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Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and men about him spread through the whole countryside. ²⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom. He stood up to read, ²⁶ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ²⁷ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has

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LUKE :

THE KINGDOM

OF GOD

We are so excited for you to engage in this study on the Kingdom of God! We're excited for a lot of reasons, but the heart of it comes down to this: The kingdom of God is one of Jesus' central messages, and understanding and living it out helps us to understand the heart of God, and extend his grace and love towards our communities.

If you read through the gospels, you will find that much of what Jesus says and does centers around the reality of "The Kingdom of God." Jesus' parables teach us about what the Kingdom of God is, and Jesus' miracles give us a glimpse into what the Kingdom of God is like.

Our heart for you as you go through the next three weeks of devotions is that you would understand what the Kingdom of God is, that is would awaken a passion in you for the things of God, and that you would find practical ways to embody and live out the realities of God's Kingdom Way.

So, what is the Kingdom of God? The Kingdom of God is God's personal rule and reign over all things, including people. The message

of the Kingdom is that God has always been moving towards restoring all things back into right relationship. God's Kingdom is not like earthly kingdoms, which have long been characterized by dominating power or even violence, but God's Kingdom is a kingdom of peace, wholeness, goodness, grace, and love where all things and all people are invited in order to be fully restored to their God-given potential. Jesus came to proclaim and usher in that Kingdom, that world where all things are made new. When we look around our world, we see a deep need for the transforming grace of God to bring that renewal, and as followers of Jesus, he invites us into the work he has been doing since the very beginning - to bring all things into perfect peace, to restore humanity, and to restore the earth. We get to be a part of this (and that's some good news!), and in the pages of this devotional we hope that you find deeper understanding of The Kingdom, deeper understanding of how Scripture talks about God's Kingdom way, and practical ways to live out what God is calling us into.

**HOW
TO USE
THIS
CURRICULUM**

This curriculum has five days of devotions for each week, with each day related to a particular question. You will read the devotion and answer the prompts that are provided at the end of each day.

DAY ONE: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

This is the day where a new concept about The Kingdom will be explained.

DAY TWO: WHAT ELSE DOES SCRIPTURE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS?

We want you to dig deep into Scripture and see where else we find these same concepts.

DAY THREE: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE MY LIFE?

We want you to look inward and see how this directly impacts the way you live.

DAY FOUR: HOW DO I LIVE THIS OUT?

Now that you know what needs to change, this day will help prompt you with practical ways to implement those changes.

DAY FIVE: WHAT FROM THIS WEEK DO I NEED TO RETURN TO?

This day is an opportunity to go back to days 1-4 and see what you need to sit with a little longer.

If you are doing this study with your group, your group leader will have questions based around the different days of the devotions for you to all unpack together. We hope you find these tools helpful as we learn about God's Kingdom together!

WEEK ONE

**SEEK
THE
KINGDOM**

NOTES:

DAY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Kingdom. Simply defined, it is a place ruled by a king or queen. It is a monarchy that provides protection and establishes law for its people. Kings and kingdoms are likely far removed from your experience. So maybe you solely use the word to describe your own private domain. However you use it, the basic premise is that someone is in charge. And we like being in charge of what is ours—and often what is not. In the U.S., we better understand democracy, where rule by the people and individual rights are fundamental. So, other than our culture's fascination with British royalty, kingdom is a foreign idea that challenges our desire to be in charge.

Kingdom is a key part of Jesus' message—The Kingdom of God. It is an abstract concept but we instinctively recognize its importance, even if we do not fully understand it. Jesus' original audience deeply understood the significance of these words. The Hebrew nation of Israel was once a mighty kingdom ruled by God; a kingdom he established with a promise that through them he would bless all nations.

Israel was the nation who God chose to bear his name and fulfill his purposes far into the future. God's presence brought blessing and abundance, and they were esteemed and feared by other nations. But they continually rebelled. They committed extreme idolatry, practiced rampant social injustices, and relied on ritual worship rather than sincere devotion. They refused God's rule, squandering their status and security. Eventually, destruction came to their families, leaders, city, and temple, the place of God's presence among them. Physically, culturally, and spiritually everything was destroyed. But God promised that one day he would return and restore his kingdom.

Centuries later, when Jesus arrived, Israel was still under the shadow of someone else's rule, **wondering if God remembered them.**

When Jesus proclaimed God's Kingdom had arrived it was the good news God's people longed for. They understood he was bringing the freedom, justice, and peace that comes with God's presence and rule. They knew he was restoring everything to its right order, as it was in the beginning. And they rejoiced.

