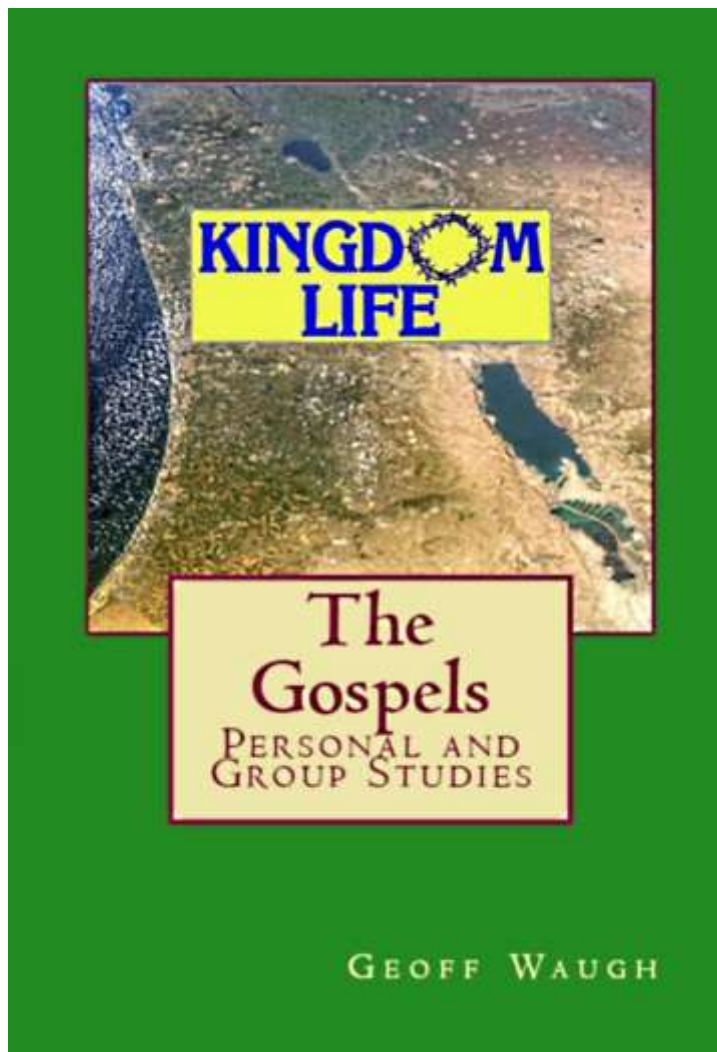


Kingdom Life

*Kingdom Life
in The Gospels
Personal and Group Studies
from Common Lectionary Readings*



Geoff Waugh

Kingdom Life

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Logo: lamp & scroll,
basin & towel
in the light of the cross

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Relational Bible studies

These relational Bible studies help you explore and live kingdom life: to love God with your whole being and to love others. At best, our love for God and for one another is but a small reflection of God's love for us. These studies can help that love to grow. Choose the sections most suitable to you or your group.

You can use this book for both personal and group study:

Personal study, which may be in preparation for a group session or just for your own interest, will involve reading the Bible passages and thinking about the questions for yourself. You may want to keep a note book or journal of your insights or discoveries.

If these readings are used in your church on Sundays you may want to reflect on the study after the Sunday and also read the next study in preparation for the following Sunday. You may have a friend, or friends, with whom you would like to discuss some of the issues, and these studies give you plenty of ideas for doing that as well.

Group study involves you with others. These studies invite you to relate together at the beginning, to respond to the Bible material in personal ways and to reflect on its meaning in your own lives and circumstances.

The studies help you share your ideas and discoveries as you study the Bible together. These relational studies invite you to interact at both a content and a personal level. You can share your pilgrimage with others. You journey together. You support and encourage one another.

The New International Version as well as the Revised Standard Version were used in writing these studies, so it will be helpful for group leaders to refer to those in preparing for each study. The Serendipity Bible (NIV) is another a very useful resource. Any versions of the Bible can be used with the studies, of course, and comparing different translations and study notes adds helpful insights.

Your group will be able to move more freely through each study if you all read the passages at home first. That will make you familiar with the Bible material so that you can then interact on it together in the group. The gospel reading is the focus. The other readings are referred to during the study and can be included that way.

Kingdom Life

A rough time guide for each study would be to allow about 15 minutes for the Relate section, about 30 minutes for the Respond section and another 15 minutes for the Reflect section. Sometimes you will go longer than that, especially at the end. Allow adequate time to conclude in prayer together or in other appropriate ways.

If you have a group of more than five or six people, you will usually gain more from these studies by working in small sub-groups of about three to five. This can be done in many ways. One good way is to begin in the whole group for the Relate section, read the scripture together in the whole group, and then move into small sub-groups for the rest of the study.

Sometimes you may want to start in small sub-groups of two or three, then study the Response section together in the whole group, and finish by following the Reflect section in smaller groups.

Using the lectionary

These group studies may be used following the lectionary dates or may be used independently, in full or in part, at any time. You could try one section to see if it suits your group or meets your needs, such as studies for Lent. Some groups may choose to select passages from the Gospel being studied and omit studies from other gospels used in the lectionary readings (See Appendix to each of the four Gospels).

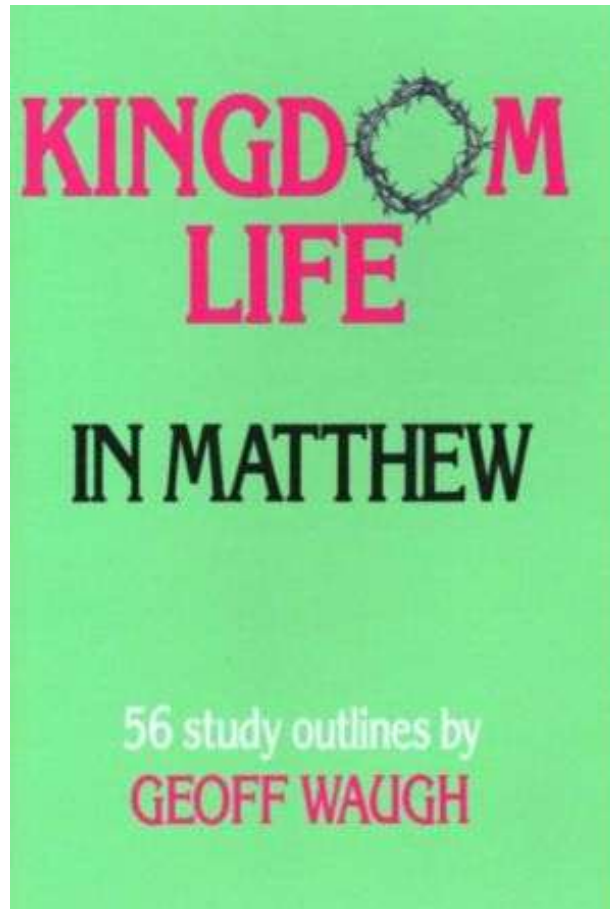
Groups following the set dates of Sunday readings in a calendar year will find that the studies from Part II on the death and resurrection of Jesus fit into Part I at the Lent to Pentecost seasons.

Study 1, The Coming of the Lord, forms a bridge between the previous lectionary year (which concludes with Christ the King) and the new lectionary year. So the first study both looks toward the fulfilment of the coming of the Lord as King and introduces the advent of Jesus.

