with the Holy Spirit just like Jesus did. Jesus said that He cast out demons by the power of the Spirit. The kingdom breaks in by the power of the Holy Spirit and begins like a small mustard seed, then grows to impact and transform the earth. Jesus suffered immensely so that we could have the Holy Spirit living in us. He died to get "Heaven in us." What a thought! Let's take small steps of faith to walk in the fullness of what Jesus died for!

Prayer:

Jesus, I want to walk in the fullness of what you died for. I have thought little of myself, but I realize that you think much of me. You value me and died for me so that I can live for you. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and give me boldness to take steps of faith to walk in authority and power just like you taught us.

Journal prompt:

Write down some “small steps of faith” that you are willing to take for Him.

DAY 7: (SPACE FOR SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES)

Week 4:
The Kingdom Is Coming Immediately
Josh Jones

The Kingdom Is Coming Immediately

March 14, 2022

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

Mark 1:14-15

We have been pondering the Kingdom Story and different aspects of the kingdom of God in this daily devotional. The gospel of the kingdom was the message and ministry of Jesus. He was not just speaking some nice words or instructions. Jesus himself was “inaugurating” the kingdom of God everywhere He went! Though the kingdom *has* come, it is also *yet* to come in its fullness when Jesus will return, fully restoring and reconciling all things and making all things new. This week we are going to meditate on how the kingdom is at hand, how it comes near, how it breaks in suddenly! The Kingdom is coming *immediately*. What does that mean?

The word “immediately” means without lapse of time, without delay, instantly, at once, with no object or space intervening. Mark’s gospel says that Jesus was announcing that the rule and reign of God was breaking into the present. That it was coming immediately, close enough to touch. The in-breaking of the Kingdom was not just a one time occurrence but happened again and again throughout the ministry of Jesus. It hasn’t stopped! Eternity continues to break into our hearts and lives in both subtle and powerful ways.

Declaration:

When we pray the Lord’s prayer we are asking for His kingdom to come not just in some future time, but also immediately! Pray like this today.

“Father, may the goodness and glory of Your name be the truth on which my life turns. Let your kingdom come! Your will be done! Here on earth as it is in heaven! Give me this day what I need, for you are my provider and my king. Forgive me every wrong I’ve done as I release forgiveness to those who have wronged me. Deliver me from evil, rescue me from wrong thoughts and actions. For You have all the authority and You rule with power and glory forever! Amen!”

Journaling prompt:

In what areas are you asking for the Kingdom to break into in your life immediately?

Heralding the Kingdom

March 15, 2022

Listen! I am sending my messenger ahead of you and he will prepare your way! He is a thunderous voice who shouts in the wilderness: "Prepare your hearts for the coming of the Lord Yahweh, make ready the way of the Lord and make His paths immediate [straight]"

Mark 1:2-3

And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Mark 16:15

One of the ways we see the Kingdom of God in action is when God's authority is established in a given space – for example, a physical body, nature, the human soul, relationships, situations or circumstances. In ancient times when a king put forth a new law or ruling, it would go into effect straight away in all areas under his dominion. A "herald" was a person sent by the king with the authoritative new decree. The herald would go to public spaces and declare the King's new law or ruling. As the herald declared the king's decree it would go into effect immediately. John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples were all heralds of God's kingdom! You and I are also called to be heralds of the kingdom of Jesus. Paul called it being an "ambassador" of Christ. When King Jesus issues a ruling, it goes into effect immediately. He sends us as his heralds to the people and places around us and as we declare and proclaim His lordship, it goes into effect. The kingdom can break in immediately! In every hopeless situation we can declare that the kingdom is within arm's reach. As heralds of the King and children of God we can ask, hope for, and expect the immediacy of the Kingdom.

Prayer:

Let Your kingdom advance and be established through the proclamation of Your word and authority in my life and the spaces and lives around me.

Journaling prompt:

Where is Jesus sending you as a herald? What is the Kingdom Story (good news) that you are bringing?

From Darkness to Light
March 16, 2022

For He rescued [delivered, saved] us from the kingdom of darkness. He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Colossians 1:13

In the letter to the church in Colossae, Paul writes that we have been rescued by God from the dominion and authority of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of Jesus. Paul was speaking from his own experience when He wrote this. Take some time and read Acts 9:1-22 now.