Jesus' message of the Kingdom was called the gospel, which literally means "good news." This Kingdom of God, good news message that Jesus brought was something so big that he used a variety of teachings and practical examples to explain it. Even his miracles pointed to the Kingdom of God. While this new Kingdom was not what the Hebrew people expected (physical freedom from the rule of other nations) it was a greater message. In Jesus, God was establishing his rule over the whole world, even among the nations that oppressed his people. It was a message of restoration, promises fulfilled, and hope, not just for the future, but for the present. Through Jesus, the whole world would be blessed. And that would change everything—people, communities, and the world itself.

The good news of the Kingdom was not only for the nation of Israel, **but for all of us.**

In this week's passage, we join Jesus as he addresses a group of people experiencing the worries, anxieties, fears, and concerns of life, both big and small

*"And don't be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don't worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else**, and he will give you everything you need. So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom."* Luke 12:29-32

Notice the highlighted phrase: *Seek the Kingdom of God above all else.*

Now, read the verses again and this time put yourself in the crowd. What do you notice? What stands out to you?

If you are like me, you have questions. What does that mean, “seek the Kingdom?” What does that look like in my life? Write down your questions.

Now, read the same Scripture in a modern paraphrased version of the Bible, called *The Message*.

“What I’m trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God’s giving. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don’t be afraid of missing out. You’re my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.” Luke 29:32

What resonates with you and makes you think? Were any questions answered? Does this version create new questions?

After reading the introduction and Day 1, how would you describe the Kingdom of God?

How would you define your own “kingdom” or personal domain? What does it include?

As you consider Jesus’ command to seek God’s kingdom above all else, how does it impact the way you operate in your own domain? How might it change your priorities or how you relate to God and to others?

Through the course of the week, we will further explore the answers to these important questions. As we do so, imagine what could change if the Kingdom of God, the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, shaped and informed all areas of our lives.

DAY 2: WHAT ELSE DOES SCRIPTURE SAY ABOUT THIS?

How often do we see a post on social media celebrating a promotion, a new car, or a fabulous vacation in a beautifully warm place followed by #BLESSED? These are exciting things, and worthy of celebration, but when I read the words of Jesus, I feel pretty sure we somehow missed the true meaning of blessed. But then, I don't necessarily recommend these kinds of posts either: persecuted today! #BLESSED, feeling pretty meek today #BLESSED, or check out my pure heart #BLESSED. That would be weird...and misunderstood.

In today's Scripture, we'll see the same words Jesus spoke in Luke 12:29-32. We find these words in the middle of a sermon where Jesus taught on the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5-7). But first, let's back up to the chapter before:

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. Matthew 4:24-25

It was to these people Jesus spoke the following:

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matthew 6:32-34

Jesus told the crowd to seek God's kingdom first, but this time he included the phrase "his righteousness." I'm not sure about you, but on the surface, that's not a clarifying statement. It feels even more distant. We are so removed from the time and culture of Jesus that the language can be confusing. But, by understanding the concepts behind "righteousness," a word we rarely hear outside the bible, we can have a clearer understanding of what Jesus tells us to seek.

In ancient Israel, righteousness involved actions between people that promoted well-being and peace in the community. It described a right relationship where one looked out for the other and everyone else benefitted. Righteousness became associated with justice as a strongly ethical idea that one's actions were to support the well-being of the community. This kind of righteous justice included the idea of advocating for the poor and needy, including giving money or food to help them.

Mankind's righteousness has nothing to do with their actions, rather, it is an overflow of God's righteousness in those who choose to live under God's rule. Righteousness is part of God's character, and his purposes promote well-being, peace, and justice for those in the community. It also includes those who need the support of the community. So then, seeking God's righteousness means being in a right relationship with God where our actions promote well-being and peace, not just in ourselves, but in our community. Seeking God's Kingdom means pursuing his purposes and plans for our lives and for the lives of others.

If you read the whole sermon surrounding today's Scripture, called The Sermon on the Mount, more of God's character emerges based on the values and principles Jesus teaches. In Matthew 5:3-10, the first section of his sermon, we read what is called the Beatitudes. Being blessed implies being fully satisfied by God's gracious kindness.

Here we see his grace bestowed on those who we would not expect, those who desire the satisfaction that comes from living in his Kingdom. Rather than the religious, educated, wealthy, and powerful, Jesus turns the human value system upside down.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Read the verses again. Circle those who are shown gracious kindness.

Now go back through and underline the ways God gives grace.

In light of the upside-down value system Jesus described, how could seeking the Kingdom above everything else reframe your thoughts, conversations, and interactions with those around you? Try to be specific.

DAY 3: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE MY LIFE?