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Kingdom Life in Matthew

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26. The Canaanite woman Matthew 15:21-28

27. Peter's confession Matthew 16:13-20

28. Discipleship Matthew 16:21-28

Discourse:

29. The community sermon (1) Matthew 18:15-20

30. The community sermon (2) Matthew 18:21-35

Authority and invitation: the ministry ends

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Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

Introduction to Matthew

Matthew the evangelist wrote especially for Jews. He begins his gospel presenting Jesus Christ as the son of David, the son of Abraham. He ends his gospel with the Great Commission declaring that Jesus sends his followers into all nations. In Jesus, God's covenant embraces the whole world.

This radical evangelistic missionary gospel shocked traditional Jews. Matthew insists that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah, backing up his claims with many quotations from the Old Testament. He argues that Jesus did not do away with the Scriptures, but fulfilled them (5:17). He emphasises the missionary nature of Jesus' ministry and of his church.

This gospel continually confronted the Jewish Christian community as well as other Jews. Here is a persistent and urgent call to mission. The good news is for all people, not only for Jews.

Matthew begins his Gospel telling of the coming of Jesus the Messiah who proclaims God's kingdom (1:1; 2:2). The figure of Jesus the Messiah is announced by John the Baptist, as prophesied (3:1-3).

The beginning of the ministry in Galilee shows Christ's design for life in God's kingdom, again fulfilling prophecy (4:15-17, 23). Chapters 5-7 gather the words of Jesus together in 'The Sermon on the Mount' in which we are challenged to seek first the kingdom of God (6:33). Here is the kingdom charter, the ethics of kingdom living. The chapters that follow demonstrate God's kingdom in the works of Jesus.

Matthew gathers the discourses of Jesus as teaching segments throughout his narrative. He often uses the phrase 'kingdom of heaven' for 'kingdom of God' in typical Jewish reverence for the word 'God' (19:23-24).

Jesus' ministry is summarised in 4:23 as teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness. This statement introduces the words and works of Jesus in chapters 5-9. Then in 9:35 the same statement is repeated. Here it introduces the mission of Jesus' followers.

The mission discourse commencing from 9:35 tells of Jesus' plan for the spread of God's kingdom. His disciples will continue his ministry. They will proclaim the kingdom of God (10:1, 7-8).

Kingdom Life

The chapters following the mission discourse show the radical nature of the mystery of God's kingdom. This mystery is revealed by Jesus to those committed to him (11:27; 13:11), but concealed from others, as indicated in the parable discourses of chapter 13.

Matthew, the only gospel writer to use the word church, points out that Jesus' church has his authority (16:18-19; 18:17-18). The church is the agent of God's kingdom and manifests the kingdom in the world.

Tensions with the keepers of Israel's traditions reached flash point and boiled over into Jesus' arrest and execution. That is the volatile setting in which Jesus pressed his authority and invitation as the ministry ends. The king is crowned with thorns and crucified. Apparent defeat in death is then turned into the amazing victory of resurrection. Christ the King reigns. We all acknowledge his reign in the end. In Jesus' victory we see God's kingdom fulfilled.

The mysteries of the passion of Jesus, his death and resurrection and the promise of the Holy Spirit conclude with the astounding claim in the Great Commission that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, God's Son, the Messiah. He commissions us to make disciples of all nations. He is with us to the end.

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Part I: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

1. The coming of the Lord

Matthew 24:36-44

Other readings:

Isaiah 2:1-5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11-14

The Lord's coming at the end of the age, like his first advent, is foretold but mysterious, the fulfilment of our deepest longings but unexpected, the culmination of God's purposes but quite surprising. No one knows when or exactly how the Lord will come. We are warned to be ready, to keep watch, to expect the unexpected!

Relate

1. Introduce yourselves in pairs telling about something you like doing or have achieved. Then introduce your partner to the group.
2. What was something you waited for with great anticipation? How did you feel in that time of waiting? Was its fulfilment as expected?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 24:36-44. Someone could read verses 36-41 and someone else read verses 42-44.
2. How can we be ready for the coming of the Lord? See Isaiah 2:1-5.
3. Why is his coming mysterious and unexpected?
4. What attitude can we have about it? Consider Psalm 122.

Reflect

1. How do you feel about the possibility of the Lord's coming?
2. What difference does it make in our lives if we anticipate the coming of the Lord? Comment on Romans 13:11-14.
3. Conclude in worship or prayer responding to these instructions.

2. John the Baptist

Matthew 3:1-12

Other readings:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Psalms 72:1-8

Romans 15:4-13

The prophetic tradition and message, often quoted by Matthew, continues into the New Testament with John the Baptist. He announces the advent of the Messiah, the coming of the Lord. The kingdom is near. It is to be revealed and demonstrated in the coming One. The old order is passing. The new comes with axe and fire. We are to repent and respond.

Relate

1. How did you become a Christian or get involved in the church?
2. What preacher, speaker or leader has had a strong formative influence in your life? How?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 3:1-12. One person can be narrator and another read the words John spoke.
2. Why was repentance needed? Is it still needed?
3. How did John describe the ministry of Jesus?
4. Why was Jesus' ministry to be so radical? Note Psalm 72:1-8 and Isaiah 11:1-10.

Reflect

1. How would you describe the ministry of Jesus? See Romans 15:4-13.
2. What difference has Jesus made in your own life?
3. Conclude with prayers of thanks and commitment.

The Gospels

3. The Messiah

Matthew 11:2-11

Other readings:

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10

James 5:7-10

John the Baptist announced the coming of God's kingdom of righteousness and justice. That clashed with earthly power. So John was imprisoned. He sent his disciples to check with Jesus. Had he been right? Was Jesus the Messiah? Jesus pointed to the evidence, and noted how God's kingdom turns the least into the greatest.

Relate

1. What do you see as the main qualities of a follower of Christ?
2. What impresses you most about the character of Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 11:2-11. One person could narrate and another read the words of Jesus.
2. How did Jesus' answer to John show that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah?
Note Isaiah 35:5-6 and Psalm 146:7-9.
3. Why were prophets like John the Baptist persecuted?
4. Why was Jesus persecuted?

Reflect

1. Are Christians persecuted today? How? Note James 5:7-10.
2. What helps to keep you going when the going gets tough?
3. Pray about that together.

4. Mary's son

Matthew 1:18-25

Other readings:

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 24

Romans 1:1-7

Jesus - Saviour. Immanuel - God with us. Incarnation. Miraculous conception. God's reign comes in unexpected mystery. We only begin to understand Christmas when its wonder and awe break in upon us. We can never fully understand the mystery. But we can adore, worship and have the faith and acceptance which Mary and Joseph showed.

Relate

1. What do you value most about Christmas?
2. How does having goodwill to everyone make a difference?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 1:18-25. Someone could be narrator and someone else read the angel's announcement.
2. What impresses you most about Mary and Joseph? Note Psalm 24.
3. Why are the name Jesus and the description Emmanuel so amazing? Consider Isaiah 7:14.
4. What does the incarnation mean for us? Note Romans 1:2-5.

Reflect

1. When has Jesus, Saviour, had special meaning for you personally?
2. In what ways does Emmanuel, God with us, make a difference for you?
3. Respond in prayer and praise.

The Gospels

5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus

Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Other readings:

Isaiah 63:7-9

Psalm 111

Hebrews 2:10-18

Wise men from the east visit the new king. The visit provokes Herod into murderous action. Joseph and Mary flee with Jesus. Already the presence of this Messiah ignites the clash of kingdoms, of good and evil. Yet God intervenes. The child is protected, and prepared for his destiny which does involve his death, and his eternal kingdom.