Saul [who is later called Paul] was persecuting the church. He was authorized by the chief priests to capture the believers in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem. On his way, he encounters King Jesus. Jesus reveals that he is the one who Saul has been persecuting. When Saul gets up, he is blind. He comes face to face with the reality that he had been spiritually blinded before this encounter and had been held captive by his destructive pursuits. Jesus then sends a man named Ananias to herald the good news to Saul and lay hands on him.

Acts 9 is Paul's story of meeting Jesus and being rescued from the dominion of darkness into the Kingdom of God. What immediately happens when people caught in darkness are rescued by King Jesus? They are transferred into his Kingdom, they are set free, delivered, made whole, set into a right relationship with God, given a new identity, and set into their new destiny of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom!

Confession:

Help me Jesus! Light up my life! Show me any areas that I have been enslaved in darkness, where I have walked blind. Show me any areas of my life that have not yet come in alignment with your kingdom. I want to respond immediately by proclaiming your good news to the world around me. Let the gates of my life and my city be opened for the King of glory to come straight in. Set people free, heal and make them whole in Jesus' name!

Journaling prompt:

Have you seen the Kingdom immediately come into someone's life in a powerful way that totally changed them? What was that like? Write down some of your thoughts as you reflect.

Faith, Power & Authority

March 17, 2022

"Now faith brings our hopes into reality and becomes the foundation needed to acquire the things we long for. It is all the evidence required to prove what is still unseen."

Hebrews 11:1

All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus. As his representatives, we operate under that authority. That being said, Jesus understood his disciples needed authority as well as power. Jesus was sent from the Father and operated under God's authority in his earthly ministry but he was also full of the Spirit and walked in the power of the Spirit. Jesus did miracles, signs and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit. The inbreaking of the kingdom came immediately when the authority of heaven and power of the Spirit worked together. Certainly the authority of Jesus and power of the Spirit are able to break into any situation.

How do we walk in that power today? What does it look like for us to release the powers of the age to come into the "now"? The Father's plan is to use the same dynamic with us that He did with Jesus. When we speak with authority, the power of the Holy Spirit loves to meet us there. At the same time, our faith declarations are not the entire equation. When we fail to understand this, we end up trying to force things to happen through our proclamations alone. The power is not in our words, the power is from God. Faith is the bridge that releases authority and power through us. The joining of God's Word and Spirit releases God's rule into any situation. We must learn how to speak in faith when we see what the Father is doing by growing our ability to perceive the power of the Spirit of God hovering over the chaos in someone's life.

Prayer:

Father, I want to grow closer to you and be your friend. I want to see what you are doing and partner with you. You say it is your good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Set me on the firm foundation of your truth. Let me know, without a doubt, my identity and authority in you. Holy Spirit, thank you for being ever present. Grow me in sensitivity to you.

Space for Journaling:

Learning to Live by the Spirit

March 18, 2022

"God's kingdom does not come simply by obeying principles or waiting for signs. The kingdom is not discovered in one place or another, for behold the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

Luke 17:21-22

The Spirit is like the wind that blows wherever it wants to. One can hear the wind, but not know where it comes from or where it is going.

John 3:8

As we grow in listening and looking for what the Father is doing, we can become more sensitive to the Spirit's activity. If we believe God is always at work, we can learn to perceive what he is doing and join him. The Kingdom is at hand in the lives of the people around us. We just need to see where the Holy Spirit is moving. This takes practice and availability. As we cultivate a lifestyle of the kingdom our hearts are sensitized to it and the voice and the activity of God wherever we go. (Acts 3:1-9)

When we're in our neighborhoods, schools, grocery stores, and workplaces, God often has gifts he wants to give to those who don't know him yet. This is one of the greatest privileges of learning to walk in authority and power of the kingdom. We can join the Spirit in touching someone's life in a dramatic way. We call these "power encounters" in the Vineyard. God often uses our local church to reach people "as we go". It is here that the kingdom breaks in!

Journaling prompt:

Have you ever had a “power encounter”? Take time to journal about it and reflect on it. How do you see that encounter differently, understanding the idea of the Kingdom coming immediately?

