

Come And See! *The Journey Begins*

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

Journey Together:

- 1). What's the best trip you have ever taken?
- 2). Describe your greatest childhood fantasy adventure.
- 3). How can we relate the Christian life as a great and exciting adventure?

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

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

Road Map: John 1:35-51.

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

5). Why does Nathanael question if anything good could come from Nazareth? What is so questionable about Jesus' background?

6). Jesus shows an interest in each of these early followers – especially Peter. What nickname might Jesus give you?

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

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

9). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

10). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

1). How has God been using journey in your life this week?

2). What were the Jews looking for in their expectations of the Messiah? What were some of the promises that Jewish Messiah's were making?

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

4). What further questions do you have from this weeks journey?

Who Am I? Journey To Self Discovery

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

Journey Together:

- 1). What are some funny characteristics/stories you can share about yourself?
- 2). Share something that best describes you to others?
- 3). How would your best friend describe you?

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

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

Road Map: John 1:1-34. This passage reminds us about Jesus' preexistence and complete knowledge of us, leading him to take on our humanity, becoming our savior and Lord.

- 1). If you had the task of introducing Jesus what would you say about him? How does John introduce Jesus here? Who does He claim Jesus is?
- 2). Jesus is the WORD of God and the Light of the world. What does Jesus identification as the WORD tell us about him? What about light as an expression of Jesus? In what way is Jesus the light of the world?
- 3). Word and light are metaphors of knowledge and revelation. If Jesus is the word of God and the light of the world what does that tell us about what he knows about us? What does Jesus know about you?

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

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

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

7). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

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

Who Am I? By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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

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

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

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

*Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow
another?*

*Am I both at once? A hypocrite before
others
And before myself a contemptible
woebegone weakling?*

*Or is something within me
still like a beaten army
Fleeing in disorder from victory
already achieved?*

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

My Journey:

- 1). How has God used this weeks fellowship discussion on being known and loved by God in your life this week?
- 2). Meditate on verses 1- 4. What does God want to say to you about the Living Word in your life?
- 3). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

Jesus, Our Good Shepherd: *Guide For The Journey*

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

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

Journey Together:

1). Have you ever owned a pet? What are some of the things a pet depends on us for?

(Read Psalm 23 out loud together)

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

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

Road Map: John 10:1-18. This passage reminds us of Jesus constant care for us.

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

- 1). What impresses you most about Jesus' shepherding care?
- 2). What makes Jesus the only "true" shepherd? What distinguishes Jesus from all others?
- 3). Jesus has a very intimate relationship with his sheep. How can we learn to hear and follow his voice?
- 4). What does Jesus say the Father loves about him? What makes him the Good Shepherd?
- 5). Jesus said he was prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. What are some ways that Jesus has gone out of his way to care for you?
- 6). Shepherds watch over and protect sheep, but they also lead sheep to greener pastures and sometimes through dark valleys. What are some ways that God is leading in your life right now? How does the promise of God's leading make you feel secure?
- 7). What further comments/questions do you have from this weeks reading?
- 8). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey

- 1). How has God used Journey in your life and witness life this week?
- 2). How has Jesus been leading and watching over you in coming to college? What are some personal examples of his leading and guarding in your life?
- 3). What further comments/questions do you have from this weeks reading?
- 4). How can this group pray for you right now?

The Hound Of Heaven: Search & Rescue

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

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

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat -- and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet --

"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

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

Journey Together:

1. What is one of the most important things you have lost?
2. What are some of the steps that God has taken to get through to you?

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

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

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

Road Map: John 6:22-70. This passage reminds us that God is pursuing all of us in Jesus, the living bread come down from God.

- 1). How is bread a good metaphor of God's sustaining life for us? What comparisons does Jesus make with himself and God's gift of manna in the wilderness? How is Jesus the "true" bread come down from God to feed the world?
- 2). It looks like the people are looking for Jesus, but in truth Jesus is approaching them with the real sustaining life (living bread) of God. Have you ever thought you were searching for God only to find that it was really the other way around? Please share in your group.
- 3). Describe God's pursuit of you. In what way is He pursuing you right now?
- 4). Jesus called for a decision from those who were following him and when challenged by it, many left. The disciples on the other hand, sealed their commitment to Jesus. What about you? In what way do you see yourself moving toward God's pursuing love or away from it and why?
- 5). Take some time to read again and meditate on The Prodigal Son story in Luke 15. The real message in this story is that both sons are lost or fail to understand the Father's love for them. What's keeping them from their Father? One son rebelled and left home. The other lived in a kind of rebellion in spite of never leaving His Father's side. Which son do you most identify with and why? Is there anything keeping you from the Father right now? What more would God need to do to convince you of his love other than sending Jesus to live, die and be raised again for you?
- 6). How can this group pray for you?