Relate

1. When have you been especially aware of God's care for you?
2. Does God sometimes change our plans? Why?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23. A different reader could read the angel's words.
2. What do you think God's inconvenient instructions meant to Joseph and Mary? Note Isaiah 63:7-9.
3. What attitude can we have to God's interventions? See Psalm 111.
4. Why was Jesus' growth as a child, youth and man necessary and important? Note Hebrews 2:16-18.

Reflect

1. In what ways have you found Jesus' humanity significant for you?
2. Has God's inconvenient intervention sometimes affected you? Has this shown his care for you?
3. Respond with prayers of thanks and praise.

6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus

John 1:1-18

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:12-20 Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

The Word was God. The Word became flesh, a human being. The glory of God is seen in him, full of grace and truth. God, veiled in flesh. The incarnate deity. God with us. John's gospel begins with these profound reflections on the mystery of the incarnation.

Relate

1. What do you value most about your beginnings?
2. How have your beginnings helped shape your life?

Respond

1. Read John 1:1-18 silently and meditate on it for a few minutes.
2. What lights up or has special meaning for you in that passage?
3. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Note Ephesians 1:18-23.
4. What does this passage promise ultimately? See also Jeremiah 31:7-14.

Reflect

1. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth mean most to you? Note John 1:14, Psalm 147:12-14, Ephesians 1:3-6.
 2. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth do you see in others in your group? Each person in turn remains silent as others comment on them.
 3. How does the awesome greatness of Jesus Christ our Lord affect your life?
- Respond in worship and prayer.

The Gospels

7. The baptism of Jesus

Matthew 3:13-17

Other readings:

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm 29

Acts 10:34-43

Jesus identified himself fully with us in our humanity. Already submitted to the reign of God, he accepted John's baptism in fulfilling all that is right. God must reign, and be seen to reign. Jesus gladly witnessed to this, and the heavens opened on him. The Spirit of God rested on him in full measure.

Relate

1. Were you baptised, and why?
2. What is the significance of baptism for you?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 3:13-17.
2. What was the significance of baptism for Jesus? Note Matthew 3:15.
3. What was the result of Jesus' obedient submission?
4. In what ways did this result confirm and begin his ministry? Note the picture of the Lord's servant in Isaiah 42:1-9.

Reflect

1. What link do you see between baptism, forgiveness and the anointing with the Holy Spirit and power? Note Acts 10:34-43.
2. How does this apply to your life and ministry? Can the group help?
3. Conclude with appropriate prayer and worship. Note Psalm 29, especially verses 1-2, 10-11.

8. The witness of John the Baptist

John 1:29-34

Other readings:

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. God's unblemished sacrificial lamb is announced to the world by God's prophet, John. God's Spirit rests on Jesus. He baptizes us in the Holy Spirit. He is the Son of God. These astounding claims and incredible titles herald Jesus' ministry.

Relate

1. What titles or descriptions of Jesus have special meaning for you?

Examples in John 1: Word, Light, Christ, Lamb of God, Son of God.

2. How did you come to know Christ personally?

Respond

1. Read John 1:29-34 aloud.

2. How does the title Lamb of God fit Jesus? Consider Psalm 40:1-11.

3. How do John's witness and the Holy Spirit's empowering testify to Jesus as the Son of God? Note Isaiah 49:1-7.

4. What are some results of the Lord imparting his Spirit to us? See 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

Reflect

1. What have been some of your most significant discoveries of the Holy Spirit in your life?

2. What would you like the Holy Spirit to do in your life?

3. Pray about this for one another and others.

9. The call of the first disciples

Matthew 4:12-23

Other readings:

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27:1-6

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Jesus begins his ministry announcing the kingdom of God, and calling for repentance that accepts God's reign. Matthew emphasises this theme (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). He uses kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God interchangeably - not a place, but the reign of God. Accepting God's reign involves following Jesus who taught and demonstrated the kingdom (4:23).

Relate

1. What impresses you most about the ministry of Jesus?
2. When have you commenced something new in your life or ministry?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 4:12-23, different people reading verses 12-17, 18-20, 21-22, 23.
2. How did Jesus literally fulfil Isaiah 9:1-7?
3. How does Psalm 27:1-6 picture this great light?
4. What does this light have to do with repentance, following Jesus, the good news of the kingdom and healing?

Reflect

1. How do you see that light affecting people
 - (a) in Scripture, e.g. Matthew 4:20, 22, 23;
 - (b) today? Note 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 17.
2. Pray about your response and the needs of others.

Kingdom Life

10. The sermon on the mount (1)

Matthew 5:1-12

Other readings:

Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 37:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Jesus' kingdom teaching is gathered together in the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7). It opens with the Beatitudes. They begin and end with reference to the kingdom (5:3, 10). Echoing Isaiah 61:1-4, they show God's love for the weak and oppressed and all who seek God's right ways and live according to God's justice, even if persecuted.

Relate

1. What is a motto you like?
2. What is a Bible verse you have as a guide or goal?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 5:1-12, a verse each.
2. What makes the beatitudes so radical or revolutionary? See Micah 6:8 and Psalm 37:1-11.
3. What are some ways the gospel of the kingdom turns everything upside down? Consider 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.
4. How do the beatitudes challenge and change our usual attitudes?

Reflect

1. Which of the eight beatitudes is strongest in your life?
2. Which one or two of the beatitudes do you desire most in your life?
3. Pray together about that.

The Gospels

11. The sermon on the mount (2)

Matthew 5:13-16

Other readings:

Isaiah 58:3-9a

Psalm 112:4-9

1 Corinthians 2:1-11

Kingdom people make an impact in the world. Salt and light. They preserve its goodness, flavour and beauty. They show the way to live in God's favour, and so bring glory to God. Salt may sting, and light may blind darkened eyes, but salt must keep its saltiness and light must shine, not be hidden.

Relate

1. Name a good deed done to you which you really appreciate.
2. What do you appreciate people doing for you at home?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 5:13-16, one read verse 13, another for 14-16.
2. How do we keep our salty flavour and our light shining? Note examples in Isaiah 58:6-9a and Psalm 112:4-9.
3. How does the inner reality of the kingdom transform us and others? See 1 Corinthians 2:1-11.
3. How can we tackle the near edge of big needs in our world?

Reflect

1. What are some practical steps you can take to be salt and light in your circumstances?
2. What are some practical steps your group can take to meet some of the big needs in the world?
3. Pray and plan together about this.

12. The sermon on the mount (3)

Matthew 5:17-26

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Psalm 119:1-8 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Jesus the Messiah upholds the validity of the Law to its smallest detail, and yet at the same time fulfils and transforms it. He lifts it far beyond legalism to life in God's kingdom under God's absolute rule even over motives and hidden thoughts. The law shifts from being outward rules to inward relationship with God.

Relate

1. When have you kept the spirit, but not the letter, of the law?
2. What is a principle or law you hold to very firmly?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 5:17-26 aloud, a person per paragraph.
2. What does God really want from us? Note Deuteronomy 30:15-20.
3. How are we blessed through obedience? See Psalm 119:1-8.
3. How does Jesus' words turn law inside out, or move from outward conformity to inner commitment?

Reflect

1. How does Jesus' teaching affect your attitudes and actions? Note the call to grow up in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.
2. In what specific areas do you sense a need in your life for more maturity or inner commitment? Listen also to others' comments on the qualities or strengths they see in you as well.
3. Support one another in prayer.