The 'Not Yet' of the Kingdom

March 19, 2022

You have crowned him [Jesus] with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Hebrews 2:7-8

Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 7:7

The gospel of the kingdom is complex. How do we wrap our minds around the idea that the kingdom has come, it will come, it is coming immediately, and it will be delayed? We live in a tension where we believe all of these things are true. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness are still at war. As Hebrews 2 says, Jesus has been crowned king of all, yet we have not seen everything submitted to him. This has as much to do with human free will as it does with his desire to partner with us. The reality of our experience is that the Kingdom doesn't always come suddenly in the ways we want it to break in.

What do we do when we don't see the Kingdom break into a specific situation or circumstance? What do we do when healing does not happen when we pray? It's easy to get discouraged, disappointed, or even give up. Though we may not see it in a moment, we must remember that He has been crowned King and His gospel (good news) is that the kingdom is at hand. So we ask and keep asking, we pray and we keep praying. Rather than get offended or quit we press into God. As long as Jesus is bigger in our eyes than any circumstance, we will have strength to continue forward in spite of discouragement.

Journaling Prompt:

Write down any areas where you are still waiting for the Kingdom of God to break into. Take some time to ask Jesus to become bigger in your eyes than these situations or areas of discouragement.

Now again ask for His rule and reign to come into those areas. Ask for his perspective. Ask him what he wants to do in those areas. Ask him how to pray and how you can partner with him. Write those things down and share them with someone.

DAY 7: (SPACE FOR SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES)

Week 5:
The Kingdom Has Been Delayed
Deb Anderson

The Lord's Prayer & The Delay of the Kingdom

March 21, 2022

Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus gave us this prayer as an example of a daily prayer. The prayer was addressed to a holy Father God. It declares "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." On earth as it is in heaven is the standard. It commands us to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." Father God is delighted to provide for our daily needs. The prayer puts forgiveness in the context of forgiving others. It asks God to "not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And ends with a declaration "Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Clearly, the kingdom was important. Our job is to pray and bring the will of heaven to earth. It is not a "given" that it is already accomplished. Praying the purposes of heaven to earth is on our "to do" list.

Our job is to faithfully pray and look to the Lord to bring it to pass. The challenge comes when we don't see answers to prayer on our timeline. What do we do when the kingdom is delayed? We continue to remain in faith and trust in Him. Is our faith dependent on instant gratification or entitlement? No, God invites us to partner with Him. He is sovereign and majestic and always generous but never a "vending machine". We partner with Him according to His will.

Prayer:

Father, show us how to pray for your kingdom to come and for your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Take time to pray for the kingdom to come in specific situations around you.

Journal Prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example below.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example below.

The Day of the Lord

March 22, 2022

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

2 Peter 1:5-7

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him with-out spot or blemish and at peace.

2 Peter 3:14

Peter prepares to give his final words before his death. In this farewell, he encourages the followers of Jesus to never stop growing in character: goodness, knowledge, love, godliness, endurance and affection. Love can be defined as "devoting oneself to the well-being of others no matter their response or the cost". He writes to "be diligent to confirm your calling." Peter warns them about false teachers. He addresses Jesus' return. Peter reminds them that God has spoken about justice and that God delivers his people. He exhorts them not to be slaves to impulses or to use grace and freedom wrongly but walk in obedience instead.

Generations fail to see the return of Jesus. Why is God taking so long? The delay of the coming kingdom is a sign of God's patience. We continue to hope. Evil will be exposed and a new heaven and earth will emerge. Christ affirms that God loves the world. He will deal with sin and injustice. There is wide hope for the whole world and Peter encourages us to examine our everyday lives while growing in the "grace and knowledge of the Lord".

Prayer:

Lord, help me to grow in faith and character as I wait for you and your return. Increase my hope in areas where it wavers. Give me faith for things that seem too big for me but not too big for you. Give me discernment in this life that I might not be led astray. Show me any area where I might be operating in falsehood and direct me back to your right path.

Journal Prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example.

Questioning God's Goodness

March 23, 2022

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

Isaiah 55:9

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16

We are made in the image of God, but we are not his equal. God invites us to partner with Him, but we don't perfectly know His will. His ways are holy while we are learning to see life through heavenly glasses with our own earthly eyes. It is an aspect of human nature to question God and his goodness. But that natural thinking needs transformation. God's ways are higher than our own. We don't have His heavenly perspective at all times to see why this or that happens or doesn't happen. We need to realize His character. He does all things well. He is not fickle and does not withhold his love because you or I made a mistake. He doesn't just love us when we are "good" and dislike us when we've been a troublemaker. His heart is constant toward us. He is with us and for us and seeks to lead us.