When the Good News of the Gospel comes into our lives, and we begin to trust Jesus and his work on our behalf, we are also brought into God's family - a community of believers we call The Church - to pursue God's Kingdom priorities and way of life together. Trusting Jesus is one thing. But trusting people, even God's people, is often another story. How many of us have thought, "If they really knew me, or what I thought about them, or what I did last night, or about my past, would they really accept me?"

Although shame and guilt often bully us into hiding, seeking the Kingdom in all areas of our lives includes our own individual, inner worlds. Living in honest relationship with God and being fully known by others is part of accepting Jesus' invitation to embrace a life of Kingdom values and purposes.

In Psalm 139:1-18, David offers us a poetic example of surrender and trust:

*O Lord, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.*

You know when I sit down or stand up.

You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

*You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.*

You know everything I do.

*You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, Lord.*

You go before me and follow me.

You place your hand of blessing on my head.

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!*

I can never escape from your Spirit!

I can never get away from your presence!

If I go up to heaven, you are there;

if I go down to the grave, you are there.

If I ride the wings of the morning,

if I dwell by the farthest oceans,

even there your hand will guide me,

and your strength will support me.

I could ask the darkness to hide me

and the light around me to become night—

but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.

To you the night shines as bright as day.

Darkness and light are the same to you.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body

and knit me together in my mother's womb.

Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!

Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,

as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

*Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.
How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.
They cannot be numbered!
I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!*

This is David's way of saying, "God, you know everything about me, everywhere I go, and you know parts of my life I can't even remember or understand." In other words, God knew David better than he knew himself. And the same is true for us.

That kind of intimate knowledge might be intimidating at first, but consider what we learn from David's words. God knows your every thought, your every move, your every word, even every cell in your body. And instead of pulling away from you, he draws near. When he thinks about you, he is delighted. He loves you so fully that he died so you can live.

As you consider allowing the Kingdom of God to permeate your whole life, even your own inner world, how does that make you feel? If it causes you some anxiety, where is that coming from? What is holding you back?

How does the reality of God's deep love for you change how you feel about being fully known by others?

Re-read David's words from Psalm 139. But before you do, ask God what he wants you to learn about him and how he sees you. Write down what you learn below.

DAY 4: HOW DO I LIVE THIS OUT?

One way to describe seeking the Kingdom of God is simply joining Jesus. In order to accept that invitation from Jesus, it's important for us to understand his purposes and priorities. Let's begin by looking at the prophet Isaiah's description of what Jesus would accomplish:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.

To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory. They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations. Isaiah 61:1-4

Centuries later, Jesus quoted this very passage from Isaiah as he taught in the Synagogue:

Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about him spread quickly through the whole region. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

Luke 4:14-21

Matthew offers us this record of how Jesus lived in fulfillment of that prophecy:

Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields." Matthew 9:35-38

Look back through those passages. What do you notice about the focus or priorities of the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed?

Instead of focusing on lofty spiritual concepts, when he announced himself as the fulfillment of all the promises of Isaiah 61, Jesus stepped directly into the real world of pain, disappointment and brokenness. He met people as there were, in their place of need, undeterred by the messiness.

Following this example may require significant change. We may be asked to change how we relate to the people in our lives. We may be asked to change how we think about our neighbors and our cities. It may require us to change the posture of our hearts. As we begin to understand and surrender to Jesus' Kingdom priorities, our own priorities change and we can begin to see where Jesus is already at work all around us.

Consider your own city and neighborhood. Where can you see God already at work? What would it look like for you to join him in that work?

Consider the people in your spheres of influence (your neighborhood, your workplace, your school, your social circles, your extended family). Who can you pray for, demonstrate care for, share the goodness of God's Kingdom with? How might your life intersect with God's activity in their lives?

Make a plan to reach out to and spend time with the individual(s) who God brought to mind. How can you be "good news" in their life this week?

DAY 5: WHAT FROM THIS WEEK DO I NEED TO RETURN TO?

Today, spend some time reviewing your notes from the past week.

What did God teach you?

What have you learned about seeking God's Kingdom?

Are there any "Aha!" moments you don't want to forget?

Was there a day you skimmed through and "phoned it in?"

What do you want to be sure to discuss with your small group or a friend?

Take time to write those things down or revisit a day you want to spend more time with. Then write an honest prayer to God thanking him for meeting you as you spent time seeking him this week.

WEEK TWO

LIVE

THE

KINGDOM

NOTES:

DAY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Last week we looked at the Kingdom of God as something we should seek. This week let's focus on living in the Kingdom of God. Again, we will start by looking to Jesus to understand what living in the Kingdom means for us.