13. The sermon on the mount (4)

Matthew 5:27-37

Other readings:

Isaiah 49:8-13 Psalm 62:5-12 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Jesus fulfils and transforms the old external law with the inner law of life in the Spirit of God. This is the law of God's righteousness. That righteousness involves open, honest communication. Just yes and no. Kingdom life challenges and transforms legal systems and goes to the heart of the matter, our right relationship with God and others.

Relate

1. Whose word could you depend on when you were younger?
2. Whose word can you depend on now?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 5:27-37 silently.
2. What inner attitude is stressed in these examples?
3. How does God's grace apply to our weakness? See Isaiah 49:8-13.
4. How does God help us live this way? Consider Psalm 62:5-12.

Reflect

1. What is the difference for you between outward law and inner commitment in your life? Note 1 Corinthians 3:16-23.
2. How would you like your inner commitments and outward actions to line up more strongly?
3. Pray about these desires and intentions.

14. The sermon on the mount (5)

Matthew 5:38-48

Other readings:

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 Psalm 119:33-40 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

God loves us all, even his enemies. God is perfect. We are to be like him in our relationships also. Love transcends law. We are not to look for the least requirement of law to be righteous but to love, even our enemies. Only then can we be like our Father in heaven.

Relate

1. When has someone gone the second mile for you?
2. When have you gone the second mile for someone, happily?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 5:38-48 as two paragraphs.
2. Love conquers all - or does it?
3. How does Jesus fulfil the law? Compare Matthew 5:48 with Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 and Psalm 119:33-40.
4. How can we be holy, complete, mature or perfect?

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to have a clear conscience? See 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.
2. How can your group help you now to be what you want to be?
3. Respond to one another and to the Lord in prayer.

The Gospels

15. The Sermon on the Mount (6)

Matthew 7:21-29

Other readings:

Genesis 12:1-9

Psalm 33:12-22

Romans 3:21-28

The Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) concludes with a strong warning about obedience. These teachings are not merely good advice or great ethics. They require obedience. Our lives, as with the two houses, stand or fall on that obedience, on both hearing and doing. Hearing is not enough. It's the doing that shows obedience.

Relate

1. What family requirements did you enjoy when you were young?
2. What expectations of others do you like fulfilling now?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 7:21-29, different people reading verses 21-23, 24-27, and 28-29.
2. What is the parable really about? Note verses 21, 24 and 29.
3. Why is obeying Jesus more important than doing many good works? Note Romans 3:22-23, 27-28.
4. How is obedience its own reward? Consider Genesis 12:1-3 and Psalm 33:18-22.

Reflect

1. What areas of obeying the Lord give you joy and fulfilment?
2. What aspects of obedience do you find tough at present?
3. Pray about these in caring and supportive ways together.

Kingdom Life

16. The Call of Levi

Matthew 9:9-13

Other readings:

Genesis 22:1-18

Psalm 13

Romans 4:13-18

God's kingdom spreads in unlikely ways, through unlikely people. A despised collaborator, regarded as a traitor and cheat, is ready to follow Jesus, while defenders of the faith will not. Furthermore, this despised outcast, Matthew, invites his friends and other sinners to share his new friendship with Jesus. They do. The kingdom spreads among them.

Relate

1. When have you given up one thing for something better?
2. How do you feel about that choice now?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 9:9-13. Someone could narrate, others read the words of Jesus and the Pharisees.
2. Why was the call of Matthew so surprising? Note Psalm 13.
3. Why did religious people find this so difficult or repulsive?
4. Why is radical obedience in faith so rewarding? Consider Genesis 22:15-18 and Romans 4:13-18.

Reflect

1. What step of obedience do you want to take just now?
2. What may be involved in that for you and others?
3. Pray for one another as you seek to respond to God specifically.

The Gospels

17. The mission sermon (1)

Matthew 9:35 - 10:8

Other readings:

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalm 46

Romans 5:6-11

The ministry of Jesus is our ministry also. Jesus gave his followers authority to do what he did. He still does. This has dynamic implications for us and the kind of church Jesus wants. It challenges us with the gap between what we read in the gospels and what we do now. Our mission is no less radical or disturbing than Jesus' mission and his disciples' mission were.

Relate

1. When have you helped people or ministered along with others?
2. What did you value about that (e.g. in a home group or team)?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 9:35 - 10:8 aloud, perhaps one verse each.
2. What was Jesus' ministry and motivation (9:35-36)?
3. How did he multiply that ministry (10:1, 7-8)?
4. How has God constantly shown his authority and love? Consider Genesis 25:21-23 and Romans 5:6-11.

Reflect

1. How might the Lord's authority and power affect us? Note Psalm 46:1, 10-11.
2. How can we learn to minister with his authority and power? See Matthew 28:18-20.
3. Do that as you pray together for specific concerns or needs.

Kingdom Life

18. The mission sermon (2)

Matthew 10:24-33

Other readings:

Genesis 28:10-17

Psalm 91:1-10

Romans 5:12-19

Church history and current explosive church growth in many countries testify to God's power at work in his people as they continue Jesus' ministry. His followers in many places also encounter sustained criticism and opposition. Jesus prepared his followers for this. He still does.

Relate

1. What leader or teacher has had a strong influence on you?
2. What qualities in others have you chosen for yourself also?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 10:24-33, different people reading a paragraph each.
2. Why was Jesus criticised when he proclaimed and demonstrated the kingdom of God? Compare 10:25 with 12:22-28.
3. How did Jesus prepare his followers with both challenge and comfort? See also Psalm 91:1-10.
4. How does God's grace and care sustain us? Note Genesis 28:10-17 and Romans 5:15-19.

Reflect

1. How does working together help us cope with opposition?
2. What are values for you in ministering with others?
3. Pray for one another and others in specific ways.

The Gospels

19. The mission sermon (3)

Matthew 10:34-42

Other readings:

Genesis 32:22-32

Psalm 17:1-7

Romans 6:3-11

The reign of Jesus is both inclusive of all who will come, but exclusive. He divides. That is the tender-tough paradox of the kingdom of God. This is not popular in our age of religious pluralism. Discipleship requires commitment to our Lord, but also brings fulfilment. The least service we do in our commitment to Jesus has its reward.

Relate

1. When have you been confronted in a compassionate or caring way?
2. How do you confront in love?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 10:34-42. Different people could read a paragraph each?
2. How does this passage show both confrontation and compassion?
3. Why is Jesus' claim on us so radical? See 10:39 and Romans 6:3-11.
4. What can we claim from God? Compare Genesis 32:24-28 and Psalm 17:1-7.

Reflect

1. How are you confronted by the Lord's claim on you?
2. What do you want to claim from your Lord and God?
3. Do that in prayer for one another or others.

20. The revelation to the simple

Matthew 11:25-30

Other readings:

Exodus 1:6-14, 22 - 2:10

Psalm 124

Romans 7:14-25a

The mystery of God's kingdom is revealed by God, not discovered or understood by human wisdom. It is hidden from the world but made known by the Spirit of God to those who belong to him. We experience a new perspective in a new dimension of living. God's grace, not our ability or achievement, makes this possible. It transforms our attitudes and actions when we accept that grace.

Relate

1. When has some simple solution to a problem surprised you?
2. What is a profound truth you understand in a simple way?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 11:25-30, one person for each paragraph.
2. What attitude is needed to understand God's ways?
3. What does close union with the Lord do? Consider Psalm 124 and Romans 7:21-25a.
4. How do God's ways turn our ways upside down? Note Exodus 1:22 and 2:10.