We blame God for our difficulties. He didn't cause a fender bender when we were inattentive at the wheel. We had a fender bender because two cars were trying to share the same space. He didn't cause cancer or illness to "teach us a lesson". A lot of illness is due to natural causes such as over exposure to illness or toxins. The promise is His presence and that He is *with us* in all things. The fact that we are never alone in our messes, troubles, trials, or heartaches is worth celebrating.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that you are higher than us yet you love us. We declare that we are well loved by you. You are generous toward us. Your heart is with us and for us. Enlarge our picture of you to understand more of who you are. Show us where our thinking might be off track - where we blame you for things that were not your doing. Lead us into all truth. Bring more of your kingdom perspective into our lives.

Journaling prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example.

Spiritual Battle and Kingdom Delay

March 24, 2022

"O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." . . . Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia."

Daniel 10:11-13

Ever since the Garden of Eden, there has been spiritual conflict. Spiritual battle is also a reason for the delay of the kingdom. In our passage, Daniel was praying to God. God was answering his prayer from the first day he prayed, but it took 21 days for the answer due to unseen spiritual warfare. It is easy for us to overlook spiritual battle. We see the natural world and do not recognize interference from the powers of darkness.

It can also be easy for us to attribute every little thing to spiritual battle. Maybe you didn't oversleep because Satan was trying to make you late, you overslept because you stayed up too late and slept through your alarm! While spiritual darkness is real, it is important to not ascribe more power to it than it has. While Satan is God's adversary, he is not his equal. While Satan has some powers in this world, he is not omnipotent and omnipresent like God.

God gives us weapons of warfare to be successful. Flee from evil. Put on the armor of God. Rebuke the evil one. Use the sword of truth. Be aware that Satan twists scripture to beguile us. Also, Satan tries to accuse us and dash all hope, but when the Holy Spirit corrects us - he always delivers it with hope!

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to discern the difference between what is spiritual battle and what is a natural consequence of living in this fallen world. Train me to battle according to your word. Help me to grasp your truth while cutting me off from the lies and accusations of the evil one.

Journal Prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example.

Pray the Kingdom Into Being

March 25, 2022

A nobleman went to a far country to receive a kingdom and return. He gave ten servants ten minas. Engage in business until I return. One made ten minas more, one five minas, and one hid the mina out of fear. The one who acted in fear lost the mina and it was given to the one who made 10. To everyone who has, more will be given, but the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

Luke 19:11-27 (paraphrased)

God wants his kingdom and his reign to come to earth through his people. The kingdom is built brick by brick and person by person. The thing with sin is you get "sick of it". There is nothing like the beauty of the kingdom. Freedom from sin, addiction and deception is amazing. The love of Jesus is unmatched. Having a clear conscience is unparalleled. The world longs for what Jesus' kingdom has to offer.

We need to press in - in prayer, neighborly, fasting, and declaring territory for Him. We can be intentional to change the atmosphere around us by fasting one meal a week, memorizing scripture, or praying for a stranger. We can be part of spreading the good news and advancing the kingdom by knowing and sharing God's love. How do we wait for his kingdom well? We can waste time as we wait or we can spend our time well. Waiting can be intentional or passive, effective or ineffective. There is an art to waiting in faith. What are you waiting for? How do you partner with Him to make it happen? Ask him to show the way.

Prayer:

Lord, I stand in faith and speak, "may your kingdom come." I agree with the purposes of heaven and want to bring your will to the earth. Thank you for using me to partner with you in bringing the kingdom. Help me to be a person who is actively growing in faith, prayer and who shares your love and light in the midst of darkness.

Journal prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example.

The Tension of the Kingdom of God

March 26, 2022

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. The enemy secretly sowed weeds in the field. The field grew wheat and weeds. The workers asked the owner, "should we gather the weeds?" The owner said no, you might uproot good wheat. Let the field grow and let the reapers gather the weeds first to be burned but gather the wheat in my barn.

Matthew 13: 24-30 (Paraphrased)

We live in a world of tension - the now and the not yet. The kingdom is here and the kingdom is coming, the promises of God are now and the promises of God are yet to come. Tension stretches us. We must learn to live in an incomplete world while waiting in faith for what is to come.