My Journey: For further study check out Song Of Songs 2:9-13; John 15:16 & John 6. *These passages continue to illustrate God's patient pursuit of us.*

- 1). How has God used this weeks fellowship discussion on God's pursuing love in your life so far this week?
- 2). What do these additional scripture references tell you about God's faithful persistence?
- 3). Do you see yourself moving toward God's pursuit of you or away from it and why do you think that is so?
- 4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Jesus On Message: *Where Are We Going?*

Every four years the United States engages in the national ritual of electing a new president. Candidates from the various parties begin lining up to convince prospective voters of their ideals for the country and how they will make the best and strongest leader. The presidential candidates develop their political platform – the values and key issues of their candidacy.

In recent years, voters have become more and more disillusioned by political speeches that are long on rhetoric and short on specifics of what a candidate will do to solve the nations ills. Voters have come to accept that we will not hear about specifics until the candidate debates. It often takes the opposing side to bring a candidate out of his corner and tell us what they really think about a certain issue and even then, we – the voters, are often surprised at the skill of some candidates to deflect and dodge the issue and tell us nothing about their true positions.

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

Journey Together:

- 1). How important are the messages and objectives of presidential candidates?
- 2). How do you decide who to vote for? How important is it to understand their message and position in making your ultimate decision?
- 3). What was Jesus message? Did he have a clearly stated mission? After listening in on Jesus conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus in John 3, what would you say was Jesus' message and mission? (John 3:1-8).

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

The Road Map:

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

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

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

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

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

8). In Matthew 12: 22-30 Jesus is a kind of spiritual Robin Hood taking from the devil (self-centered Prince John) and giving back to God (Good king Richard). What are some comparisons you can make between the story in Matthew 12 and the legend of Robin Hood, and how does it help you appreciate Jesus mission from a larger kingdom perspective?

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

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

11). How can this group pray for you tonight?

My Journey:

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

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

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

The Stone Kingdom: *Jesus Mission Rooted In History*

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

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

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

Journey Together:

- 1). Describe your most memorable dream.
- 2). How has spoken or used dreams in your life?

Road Map: Read Daniel 2

- 2). What impresses you most about this story?
- 3). Describe the details of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. What successive kingdoms are presented before the king and how are they differentiated? What do we know about these kingdoms?

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

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

Note: *Luke 20:17, 18 seems to identify this last kingdom as the kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating – a kingdom so different from all those represented in the kings dream that it smashes and crumbles all others that come before:*

"Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

- 5). How does the message of the kingdom of God introduced through Jesus help us understand Jesus mission as something more than just salvation from sin? What are the implications of the "good news" or gospel of the kingdom?
- 6). Ultimately, the reality of God's kingdom on earth is in process. It is something God is accomplishing through Christ. It is also something Jesus encouraged us to pray for as we mentioned last week: *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* Jesus said. How is the kingdom of Jesus a source of good news for you and what evidence do you see of the presence of Jesus kingdom already at work in your life and in the life of others?
- 7). Why do you think God has so carefully laid out the establishing of his kingdom. What careful preparations will you need to make to enter his kingdom?
- 8). How can this group pray for you this evening?

My Journey: For further study John 3:22-36

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

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

- 2). In what areas of your life does Jesus need to become greater?
- 3). How can we best participate in God's kingdom rule right now today?

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

Heaven Now! *The Two-Phased Kingdom*

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

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

For instance, we have the beginning of the Christmas season, Christmas day and the winding down of Christmas with the New Years celebration. In a way, it is all Christmas

Journey Together:

- 1). What do you love most about Christmas?
- 2). What part of the Christmas season do you enjoy most – preparing for Christmas, Christmas day or the New Years celebration that follows and why?

Road Map:

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

- 1). How do these parables help explain the two phases of the kingdom?
- 2). Jesus makes the official announcement of the arrival of the kingdom in Mark 1:15 with, *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* What are some of the evidences Jesus gives that the kingdom of God had begun with the authority of God already at work in verses 16 - 45 of this same chapter? What specific things can you list?

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

4). Revelation 21 – 22:7 describe the second phase of God's kingdom on earth in the coming of the new Jerusalem down from God out of heaven. What are some notable differences between the kingdom described here and phase 1 in Jesus' first coming? What do you look forward to most about the New Jerusalem and the final establishment of God's kingdom rule?