Reflect

1. When has a kingdom mystery become clear to you?
2. In what area would you like to be more closely yoked with Jesus?
3. Pray about that together, in faith.

The Gospels

21. The parable sermon (1)

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Other readings:

Exodus 2:11-22

Psalm 69:6-15

Romans 8:9-17

Jesus' parables both reveal and conceal truth. His disciples often missed the point! These stories always have a sting in the tail. Children can enjoy them but they also shock and confront us. The story of the sower does that because we so often have hard hearts, are shallow, or preoccupied with this world's affairs. Kingdom life challenges all that.

Relate

1. When have you become more open to new truth?
2. How has a new perspective changed your understanding and action?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 13:1-9,18-23, different people reading each section.
2. How does the parable illustrate verse 11?
3. How can we understand kingdom mysteries? See Romans 8:9-17.
4. How does God help us in our blunders? Compare Exodus 2:11-22 and Psalm 69:6-15.

Reflect

1. How can we cultivate good soil in our lives?
2. What does this mean for you in practical ways?
3. Commit those ways to the Lord in prayer together.

Kingdom Life

22. The parable sermon (2)

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Other readings:

Exodus 3:1-12

Psalm 103:1-13

Romans 8:18-25

Jesus often pointed out that only God knows those who belong to him. We can't judge that by human standards. It is revealed by God's Spirit. Weeds and wheat may look much alike at first. Many who think they're in God's kingdom are not. The self-sufficient or proud are in special danger. Those with ears need to hear!

Relate

1. When has your assessment of something needed changing?
2. When have new insights changed your prejudices?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, two people with a section each.
2. Why are we unable to judge who are the wheat and weeds?
3. What harvest is being prepared now? Note Romans 8:18-25.
4. How does God prepare us for his purposes? See Exodus 3:1-12 and Psalm 103:1-13.

Reflect

1. When has God worked strongly in your weakness?
2. How do you think God wants to work through you in your situation?
3. Claim his help in prayer for one another and others.

The Gospels

23. The parable sermon (3)

Matthew 13:44-52

Other readings:

Exodus 3:13-20

Psalm 105:1-11

Romans 8:26-30

Belonging to God's kingdom is more significant and worth more than anything else on earth. Its value cannot be over-estimated. Jesus gave many pictures of the supreme importance of that kingdom. It continues to permeate and transform us, including those who know the scriptures. They can draw on their background in new and dynamic ways. The renewing of the church is like that.

Relate

1. What material possessions do you value most?
2. If you lost your possessions in a fire, what would you start accumulating besides your basic furniture and utensils?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 13:44-52, different people reading each parable.
2. Why is God's kingdom wonderful? Note Psalm 105:1-11.
3. How is the Old Testament enriched by our understanding of Jesus' teaching and demonstration of the kingdom? See verse 52.
4. How does God work out his kingdom purposes in us? Consider Exodus 3:13-20 and Romans 8:26-30.

Reflect

1. What do you value most about kingdom living?
2. What aspects of kingdom life do you desire more fully?
3. Pray about that together.

24. The feeding of the five thousand

Matthew 14:13-21

Other readings:

Exodus 12:1-14

Psalm 143:1-10

Romans 8:31-39

God's kingdom clashes with the kingdoms of this world. Sin is exposed. Herod had imprisoned and killed John the Baptist. Jesus withdrew to a quiet place; but crowds followed. So Jesus' compassion reached out in healing grace, the opposite of power that destroys. Jesus demonstrated love and power that meets needs and involved his followers in that caring and powerful ministry.

Relate

1. When has someone's simple or small act meant a lot to you?
2. When have you done something simple or small which blessed others?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 14:13-21. One person could narrate, others read the words of Jesus and the disciples.
2. How did Jesus show his compassion? Note Romans 8:31-39.
3. How does God's power reveal his love? Compare with Matthew 4:3-4.
4. How is God's love our security? Consider Exodus 12:1-14 and Psalm 143:1-10.

Reflect

1. How can our small acts connect with God's great love and power?
2. What activity of yours do you need filled with God's love and power just now?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

25. Jesus walks on the water

Matthew 14:22-33

Other readings:

Exodus 14:19-31

Psalm 106:4-12

Romans 9:1-5

Jesus stayed in close union with God in prayer. He then demonstrated divine power over nature, and invited others, such as Peter, to participate in his actions. He would not use that power for show or for personal gain, but did reveal his awesome authority to his followers and taught them to trust in God. When they failed he quickly restored them.

Relate

1. When have you seen someone do something risky for God?
2. When have you done something difficult for God?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 14:22-33. Someone could narrate, others read the words of the disciples, Jesus, and Peter.
2. Why did Jesus need to pray alone? Note John 6:14-15, and compare with Matthew 4:8-10 where he chose only God's way for him to reign.
3. Why did Jesus avoid spectacles while demonstrating God's power? Note Matthew 4:5-7.
4. Why is God's power both glorious and dangerous? Consider Exodus 14:19-31, Psalm 106:4-12, and Romans 9:1-5.

Reflect

1. How did Peter connect with the Lord in this story?
2. How do you want to connect with God in your circumstances?
3. Pray specifically about that together.

26. The Canaanite woman

Matthew 15:21-28

Other readings:

Exodus 16:2-15 Psalm 78:1-3, 10-20 Romans 11:13-16, 29-32

Matthew points out that Jesus' mission was to Israel initially and through Israel to the world. He also shows the missionary heart of Jesus in his travels far to the north and his willingness to respond to the need and faith of Gentiles also. Jesus responded with typical compassion and admiration to the humble faith of the Canaanite woman.

Relate

1. When has an 'outsider' surprised you or challenged your faith?
2. When have you been blessed by someone considered an outsider?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 15:21-28. Different people could read each role.
2. Why would Jesus help 'unclean' Gentiles? Note verse 20 and Romans 11:13-16,29-32.
3. What were Jesus priorities and why was he pleased with the woman?
4. Why are we all outsiders or unclean, in need of God's amazing grace? Consider Exodus 16:2-15 and Psalm 78:1-3, 10-20.

Reflect

1. In what ways does the gospel of God's kingdom confront your traditions or prejudices?
2. What steps can you take to be more Christ-like?
3. Offer these steps to God in prayer together.

27. Peter's confession

Matthew 16:13-20

Other readings:

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm 95

Romans 11:33-36

Peter's shocking statement earned Jesus' warm approval. To be a good man or prophet was acceptable; to claim to be the Messiah was seen as blasphemy. The leaders finally had Jesus killed for it. The early Christians were severely persecuted for this claim. Yet Peter got it right, by divine revelation. The church is built on it.

Relate

1. When has some new insight transformed your thinking?
2. How has this affected your attitudes or behaviour?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 16:13-20, someone reading verses 13-16, another reading verses 17-20.
2. Why was Peter's answer so radically different from the others? See also Romans 11:33-36.
3. Why was this revelation so dangerous? Compare verses 16 and 20 with Matthew 26:63-66.
4. Why are God's revelations so surprising and awesome? Consider Exodus 17:1-7 and Psalm 95.

Reflect

1. How does this passage affect your beliefs and behaviour now?
2. What part do you think the Lord wants you to have in his church?
3. Pray about that together.