From the parable of the wheat and the weeds, we learn the heart of God for people. He loves the "wheat" so much that he did not want to prune the field of weeds during the growing season and suffer the loss of even one shaft of wheat. Wait for the harvest time. Then separate the wheat from the weeds so that none are lost. That is the Lord's heart for believers! Wait - give as much opportunity as possible for all to believe.

We can see that the kingdom waits for more to have an opportunity to believe. Matthew 24: 14 says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come". It is for God's love for all people that the kingdom waits.

Prayer:

Lord let my heart beat with the beat of your heart for others. Thank you for your patience with me in my human shortcomings and for your patience with the world. While the world is in chaos you wait for more to enter your kingdom. Show me how to spread your kingdom in Oxford and beyond.

Journal prompt:

Lord, I thank you for where I have witnessed answered prayer in the past. Write an example.

Lord, help me to continue to pray for this yet unanswered prayer. Write an example.

DAY 7: (SPACE FOR SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES)

Week 6:
Living In Kingdom Tension
John Richter

Revisiting Our Worldview
March 28, 2022

"Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness."

Luke 11:34

In this verse Jesus is teaching us that our worldview – how we see ourselves, others, and God – is critical in this battle against darkness! If we are not walking in the light and seeing the kingdom story properly, we will not live in our destiny. Hopefully our worldviews are shifting and we're beginning to see life as Jesus sees it. All of us have a place in this kingdom story and a part in ruling and reigning to see the kingdom of God transform the world around us. It begins with allowing the Holy Spirit to help us see life from His kingdom perspective. This week we are going to focus on practical ways of how we live based on the understanding of this kingdom worldview that we are growing in.

Prayer:

Let's again take a moment to surrender our belief and perspective to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to come and transform how you view your life and others from his perspective.

Journal prompt:

Pause and take a moment to think about how your worldview has been changing over the last six weeks. Then jot down some of the specific areas in your notes.

Living With Eternity in Mind March 29, 2022

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."

John 18:36-37

In Jesus' response to Pilate, we get a glimpse of this supernatural, eternal kingdom. It's good to be reminded that the physical world we live in is not all there is. As followers of Christ, we are new creations. We are natural and supernatural – body, soul, and spirit – and we need to live and think from this supernatural eternal perspective. The challenge for us is to stay focused on this present reality and not believe that "eternity" is solely something in the future. As kingdom citizens, eternity is a "now" experience. Each of us is called to be a conduit to draw eternity into the "now". We call this the breaking in of the kingdom. This is our new normal. Brian Blount says, "Every time it happens, I am shocked. Every time it does not appear to happen, I am shocked as well." May we all live with eternity in mind and be shocked if we do not appear to see it break in!

Declaration³:

Father God, You are good. Your covenant with me is amazing! Father God, You love me! Father, You will always love me! Father, You like to be with me. Father, You enjoy me. Father, You love to you partner with me to do kingdom Miracles in the earth! I am Your Friend. I am Your Daughter (Son). I am Your ambassador in the earth.

³ If our declarations are not difficult to believe, then we are not exercising our faith!

Journal prompt:

Yesterday we jotted down areas where we don't believe or trust in the finished work of Jesus and that his kingdom has come. Now write down declarations of truth based on the finished work of Jesus for each one of these areas.

The Father's Pleasure
March 30, 2022

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Luke 12:32

Think about the diagram that we looked at in the first weeks of the series where we deduced that God's goodness is simple and that he is always good and his love is always towards us. His sovereignty is complicated. We are in a cosmic battle to enforce the kingdom of light and dispel the darkness; to work with our God to redeem the world and make all things new.

It is easy to fall into a mindset that God is not working or only works sometimes and that the kingdom of heaven is not really at hand. This verse encourages me every day and I have to remind myself that it is truly the fathers pleasure to give us the kingdom! He is longing to break into our situations and circumstances with truth, life, love, healing, and power. It's not just meant for a select few, but everyone who is his child gets to experience and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer:

Today is a good day to pray like the father with the epileptic son in Mark chapter 9. Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief! Believing that Father God wants to break into our lives with His kingdom is a major shift in thinking. Let's declare our scripture for the day making it personal – "It is the Father's good pleasure to give me the kingdom!"

Journal prompt:

Journal any doubts, fears, concerns that you have about this scripture in your personal life. What situations have screamed to you that this verse is not true. Write your own personal declaration of faith in this verse and the Father's goodness to break into your life with His kingdom power.