5). How does a two-phase kingdom provide a better explanation of Jesus' overall ministry and mission? Some have referred to the kingdom of God as here and not yet – meaning that the kingdom has already begun, but also not yet fully realized. In what way do you already see yourself living in the kingdom? How is God's kingdom a daily experience in your life today?

6). What will it take for God's kingdom to be real for you?

7). How can this group pray for you this evening?

My Journey: Read Ephesians 6:10-18

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

2). Paul often referred to himself as Christ's ambassador – meaning that he belonged to God's kingdom while representing God's affairs in a foreign land. In the verses above, he also reminds us that we are waged in a spiritual battle of conflicting kingdoms. The kingdom of God has come and we are victorious in God's strength. However, the prince of darkness still fights on against God's rule. How are we most vulnerable in this battle and what weapons are you most in need of to be an overcomer?

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

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

Kingdom Architecture: *Defining The Kingdom Of God*

In our study last week we read about the dimensions of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. John says it measures 600 miles high and is as long and wide as it is high. Today we could probably care less about the dimensions. We are really more concerned about the quality of life in the city.

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

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

Journey Together:

- 1). Share one of the best surprises you have ever had.
- 2). What is one of your earliest childhood memories?

Road Map:

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

Authority:

In Luke 10:17-20 Jesus talks of how the establishment of his kingdom is bringing down the rule of Satan. We see this very thing happening in many peoples lives, but perhaps none more clearly than in the life of the demon possessed man in Mark 1:21-28.

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

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

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

Forgiveness:

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

- 4). What is an important thing you remember being forgiven for?
- 5). What is the hardest act of forgiveness you have ever had to offer?
- 6). When and how did you finally accept Gods forgiveness in your life?

Justice:

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

- 7). Why was Jesus so angry here?

- 8). In another story about caring for the poor and imprisoned in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus links acts of justice for the oppressed with caring for him. How does this parable help you understand justice and mercy and their relationship to Jesus’ mission?

- 9). In the ancient story of Robin Hood, Robin steals from the rich and returns money back to the poor. How is this story a helpful comparison of the work of Gods kingdom in the ministry of Jesus?

Note: When Jesus says that his kingdom is at hand we should expect some tangible evidence. As we embrace his kingdom we discover a new authority in our life, forgiving grace and a realization of God’s justice. Extending these to others opens the door of his kingdom to them and us. These are some of the visible aspects of Gods kingdom.

- 10). Which of these aspects of God’s kingdom rule do you need most in your life today?

11). How can this group pray for you this evening?

My Journey:

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

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

3). In the light of this weeks study, what does it mean to seek first the kingdom?

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

Dressed In Royalty: New Clothes From The King

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

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

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

Journeying Together:

- 1). Describe the dirtiest you have ever been.
- 2). What is the best part about being clean?
- 3). Imagine being washed in the Spirit. What would that feel like?

Road Map: John 3:1-15

- 4). What does baptism by water and Spirit have to do with God’s kingdom? Why does Jesus say that Nicodemus will never “see” the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit?
- 5). Why is the new birth of the Spirit so difficult for Nicodemus to understand and accept? What might water and Spirit represent in Jesus’ message to the Pharisee?
- 6). How would you describe your own “new birth?” How does it feel to be washed clean by baptism and the Spirit’s indwelling? What does baptism and new birth in the Spirit reveal to you about life in God’s kingdom?

Read: Revelation 21:1-8. *Revelation 21 talks about a new heaven and earth filled with new people. The key word here of course is “new.” God is making everything new by introducing the principles of his government – his authority, forgiveness and justice like we read and studied together last week. These principles are working their way in the world like leaven rising in the dough and changing the world from the inside out. But now he talks about birth – a new life in him cleansed by water and Spirit. New people transformed by his Spirit are the way Jesus kingdom is at hand.*

- 7). What do these additional scripture references tell you about living clean in God’s kingdom?
 - 8). What is the relationship between being washed, new birth and God making all things new in his kingdom? How do the realities of *God’s new authority, forgiveness, justice and new birth* in our lives help clarify the kingdom of God in real and practical terms for us today? How is God making these things real in your life right now?
- Note:** In John Bunyan’s famous book *Pilgrims Progress*, Pilgrim is on a journey away from the “City Of Destruction” to the “Celestial City.” Pilgrim goes through many experiences and life-transforming events that help him better understand his journey and his new life under the lordship of Christ.
- 9). We are going to look more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth in and through Jesus is how our life in Christ begins. How is Jesus washing and making you new every day – in your heart, your mind and in your relationships with others?