28. Discipleship

Matthew 16:21-28

Other readings:

Exodus 19:1-9

Psalm 114

Romans 12:1-13

Peter's claim that Jesus was the Messiah was a turning point. From then on Jesus prepared his followers for his death. Peter's rebuke of Jesus earned Jesus' strong rebuke. The way of the cross was inevitable and essential. Jesus would not turn from that. However, it also means Jesus' followers walking that way, even to physical death. It was so then. It still is.

Relate

1. Who has been a good example of Christian discipleship for you?
2. What do you see as important aspects of discipleship?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 16:21-28, someone reading verses 21-23 and another reading verses 24-28.
2. Why did Peter's rebuke earn Jesus' stronger rebuke?
3. Why is the cross central to discipleship? Note Romans 12:1-2.
4. Why is God's claim on us so total? Consider Exodus 19:3-6 and Psalm 114.

Reflect

1. In your discipleship what gifts or ministries do you see most strongly in operation? Note Romans 12:3-13.
2. What gifts do you see most clearly in others in your group?
3. Give thanks for these and pray about their future use.

The Gospels

29. The community sermon (1)

Matthew 18:15-20

Other readings:

Exodus 19:16-24

Psalm 115:1-11

Romans 13:1-10

Jesus brought into being a new community of his followers. To that community of believers he entrusted his ministry. He gave them authority and required unity with mutual reconciliation and respect among them. His church has all the potential of his own ministry on the earth, and is charged with that same ministry.

Relate

1. When have you enjoyed making peace after a disagreement?
2. How do you feel when you are at peace with others?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 18:15-20, a verse each.
2. What is required for unity and submission in the Christian community? Note John 17:20-21 and Romans 13:1-10.
3. What authority does Jesus' church have? Compare verses 17-18 with Matthew 16:18-19.
4. Why are authority and unity so significant? Consider Exodus 19:16-24 and Psalm 115:1-11.

Reflect

1. When have you discovered the presence or authority of Jesus in a new way through forgiveness and unity with others?
2. What do you desire for your group's unity now?
3. Pray for that.

30. The community sermon (2)

Matthew 18:21-35

Other readings:

Exodus 20:1-20

Psalm 19:7-14

Romans 14:5-12

Jesus' community, the church, must be based on love and unity. So mutual forgiveness is essential. In Jesus we have God's forgiveness, unmerited and complete. So we are required to forgive others, fully. This is opposite to the world's standards and behaviour but is demanded of us by our Lord who forgives us totally.

Relate

1. When did you become aware of God's forgiveness in your life?
2. How does that awareness affect you now?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 18:21-35, someone narrating and others reading the words of Peter, Jesus, the king, the servant, the other servant.

2. Why are judgemental and unforgiving attitudes so destructive?

Note Romans 14:5-12.

3. Why does God's forgiveness of us demand our forgiveness of others?

4. How are God's laws both a marvellous guide and a reminder of our need for forgiveness? Note Exodus 20:1-20 and Psalm 19:7-14.

Reflect

1. What link have you found between forgiveness and health or wholeness? Note James 5:16.

2. What forgiveness do you need to receive or give just now?

3. Pray about this with love and gentleness.

The Gospels

31. The parable of the labourers

Matthew 20:1-16

Other readings:

Exodus 32:1-4

Psalm 106:7-8, 19-23

Philippians 1:21-27

Jesus often stressed that the first would be last, and the last first. God's grace cannot be measured by our finite ways or tiny concepts. That grace is infinite, and freely available to all who will respond. Our achievements or efforts do not earn grace. It is a gift. We can be grateful for all God's goodness to us and to others as well.

Relate

1. When have you been surprised by God's generous grace?
2. How does God's grace affect you? Consider Luke 7:47.

Respond

1. Read Matthew 20:1-16, someone narrating and others reading the words of the landowner and the servants.
2. How does God's grace turn things upside down? Consider verse 16 and 19:30.
3. Why do we need God's amazing grace? Note Exodus 32:1-4 and Psalm 106:7-8,19-23.
4. Why does God treat us this way? Compare this story with the story of the prodigal's father going out to both his sons: Luke 15:20, 28.

Reflect

1. Why is serving the Lord its own wonderful reward? Note Philippians 1:21-27.
2. What does God's grace mean for you in your life and work?
3. Pray about that for one another and others.

32. The parable of the two sons

Matthew 21:28-32

Other readings:

Exodus 33:12-23

Psalm 99

Philippians 2:1-13

The kingdom of God belongs to those who say yes to God, who repent, the humble, the outcast. God's grace is freely available. Yet our sin of pride and prejudice may cut us off from that grace, as with Israel's leaders in the days of John the Baptist and Jesus. This story shocks religious people still. Sinners enter the kingdom ahead of those who are self-righteous.

Relate

1. When have you changed your mind about something?
2. Why did you?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 21:28-32, a verse each.
 2. Why did this parable sting the good, religious people?
 3. Why is it often easier for unbelievers and sinners to enter the kingdom of God ahead of good, moral people?
 4. How does our response open the way to discover God's glory and majesty?
- Consider Exodus 33:12-23 and Psalm 99.

Reflect

1. What do you find most significant about Jesus' wholehearted obedience? Note Philippians 2:1-13.
2. In what ways do you need to change to be like that?
3. Pray about that in surrender and faith.

The Gospels

33. The parable of the tenants

Matthew 21:33-43

Other readings:

Numbers 27:12-23

Psalm 81:1-10

Philippians 3:12-21

God reaches out to us constantly, urgently. Only if we persist in our rejection of that love and grace are we condemned. God does not violate our free will. Time after time God's messengers have been rejected, and even God's Son was killed. This had national consequences for Israel. Our response to God's kingdom has personal consequences for us and for others.

Relate

1. When have you discovered you were needed by others?
2. When have you discovered you were not indispensable?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 21:33-43, a verse each.
 2. What does this story say about God's persistent grace and our response? Note verse 43 and Philippians 3:17-21.
 3. Why does the missionary thrust of this story challenge tradition?
 4. In what ways are God's purposes much bigger than our ideas?
- Consider Numbers 27:12-23 and Psalm 81:1-10.

Reflect

1. What is your response to God's claim on you? Reflect on Philippians 3:12-16.
2. How can your group help you respond more fully?
3. Act on those ideas in prayer together.

34. The parable of the marriage feast

Matthew 22:1-14

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Psalm 135:1-14

Philippians 4:1-9

The theme of God's abounding grace and invitation continues, along with the awful undercurrent of human rebellion and resistance. Yet grace persists. The missionary nature of God's love cannot be stopped by anyone. It extends to all people, everywhere. The nation of Israel had to learn this. So do we. God will not be limited by any of us.

Relate

1. What kind of wedding breakfasts have you especially enjoyed?
2. What kind of BYO meals do you enjoy most?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 22:1-14, a paragraph each.
2. How is this story both a warning and wonderful invitation? See Psalm 135:1-14.
3. What is appropriate dress in the king's presence? Note Philippians 4:1-9 and Colossians 3:12-14.
4. How do our lives now affect our future destiny? Consider Deuteronomy 34.

Reflect

1. What can you do to encourage interest in the wedding banquet?
2. Who do you think are most likely to show interest?
3. Pray for them and others, and for your part in the celebrations.

35. Paying tribute to Caesar

Matthew 22:15-20

Other readings:

Ruth 1:1-19a

Psalm 146

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

As hostility toward Jesus by religious leaders increases they try to trap him with sarcastic jibes and evil intentions. Again, Jesus lifts the discussion to bigger issues and challenges them about their priorities and loyalties. Those challenges remain. We all face them! Kingdom life transcends our petty rules and legalism.