When reading the accounts of Jesus' life, it becomes obvious that prayer was an integral part of his ministry. Not only do we see him interact with his Father when performing miracles, but more often we see him retreat to spend time alone with God. Sometimes he goes to seek direction, sometimes he goes to recharge, and sometimes he goes because only the Father can understand the difficulty of his ministry and what lies ahead. A few times Jesus takes his closest friends with him to pray.

In one instance, a disciple asked him to teach them to pray. We find that account in Luke 11, and Jesus' response in verses 1-4:

Jesus said, "This is how you should pray:

"Father, may your name be kept holy.

May your Kingdom come soon.

Give us each day the food we need,

and forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

And don't let us yield to temptation."

That's it. Having read this prayer from childhood, memorizing it, quoting it, and hearing others quote it, I am still amazed that Jesus' prayer was not elaborate. It was simple and straightforward. And to someone whose prayers are not eloquent, it is a relief to see. But I also realize as short as it is and as simple as it seems, there is a lot of meaning packed into these three verses and so many things to learn about how to live in his Kingdom.

1. Even Jesus prayed in order to keep his mind on the things of God.

To live in God's kingdom is to allow God to influence and guide our lives. Prayer is one way I can surrender to him. When I pray, I take the time to verbalize to God what is important. That quiet time alone or in a small group recharges me, comforts me, gives me confidence, resets my thinking, and gives me a chance to be heard by the One who loves me more than anyone else, the One who created me, who champions me, and desires good things for me. We know prayer benefits the person who prays because we see it in the life of Jesus, read about it in the Psalms, hear the stories of others whose lives were changed by prayer, and experience it for ourselves.

2. God, our Father, is holy.

Even though I am created in his image, he is not like me. He is set apart from me and everyone else by his purity. He is the ruler and creator of all things. He is the one who is complete in his goodness and righteousness. If God is holy, if he is my creator, if he is perfect in his completeness, then I'm pretty sure he knows better than I do. And it's really important for me to understand that I am not God. So, when I surrender my life to him, agreeing to his guidance and direction in my life, I need to recognize that he knows better. The life he calls me to lead is not to make life harder, but to give me a life of abundance in him—in his grace, strength, power, humility, freedom, and so much more. Because of that, I can surrender everything that burdens me and trust him.

3. Each day I need to commit to living in God's Kingdom.

While I physically live in a broken world, I can recognize that I am part of God's plan to reconcile the world to him. I am his representative to bring healing and peace and grace and love to those around me. I am his messenger to bring the Good News to those who need his direction and guidance in their lives, just like I do. Each day, I need to ask for his Kingdom to come to remind myself to live in what he has to offer now, and

not wait until life is over and I am with him in eternity. That will come. But he empowers me, he guides me, he comforts me, and gives me joy today. I don't have to wait.

4. Ask him to provide what I need.

A loving Father provides what his child needs, but not necessarily wants. I can trust him to know what I need, when I need it, and if I need it. Even when I am unsure of what my needs are, he knows, and I can ask him to give what he knows I need. Even when I know he knows, I still ask, because I want to show him that I trust him, so I ask with expectation. And, when I ask and receive, I have no doubt it was from him, and it reminds me to thank him and trust him even more. And he gives me lots of reminders to just ask. I can go back and read last week's Scripture from Luke 12:31. Or keep reading in Luke 11. For the next eight verses he tells a good story and reminds his disciples to keep praying, and always expecting. Those words are for me, too.

5. Ask forgiveness because I am not perfect.

So, while we're asking for things, it's the right time to acknowledge my wrongfulness and ask his forgiveness, even though he knows all the details of my bad behavior – usually in my thoughts or my attitude, but sometimes more. Unfortunately, saying I'm sorry doesn't make it right. It's what I do with my sorry. First is to recognize I got trapped by my own selfishness or anger or whatever it is that hooks me, and acknowledge it. Sometimes saying I'm sorry isn't just between God and me, but maybe there was another person involved. So, asking forgiveness is the next step. Last, it's important to ask for his strength, his reminder, and his help so that I can become untangled and stay away from the bait to begin with. It's often self-focus that gets me in trouble, so part of the process for me is to focus on him and his Kingdom. Then I can begin to be set free from that part of me that is so unlike him and the person he created me to be. Kingdom living recognizes that I cannot do it on my own, so I focus my eyes on him—his guidance, his wisdom, his strength.