The Upside-Down Kingdom

March 31, 2022

“What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Matthew 21:28-32

The heroes of the world are not necessarily the heroes of God! The kingdom of God is made of the lowly, the meek, the poor, the humble, and the people who don't necessarily make the news, become famous, or have a lot of money. The kingdom of heaven is upside down compared to the world. All of this makes sense when we think of the reality that the world is dominated and ruled by darkness. If we're really going to follow Jesus we must embrace the reality that we are called to live counter-culturally, to not go with the flow, to be different, to stand out, to even appear weird when compared to the world.

This is why it's so important that our kingdom identity is found solely in who we are in Christ and that we are his beloved children. Embracing your identity in Christ is of utmost importance for your spiritual journey. I would encourage you to meditate regularly on who you are in Christ and all Jesus says about you because it is from this identity that we fulfill our destiny.

Prayer:

Father, I give you my worldview. I see that you value things differently than the world. Sometimes I have had values that do not align with yours. I give you my ideas, mindsets, prejudices, desires, and intentions and ask that you remove those that do not align with your goodness, truth, and beauty.

Journal prompt:

Pause for a moment and think of any values that are upside down from God's values. List those down and any lies that you have believed associated with these values.

“Stop the Blame Game”

April 1, 2022

You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.” Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Hebrews 2:7-9

In the kingdom story we are living in the tension of the “Now and Not Yet” – the “complete, yet incomplete” nature of the kingdom. This scripture captures the “Not Yet” of the kingdom. There is a tension we live in, in which we sometimes see the kingdom break in, and sometimes we don’t. Kingdom theology helps us to better understand this tension and avoid the “Blame Game.”

When we adopt a worldview that says God controls every aspect of life down to the tiniest detail, we naturally blame God for acts of evil, taking parents, bringing disease, allowing abuse, and so on. We might blame ourselves or others for not having enough faith to be healed. In the kingdom story, we are free to put the blame on the source of it all, the devil, who came to steal, kill, and destroy. We get to stop questioning Father’s love for us! God’s motives are not manipulative or confusing and he doesn’t use evil means to achieve his ends. We don’t have to distort the details to believe evil things like disease and death are somehow “good”. We now have a grid to process disappointment and to run to God with our questions, pain, and suffering because we understand the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness are still in conflict in this age.

Prayer:

Father, I ask you to forgive me for blaming you for acts of evil. I have questioned your motives and intentions in the past. I am done with believing those lies! I know that you are always for me and that you are always good! You are my safe place and I will run to you with my doubts, questions, hurts, and pains.

Journal prompt:

If you have had any specific situations in the past where you blamed God, right these out as a letter to Him. Many times this can be a barrier to our relationship with God because it can grow into resentment and even bitterness. Know that He is a safe place to be authentic.

Learning to Fight
April 2, 2022

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:12

It is time to enter into the battle and fight the fight of faith! As kingdom ambassadors, this is not an option but a responsibility. As Uncle Ben told Spider-Man, "with great power comes great responsibility!" There is truth in this statement and the reality is that we have access by the Holy Spirit to incredible power that can change lives, heal bodies, deliver people from evil, and work incredible miracles. I'm reminded of Star Wars and the story of Luke Skywalker becoming a Jedi. We aren't instantly skilled "Jedi" of the kingdom.

It truly is a learning process to grow in discerning the Holy Spirit's voice and activities around us so we can partner with Him to bring in the kingdom. We need to have patience with ourselves as we grow or we will quit trying to get up every time we stumble and fall. We must learn to rest in this covenant of grace that is always abounding towards us while never settling for anything less than the breaking in of the kingdom in our everyday lives.

Declaration:

I am a warrior for Christ. The weapons of my warfare are mighty to tear down strongholds. I do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers of evil in the spiritual realms. I am a temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore the kingdom of God is within me and upon me to destroy the works of the devil. I know that his grace is always sufficient for me, even when I stumble. I know my father is with me, for me, and loves me.

Journal prompt:

Take a few minutes to reflect on the last six weeks of the Kingdom Story Series. List down three of the most impactful truths that have impacted your worldview. Now list three more actions that you were going to take based off of this series to continue to grow in your identity, authority and destiny.

DAY 7: (SPACE FOR SUNDAY'S SERMON NOTES)