Relate

1. What are some conflicting loyalties in your life?
2. What are some of your top priorities?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 22:15-20, someone reading verses 15-17, another reading verses 18-20.
2. What is important about loyalties and priorities? See Ruth 1:1-19a. and Psalm 146.
3. What point did Jesus emphasise in this clash?
4. What priorities does God bless? Consider 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to give to God what belongs to God?
2. How do those priorities affect your obligations to human authorities?
3. Pray about those commitments together.

36. The greatest commandment

Matthew 22:34-46

Other readings:

Ruth 2:1-13

Psalm 128

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Note the context of the greatest commandment. Jesus replies to heated theological debate by identifying the heart of all theology - knowing God in a loving relationship, lived out in love for others. Further, Jesus shows that the Messiah is more than human: David calls him Lord. Yet the leaders refuse to know God revealed in Jesus the Lord. Jesus calls us all to know God through a commitment of love.

Relate

1. What are some of your earliest memories of human love?
2. How did you become aware of God's love?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 22:34-46, a section each.
2. How can we please God? Note 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8.
3. How does the great commandment challenge other priorities and traditions?
4. Why is loving God and others so greatly blessed by God? Consider Ruth 2:1-13 and Psalm 128.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to love God with your whole being?
2. What does it mean for you to love others as yourself?
3. Pray for one another in regard to these challenges.

37. Hypocrisy and ambition

Matthew 23:1-12

Other readings:

Ruth 4:7-17

Psalm 127

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13, 17-20

Jesus denounces the leaders, again emphasising that the greatest are the servants. The humble will be exalted. Here is a terrible warning for those whose doctrine is right but whose attitude is wrong. This chapter has seven woes pronounced against hypocrisy and ambition in the strongest terms, yet ends in the broken hearted cry of love rejected (23:37-39).

Relate

1. What for you is good and bad ambition?
2. How does hypocrisy creep into our lives?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 23:1-12, a paragraph each.
2. Why was Jesus so hostile towards the religious leaders?
3. How does Jesus instruct us to avoid the same trap? Note verses 11-12 and 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13,17-20.
4. What work does God bless? Consider Ruth 4:7-17 and Psalm 127.

Reflect

1. What commitments and service do you offer God?
2. What service do you appreciate in the others in your group?
3. Pray for one another in your response to the Lord's claim on you.

38. The final sermon (1)

Matthew 25:1-13

Other readings:

Amos 5:18-24

Psalm 50:7-15

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Jesus challenges us all to take our destiny seriously. Preparation here affects the future. At the close of his own life and ministry, faced with mounting opposition, Jesus urged everyone to watch out and be prepared. The end must come. Failure to be ready, whenever or however the end may come, would be disastrous.

Relate

1. Do you usually arrive early, on time or late for meetings?
2. What do you prefer to do?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 25:1-13, someone narrating, others reading the parts.
2. How does this story link with the previous one (24:45-51)?
3. How can we be prepared? See 24:36,42 and Psalm 50:14-15.
4. Why is the Lord's coming both encouragement and warning? Note Amos 5:18-24 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Reflect

1. What do you expect the Lord's coming to be like?
2. What preparations have you made?
3. Pray for yourselves and others concerning this.

The Gospels

39. The final sermon (2)

Matthew 25:14-30

Other readings:

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

Psalm 76

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Jesus confronts us. He claims us for himself. To ignore him is to refuse him. Response involves faith and action. Our lives count. We are accountable to God and will report in at the end. Our availability counts more than our ability. Abilities vary. We are all required to be faithful, irrespective of our different talents.

Relate

1. What did you enjoy most at school?
2. What do you enjoy doing now?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 25:14-30, a verse each.
2. What is the main point of this story?
3. How is our perception of God affected by our faithfulness to him? Note verses 24-25 and Psalm 76.
4. How should we prepare for the day of the Lord? Consider Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

Reflect

1. What talents or abilities has God given you?
2. What talents or abilities do you see in others in your group?
3. Pray about using these faithfully.

40. Christ the King

Matthew 25:31-46

Other readings:

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 Psalm 23 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

We are servants of the Lord, accountable to him. Whatever we do for others, especially those considered insignificant or unimportant, we do for the Lord himself. Christ the king reigns in mercy and justice with holy love. His kingdom must show this in our lives now.

Relate

1. When has someone helped you?
2. When have you helped someone in need?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46, a paragraph each.
2. What does the Lord expect of us? Remember Matthew 22:39.
3. What attitudes produce the actions praised in this story?
4. Where is everything heading? Compare Psalm 23 with Ezekiel 34:20-24 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

Reflect

1. What attitudes or actions do you need to develop more fully as a result of this study?
2. How?
3. Do that in prayer together.

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Part II: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

1. The transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-9

Other readings:

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 2:6-11

2 Peter 1:16-21

After Peter's astounding confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus taught his disciples what that meant in terms of his death and resurrection and their discipleship (16:21-28; 17:1). The last journey to Jerusalem started at that time with his transfiguration. His glory was revealed. God gave unqualified approval of his Son.

Relate

1. What was a high point or mountain top experience in your life?
2. What do you think pleases God in your life or circumstances?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 17:1-9 aloud. Different people the spoken parts.
2. About a week after Peter declared who Jesus was (16:16) and Jesus predicted his own death, Jesus was transfigured. How are these events linked? Note Luke 9:31.
3. Why were God's words so important?
4. Why were the shining appearances, the bright cloud and the voice so significant? Consider Exodus 24:12-18, Psalm 2:6-11 and 2 Peter 1:16-21.

Reflect

1. When has God broken through into your life or experience?
2. How do mountain top or valley experiences affect you now?
3. Pray about that, acknowledging God's presence in your situation.

2. The temptations

Matthew 4:1-11

Other readings:

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-17, 25 - 3:7 Psalm 130 Romans 5:12-19

The way of the cross is the hardest way of all. Temptations divert us. They did not divert Jesus from his total obedience to God's will. Jesus' mission included the cross. He chose to give his life. He lived in full obedience. He alone could proclaim and demonstrate God's kingdom rule in its fullness.

Relate

1. When have you been tempted to doubt God's word?
2. How has God's word helped you deal with temptations?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 4:1-11 aloud. One person could read with the whole group responding together in verses 4, 7 and 10.
2. What did the temptations challenge for Jesus and how did he combat the challenge? See verses 3:17; 4:6.
3. How does temptation challenge us? Note Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7.
4. How does God's faithfulness rescue us? Consider Psalm 130, especially verses 3-5, and Romans 5:12-19.

Reflect

1. How can we deal with temptation? Any examples?
2. How does God's faithfulness and grace apply to us? Any examples?
3. Prayer could include confession, repentance or gratitude to God.

The Gospels

3. The meaning of the cross

John 3:1-17

Other readings:

Genesis 12:1-8 Psalm 33:12-22 Romans 4:1-5 (6-12) 13-17

Jesus knew that his destiny involved sacrificial death on the cross, an ugly instrument of public torture and humiliation. This passage likens his death to the time God's people were saved from death when they looked at the brass serpent on a pole. God's great love gave us salvation through Jesus' death. We only have to 'look and live' or trust God because of Jesus' death.