6. Don't hold grudges.

"Forgive them! But Jesus, they didn't just sin against God, they sinned against me! They did us both wrong." Now that you've seen my real thoughts, my selfish thoughts, I am reminded that Jesus did no wrong, and he still suffered the consequences of a world gone wrong. He freely offered himself to make it right. Let me say this another way. God, the holy one, the creator of the universe and everything in it, the one who is perfect and good, loved me so much that he sent his son, who gave up his deity, his God-ness, his other-worldliness to become a man, to live in this crazy world within the confines of a limited human body, fully knowing he would be demeaned, humiliated, and tortured to death. Fully knowing he could change it with a spoken word, he still chose to go through with such an undignified and painful death. And while in the grave, he fought death for three days, a part of the story for which I don't know the details, and cannot imagine. But he did win and he is now alive. And here's the kicker – he forgave those who killed him, even while they killed him, and he knew that he was dying for them. And now Jesus is asking me to forgive those around me who don't know him and don't like me and who may have ruined my life – or those who do know him and like me, which is a worse betrayal. When I think of it that way, surely I can forgive those who did me wrong, including the one who was my friend or family member and hurt me even more. And, because of Jesus' love for them, I am asking him to help me love them, too.

7. Help!

This brings me to the last part of Jesus' prayer, one I definitely need to pray every day. "Give me the strength to not give in to all those temptations." Not just the ones I want to do, but the ones I don't want to do, like yell at my kids or make a snide comment about the woman in the checkout line, all because I was focused on myself and my own "needs." I want to be a nice person, a good person. I want to look like Jesus. Sigh! "Father, let me live according to the unselfish love you show me, to all of us. Let me live each

day as gracious, and kind, and patient, and each day become more like you. Transform me more and more to your likeness.”

Here is the key to living a life for God in his Kingdom. I must prayerfully decide to offer my plans to God in exchange for his plans. It is to allow the truth of who God is, what he has done, and who I am in him to define and inform my life. It means I have to lay down my kingdom control for his Kingdom’s purpose. It requires trusting him, relying on his strength, offering forgiveness to myself and others, and living in a posture of humility. But because of who he is, it is what I choose. And my prayer is that each day you choose the Kingdom life, too, so that we can live this life together. Because together is better and how God designed it.

Where in your life are you struggling to exchange your own plans for God’s?

In what area(s) of your life do you struggle to trust in God’s ways and timing?

How can Jesus’ example of prayer influence what “living the Kingdom” looks like in your daily life?

DAY 2: WHAT ELSE DOES SCRIPTURE SAY ABOUT THIS?

We concluded yesterday by remembering that living in God's kingdom involves exchanging our plans for God's purposes. We do this with an understanding of who God is, what he has done, and who we are in him. Naturally, we have to trust God, knowing he sees beyond what we can see. And because sometimes God asks us to do hard things, we have to rely on his strength to remain faithful to the plan.

The Bible is full of examples of people who choose to live the Kingdom life. God calls them out of the comfortable known and into the risky unknown, sometimes giving them very few details. This is when faith in God's vision beyond ours is a necessity. One of the great examples of faith is Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people he had taken into his household at Haran—and headed for the land of Canaan. Genesis 12:1-5

There is so much to notice in these verses about Abram, whose name means "exalted father." If you do not know the story, he later becomes known as Abraham, meaning "father of multitudes." Abram actually had no children at

the time God called him. So, this name change gives us insight into some of his story and how God kept his promise.

But let's focus specifically on Abram's calling to live out God's purpose. Read the verses again and underline each detail of what God wanted Abram to do. These are some hard things God is asking.

If you've traveled to other countries, you might have an idea of the kinds of changes Abram was facing. In addition, leaving his relatives meant leaving his community and their protection. God was sending Abram, with his great number of people and possessions, into a situation that would make them vulnerable to raiders and thieves. He could lose his cattle and flocks, and face unknown dangers.

Because of distance and mode of transportation, saying goodbye was likely permanent. In addition, your family is a big part of your identity. So not only is God asking Abram to leave his place and his people, but also his reputation as the son of his father, which came with certain privileges.

And one last observation – notice Abram's age. That's the age when life should be comfortable, and with Abram's wealth, he could have lived out his old age in comfort. And while Abram is not required to live in poverty, he does live the life of a nomad, spending his "retirement years" living in tents.

Now, go back and double underline the details of where Abram was to go. There's not much there. The direction was to simply follow God's direction. The implication is that he would go until God said stop. It does seem he had a general idea, but Canaan was a large place, so we can assume the final destination was unknown.

Look at the passage once again and circle Abram's reaction. There is not much there either. It seems Abram, who wrote much of Genesis, did not feel all those details were necessary. But what he wrote was necessary—God told him to go and he went.