- 10). What questions do you still have about being “born again?” How would you explain what being born again is like to others?
- 11). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading and discussion?
- 12). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

- 1). How has God used this weeks fellowship discussion on being washed clean in your life this week?
- 2). We are looking more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth is the beginning of our life in Christ. How is Jesus washing and making you new every day – in your thought’s, in your heart, in your relationships with others?
- 3). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?
- 4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Kingdom Transactions: *Passports To Freedom*

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

Our goal in *The Christian Life & Journey* has been to walk with Jesus learn first hand about Him and his mission. One thing we’ve learned is how much Jesus emphasized his kingdom and how it has already begun. “The kingdom of God has come”, was his main message.

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

Journey Together

- 1). What are some important legal transactions you have negotiated in your life?
- 2). What do you love/hate most about signing a binding document?

Road Map

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

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

Romans 6 – *Free from sin* – The transition from the dominion of sin to freedom in righteousness.

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

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

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

experience of being at peace with God and standing in abundant grace and life through Jesus Christ? What is the difference of being ‘under’ God’s wrath and condemnation and ‘standing’ in the free grace of God?

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

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

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

Characteristics of the new life in Christ through the Spirit:

- a).
- b).
- c).
- d).

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

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

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

My Journey:

- 1). How is God using Journey in your life and witness to others this week?
- 2). The gospel of Jesus is about freedom. We have been freed of God’s wrath, sin, law and death. Which of these freedoms are the most meaningful to you right now and why?
- 3). Which fruit of the Spirit are you most grateful for right now and which one would you most like to see bearing fruit in your life?
- 4). What questions do you still have from this weeks study?

5). How can this group pray for you right now?

Giving Away The Kingdom: *Sharing The Good News*

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

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

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

Journey Together

- 1). What are some good gifts you have received in your life?
- 2). What are some great gifts you have given in your life?
- 3). Who would you most like to share the story of Jesus with and why?

Road Map: Luke 10:1-24

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

2). Why are the disciples so excited that even the demons are subject to them? What does this victory over evil reveal about the over all-purpose of Christ? Why did Jesus caution them to be more grateful that their own names were written in heaven than the trampling down of Satan's kingdom? Why does Jesus express such joy in the disciples experience here?

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

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

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

Advancing The Kingdom: Matthew 25:14-30

- 4). What is the relationship between investing God's property and giving away the kingdom?
- 5). What is a talent? Why does the third manager hide his talent? What does hiding our talent translate into in this story? What great investments have you already made or can you make for advancing God's kingdom?
- 6). What excites you most about giving away God's property?
- 7). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?
- 8). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

- 1). How is God using Journey in your life and witness to others this week?
- 2). We have all been affected by the fall and injustice of Satan's rule in our lives. Talk about a hurt or painful experience in your own life that helps you appreciate the coming of the kingdom.
- 3). How has the simplicity of advancing the kingdom changed your perspective on sharing the good news?

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

The Main Thing Is Keeping The Main Thing, The Main Thing!

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

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

Jesus said we have to know our priorities. On many occasions he reminded the disciples that the kingdom of God was the most important thing of all. In Luke 14 Jesus emphasized the cost of being a disciple. He never made discipleship seem easy, just full of grace. In Luke 9 he talked about gaining the whole world while loosing our soul. He said the kingdom was the greatest priority – that it was like finding treasure hidden in a field that upon discovery a person sells all he has to own the field and the treasure in it - or like a man in search of fine pearls and when he finds the precious pearl sells all to have it. The emphasis is on selling all because the treasure or pearl is worth more than the sum total of all he possesses.

Journey Together

- 1). List three important things in your life.
- 2). Which two of the three would you be willing to give up to have the other?
- 3). What important sacrifice has someone made for you or you for someone else?

Road Map: Matthew 19:16-30

- 1). What did the rich man have? What did he want? Why was he coming to Jesus? What did Jesus have that he wanted?
- 2). Why did Jesus quiz the man about goodness and refer him back to the law? Why did he question him about calling him “good?” What were the man’s assumptions about Jesus?
- 3). How did Jesus turn this man away? What did the man miss about the greatness of Jesus kingdom? What keeps us from selling all for the kingdom today?
- 4). Why were the disciples now fearful of loosing out on the kingdom as well? How can anyone obtain the kingdom?
- 5). Who are you most like in this story: The rich man, Jesus, or the disciples and why?
- 6). What is your main priority in life?
- 7). How can this group pray for you?

My Journey: For further study read Matthew 6:33.

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

- 1). Where have you seen evidence of God’s kingdom this week?
- 2). In what way has the kingdom become the main thing in your life?
- 3). What is your greatest distraction in seeking first the kingdom?

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

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