So when we talk about faith, trusting in God's plan even when we don't see the details, Abram is the poster child. The author of Hebrews agrees:

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

It was by faith that even Sarah was able to have a child, though she was barren and was too old. She believed that God would keep his promise. And so a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them. Hebrews 11:8-12

The point here is not that God called them to leave their home and family and go to another land. God does not always call us to wander until he says stop. Sometimes it's not that kind of an ask. But almost always it is for something that changes our lives and the lives of those we encounter.

So, using Abraham and Sarah as examples of living in the Kingdom, we can infer a few things. Living in the Kingdom comes with risks and a willingness to be uncomfortable. Facing unknowns is not solely for those who follow Jesus. That is a reality of life. But the benefit of saying yes to Kingdom life is that we are walking into the unknown with a God who does know. Just as he could see

centuries beyond his plan for Abraham and Sarah to leave their home, he sees even farther than that.

We can trust his plan because he knows the outcome. We can trust his plan because it includes us in his eternal vision.

If you were Abram, what would have been the hardest sacrifice for you to make? Why?

When is the last time you sensed God asking you to do something risky or uncomfortable? How did you respond?

Spend some time having a conversation with God about how he might be asking you to live differently to more accurately reflect his Kingdom ways and purposes. In the space below, write down anything you want to remember about that conversation.

DAY 3: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE MY LIFE?

As we learned from Abraham's story yesterday, living the Kingdom of God requires a level of commitment on our part. Today, we'll examine four specific areas which can either challenge or reinforce that commitment.

One reality of living the Kingdom is engaging with the world around us. We can't join Jesus' invitation to bring God's Kingdom into the world if we live hidden away and isolated. Abraham was sent to live in a hostile culture. Early Jewish Christians were called to live in communities very different from their own. This often meant living with people who did not necessarily respect their faith or their God or share their values. Nevertheless, they worked alongside them, sat and ate with them, and even raised their children among them. They lived surrounded by the influences of the culture of the day, often with little control over its impact on their lives. They had no choice but to trust God in these environments, and choose his purposes and love above their own comfort or preferences.

Second, to live in the Kingdom means living in connection to God's family, the local church. But this is more than just participating in "church things". It requires a commitment to knowing others and being known. Look at this example from the early church in Acts 2:42-47:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions

and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

This is living in connection to God's family. In fact, it's what you are doing right now by participating in Community Life with others. We do this because we understand that we don't live out the Kingdom alone. Abraham took a small group with him, Jesus gathered disciples, then sent them out in pairs. Our faith is not meant to be lived alone; it is meant to be lived out together in community.

Living the Kingdom of God also means remaining in Jesus. There is a difference between sharing information about Jesus with someone and sharing the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed. One we can do on our own, the other we cannot. As we remain in Jesus and stay connected to him, we can share our lives out of the overflow of what he is already doing in us. He enables us to lay down our lives to serve others sacrificially, offer gracious hospitality, give generously, and care for the needs of others above our own. Jesus reminded us of this in John 15:4-5:

“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

Finally, as we engage with the world around us, while staying connected to God's family and to God himself, it requires navigating the tension. This is where some are tempted to bail out. But realistically, to live out the Kingdom of God in the here and now means that we live with some internal and social tension. But rather than discourage us, this reality motivates us to live by faith - every day. It compels us to rely on and extend grace - every day. It requires us to live in dependence - every day.

Of the four areas above: engaging with the world around us, living in connection to God's family, remaining in Jesus, and navigating the tension - which do you find most intimidating or difficult and why?

For each area, list examples of how you see them reflected in your life.

What hope do you receive from what you learned today?

DAY 4: HOW DO I LIVE THIS OUT?

Imagine for a moment that Jesus walked into the room right now. Perhaps he greets you by name, then simply says, "Come with me."

How would you feel? Where would you hope he was taking you? What questions would you have? Would you go?

Jesus' invitation to live in God's Kingdom requires that we go with him outside the walls of our church buildings and be with people. All kinds of people from all different walks of life. Accepting that kind of invitation requires a willingness to take risks, to give up our own preferences, and to forgo our own comfort for the sake of others.

Let's consider saying yes to that risky invitation today. What are some practical ways we can care for those around us, offering them some of God's Kingdom goodness? Try thinking about it in three ways:

1. Be a blessing to someone you know - maybe a friend, a family member or a colleague. Offer a word of encouragement or do something kind for them. It doesn't have to be complicated. You don't have to tell them why; simply practice living out the Kingdom of God with someone you know.

2. Be a blessing to someone you don't know yet. Do something to connect with a neighbor or that barista who serves you each day but whose name and story you haven't learned - anyone in your regular rhythms of life you have yet to build a relationship with.

3. Be a blessing to someone outside your normal circles. Where do you have the opportunity to engage with and befriend someone who isn't just like you - doesn't think just like you, believe just like you or live just like

you? Don't know where to start? Try showing genuine interest and striking up a conversation with someone you would normally pass by without stopping. Simply notice, offer kindness and make a connection.

What was that like? Did you do it? If not, what stopped you? Write down what you experienced and share what you learned with your small group or a friend.

Finally, use the space below to write a prayer for each of the individuals you connected with and ask God to help you build on those connections.

DAY 5: WHAT FROM THIS WEEK DO I NEED TO RETURN TO?

Today we get the chance to look back at the week and reflect. Take some time to review your notes and any pieces of Scripture you found particularly meaningful.

What did God teach you?

What have you learned about seeking God's Kingdom?

Is there a certain day you want to spend more time with? Take today to do that.

Is there a particular action you want to take or a change you want to make in light of what you've learned?

After you review the week, record any additional thoughts here. Then write a prayer of response to God.

WEEK THREE

**SHARE
THE
KINGDOM**

NOTES:

DAY 1: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

So far, we have looked at what it means to seek and to live God's Kingdom. This week we focus on sharing God's Kingdom with others. We start in Luke 8:1-3.

Soon afterward Jesus began a tour of the nearby towns and villages, preaching and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve disciples with him, along with some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases. Among them were Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.

When I read these verses announcing that Jesus is taking the message of the Kingdom on the road, I admit I found myself wanting to refer to this trip as a traveling gospel road show. After all, he performed sensational miracles and brought along a group of oddities to draw the crowds.

These followers were not the usual pious men who excelled at Torah studies, following their rabbi from town to town to learn from his wisdom and the way he lived. Instead, Jesus took a group of common fishermen, unethical tax collectors, and men from other less respected professions. More astonishingly, he took a group that no rabbi of that time would ever have allowed to follow him, much less permit them to contribute to his ministry. Not only were they women, but women who had been struck by disease and demons.

But we know that Jesus did not choose this group to create sensation and draw crowds to benefit him and his ministry. So, why were there none of the typical rabbinical disciples among his traveling group?

The simple answer is this: Jesus does not look at outward appearances, he looks at the heart. He saw the value in each person who followed him. He knew those who saw their need for him would be the ones to accept the good news of the Kingdom. Jesus made no distinctions and his invitation to follow him was an open one. He changed lives. And those whose lives he changed

were compelled to carry his message of good news to others to change lives as well.

While we do not live in the culture of Jesus, traveling with our teacher so that we can bring the good news to others, we can follow Jesus as an example of how to share God's Kingdom with others.

1. We can share the Kingdom as we are going.

Jesus had compassion on those he met. He saw those who needed to know him, his love, and his healing power. He did not preach to the masses or the individual with shame or condemnation, but with grace and kindness. He met them at the greatest point of their need and gave them hope and acceptance.

2. We can welcome people into our lives.

As we have seen, Jesus accepted everyone, except those who misrepresented God's Kingdom. In the gospel stories, we see him meeting with the rich and religious, the poor and the lost, the sick and the needy. He had no home of his own, so he met them in their homes, in their churches, in the streets, next to water wells, beside seas, on mountains, and even in the dead of the night. Not all of his followers were poor. Not all were without religion. Not all were sick or lame or possessed. The one thing they all had in common was their desire for his Kingdom.

3. Show up in the lives of others without an agenda.

Well, maybe one agenda. It is the same as Jesus' agenda, to show them God's love. That's it. He saw their value and met their needs. He played with their kids, visited their homes, attended their churches, became their friend, and met their needs when he could. He expected nothing in return. He humbly accepted what they offered because that is hospitality. And he offered them his own. Once people saw his genuine interest in them, his unconditional love, and the friendship he offered, they were compelled to know more of his message and the Kingdom he carried inside of him.

How does Jesus' example of sharing the Kingdom inspire you or alter your perspective?

Who are you currently welcoming into your life?

Whose life are you showing up for? Whose life are you currently investing in relationally?

DAY 2: WHAT ELSE DOES SCRIPTURE SAY ABOUT THIS?

Perhaps you know the story of Zacchaeus from childhood and can still sing the song of when he met Jesus. Or, maybe this is your first time, and the details are new to you. Whichever category you fit into, read about Zacchaeus and put yourself in his story. As you read, find the person(s) in the story who draws you in, who you identify with, or understand.

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way. When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. "Zacchaeus!" he said. "Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today." Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. "He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner," they grumbled. Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, "I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!" Jesus responded, "Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." Luke 19:1-9

Read it again and imagine yourself being the person who stood out to you, or maybe a bystander observing that person. Why did that person(s) capture your attention? What actions or words stood out to you most? What senses were on alert? What emotions did you feel? What else can you imagine beyond the story?

I ask you to be in the story because it is in sharing our stories that we get to know each other. If you were familiar with Zacchaeus' story, did you notice anything you had not before? Did you learn something about the setting or the characters you had not before? Did you feel more compassion for Zacchaeus beyond his small stature?

Often people share their encounters with Jesus in words, and sometimes joyful shouts. But for Zacchaeus, sharing his encounter would be by his deeds. Can you imagine the strength of his story when each person he extorted money from is paid back times four!? Can you imagine how the story that others tell about him changed when he gave half of what was left of his money to the poor? We do not all have this kind of story to tell, but we can learn from Zacchaeus. Before he told his story, he lived it.

In sharing our stories, we learn the hardships and obstacles that others have overcome. We identify with each other, feel compassion towards one another, and learn things we never knew. Sharing our own encounters of Kingdom living—or perhaps it is more about God's Kingdom living in us, does not have to be as profound as Zacchaeus'. It could be a simple moment of how Jesus in our lives made a difference, something as simple as an answered prayer, or a kindness from our community of believers.

Over the past few years, who are the people you have allowed close enough to know you and your story?

As you think about your life as a reflection of what the Kingdom of God looks like, what about Zacchaeus' story inspires you or challenges you?

What do you hope people will see when they look at your life? How will they have opportunities to see it?

DAY 3: HOW DOES THIS CHANGE MY LIFE?

Yesterday we acknowledged that our lives tell a story to the people around us about what the Kingdom of God is like. If what they see in your individual life is attractive, they may become curious about our community or church family. We each play an important part in ensuring the community we are inviting others into is one filled with kindness, humility and grace, where people share their lives generously and disagree agreeably, unlike the combative "I'm right" thinking that is all too prevalent today.

How do we avoid self-righteous thinking and ensure we help create and maintain environments that reflect Jesus' Kingdom priorities? We remember we have been forgiven. We remember Jesus loved us before we first loved him. He loved us in our mess and brokenness even before we knew we needed him. We remember we still need him.

Luke 7:36-50 helps us remember our own need:

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you."

"Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied.

Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?"

And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The woman in this story came to worship Jesus, crying tears of repentance and love. The response of the important religious men in the room was to criticize Jesus for interacting with an unclean sinner. How did Jesus respond to the men, and Simon in particular?

Although the woman and Simon might have looked different to the other people in the room, Jesus understood they were equally in need of his forgiveness, grace and love.

How about you? How have you experienced Jesus' forgiveness, grace, and love this week?

What would it look like to take a posture of humility with those whose stories and experiences are different from your own?

What are some practical ways you can help create an atmosphere of belonging in your small group or community?

DAY 4: HOW DO I LIVE THIS OUT?

In order to freely share the Kingdom of God with others, it is helpful to take an honest look at ourselves first, to examine what might be hindering us from seeking and living the Kingdom we want to share. As we commit to surrendering all areas of our lives to God's Kingdom ways and purposes, his Spirit will begin to bring to our attention what we have yet to submit.

Perhaps you have already started to experience this. Is there something you sense God asking you to give up, rearrange, or take up? Has he exposed a particular attitude or behavior that does not align with Jesus' ways? If so, that is the Holy Spirit's invitation to repentance. Repentance simply means agreeing with God.

Today, spend some time giving the Holy Spirit permission to point out any area of your life that needs repentance. Here are some areas you might want to consider: relationships with family and friends, personal integrity, use of time, money matters, sex, anger, selfishness, pride, judgmental attitudes, hypocritical thinking.

Let's return to Psalm 139 for help. Use David's words as a starting point in prayer. Then add your own honest thoughts and agree with God about what he brings to mind.

*Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Psalm 139:23-24

God, I agree with you that there are things in my life that do not reflect who you are and hold me back from sharing you with others. They are:

Finally, take the appropriate next step. Call that friend and set up a coffee date to seek reconciliation, set up healthy boundaries, ask for forgiveness, make amends, or find a trusted friend to share what God is doing in you and ask for their support.

DAY 5: WHAT FROM THIS WEEK DO I NEED TO RETURN TO?

Today, spend some time reviewing your notes from the past week.

What did God teach you?

What have you learned about seeking God's Kingdom?

Are there any thoughts you want to be sure to remember?

What do you want to be sure to discuss with your small group or a friend?

Take time to write those things down or revisit a day you missed. Then write an honest prayer to God thanking him for meeting you as you spent time seeking him this week.