Relate

1. What gave you security in your childhood or youth?
2. What gives you security now?

Respond

1. Read John 3:1-17. One could narrate, others read the words of Nicodemus and Jesus.
2. What point did Nicodemus miss? Consider Genesis 12:1-8 and Romans 4:1-5,13-17.
3. Why would Nicodemus miss the point?
4. Why is Christianity based on the cross? Note Psalm 33:12-22.

Reflect

1. What difference does believing or trusting God make for you?
2. What security do you have in trusting in Jesus now as well as for life beyond death?
3. Pray with thanks and faith.

4. Signs of the resurrection (1)

John 4:5-26 (27-42)

Other readings:

Exodus 17:3-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar looks to the time when in Jesus crucified and risen all people will have access to eternal life and will worship God, especially the outcasts and oppressed like that woman. Jesus, in himself, transcends our divisions and hostilities by making us one in him alone.

Relate

1. What non-conformist or different things have you done?
2. What non-conformist or different things would you like to do?

Respond

1. Read John 4:5-26. One could narrate, others read the words of Jesus and the woman.
2. Why was Jesus' action so startling and radical?
3. What did Jesus mean by living water? Consider Exodus 17:3-7 and Psalm 95.
4. How does the living water affect life now? Note Romans 5:1-11.

Reflect

1. How have you become aware of living water or an inner spring?
2. How does Jesus' life in us free us to be like him?
3. Pray about the implications of that for you now.

The Gospels

5. Signs of the resurrection (2)

John 9:1-41 or 9:1,6-9,13-17,34-38

Other readings:

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

Jesus healed a man born blind. He did this on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out that he himself was the light of the world (9:5), that the blind will see and those who see will become blind (9:39). He broke the traditions to help people. He gave life and wholeness. He still does. Our traditions may blind us to God's great grace and compassion.

Relate

1. When has someone gone out of their way to help you?
2. When has your concern for someone made you break traditions?

Respond

1. Read John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38. Different people could read each section.
2. Why did Jesus' compassionate act cause so much strife?
3. Why are God's ways often unexpected and disturbing? Compare this story of the blind man with 1 Samuel 16:7, 10-13 and David's attitude in Psalm 23.

Reflect

1. How does living in the light of the Lord's presence and power affect daily life? Note Ephesians 5:8-14.
2. How would you like to be more like the man born blind or like David?
3. Pray about that.

6. Signs of the resurrection (3)

John 11:1-45 or 11:3-7,17,20-27,33b-45

Other readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 116:1-9

Romans 8:6-11

God's power transcends and conquers death. Jesus demonstrated this in the raising of Lazarus and declared that he himself was the resurrection and the life (11:25). Those who believe in him will never die but live beyond death. Life continues into greater dimensions. We have only just begun.

Relate

1. Who had a strong influence on your life by their example?
2. What is your idea of life after death?

Respond

1. Read John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 32-45. Different people could read each section.
2. What do verses 25-26 mean for us now and in the future?
3. How does Jesus' resurrection life apply to us? Compare John 10:10 with Psalm 116:1-9 and Ezekiel 37:13-14.
4. How does God's Spirit make this a reality in us? See Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Romans 8:6-11.

Reflect

1. How has God's Spirit changed you?
2. What further changes do you want from the Spirit in your life?
3. Pray about that together.

7. Palm Sunday and the crucifixion

Matthew 21:1-11; 26:14 - 27:66 or 27:11-54

Other readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a Psalm 118:19-29; 31:9-16 Philippians 2:5-11

Holy Week! No other week in all history is like it. Jerusalem saw the cosmic drama of the universe enacted then. Yet no one there but Jesus knew what really happened. From hosannas to ‘crucify him’; from the disciples’ highest hopes to their deepest despair; from triumphant celebration to agonising desolation. The end? No. The beginning.

Relate

1. What qualities do you admire most in great people?
2. What do you admire most about Jesus’ life?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 21:1-11 and 27:20-26
2. What kind of Messiah did the people want, and get? Compare Psalm 118:19-29 with Psalm 31:9-16 and Isaiah 50:4-9.
3. How does the cross affect us now?
4. Why is Jesus’ reign or Lordship so radical and powerful? Compare Matthew 20:25-28 with Philippians 2:5-11.

Reflect

1. What servant qualities do you value or desire in your life?
2. What servant qualities do you see in one another in your group?
3. Pray about that with thanks and faith.

8. The empty tomb

Matthew 28:1-10; John 20:1-18

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalm 118:14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

(Acts 10:34-43)

Resurrection! Hope. Doubt. Reports. Rumours. Confusion. Glimpses. Earthquake. Angels. Miracles. Stone rolled away. The tomb empty. A spirit? A real body? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Relate

1. When have you been surprised or amazed in your faith journey?
2. What was a new or profound insight for you in your growth?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 28:1-10. Different people could read verses 1-4, 5-7, 8-10.
2. Why do you think Jesus revealed the resurrection to the women first? Note Matthew 27:55-56 and Luke 23:55-56 and John 20:1,14-18.
3. Why is the resurrection so significant? See Acts 10:39-43.
4. What hope does the resurrection affirm? Note Psalm 118:14-24 and Jeremiah 31:1-6.

Reflect

1. What difference does the resurrection make to your life? Note Colossians 3:1-4.
2. What hope or dream do you have for your future?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

9. The leaders react

John 20:19-31

Other readings:

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16:5-11

1 Peter 1:3-9

The incredible was true. Jesus had conquered death. God's Messiah was vindicated. The new order had begun. The king reigned. The mystery deepened. This king lives in his people by his Spirit. He imparted his own Spirit to his followers. Even doubters began to believe. Kingdom life flourished.

Relate

1. What was a celebration especially significant for you?
2. What kind of celebrations do you like most?

Respond

1. Read John 20:19-31. Different people could read the words of Jesus and Thomas.
2. Why do you think Jesus kept reassuring his friends? See verses 19, 21, 26.
3. What impact did the resurrection have on these leaders? See verses 20 and 28, Acts 2:22-32 and Psalm 16:8-11.
4. Why were these details recorded for us? Note John 20:30-31.

Reflect

1. Why is the resurrection a cause of celebration for us? Note 1 Peter 1:3, 8-9.
2. How can our worship and fellowship celebrate that?
3. Do so.

10. The Emmaus road

Luke 24:13-35

Other readings:

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

Psalm 116:12-19

1 Peter 1:17-23

The risen Lord revealed himself to two of his followers as they walked in fellowship, invited him among them, and broke bread together. Although he could materialise at any time and place, he prepared them for his physical absence and his powerful presence in the Holy Spirit. He lives on in his people. Kingdom life is Jesus' life in us.

Relate

1. When are you most aware of the Lord's presence?
2. How can this affect other times?

Respond

1. Read Luke 24:13-35. Different people read the words spoken.
2. Why do you think Jesus did not identify himself and then disappeared as soon as they recognized him?
3. What impact does believing in the risen Lord have? Consider 1 Peter 1:17-23.
4. How might we respond to our risen Lord? Note Psalm 116:12-19 and Acts 2:36-41.

Reflect

1. When have you been aware of the Lord drawing near to you in your journey? Note Luke 24:32.
2. Can we expect more of these encounters? How and when?
3. Act on that as you pray together.

The Gospels

11. Jesus the good shepherd

John 10:1-10

Other readings:

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John recorded many discourses which give further insights into the claims and nature of Jesus. Those claims are astounding, and relate to his authority and divinity. Jesus himself is the doorway or gate for his followers. In him we enter into life in all its fulness.

Relate

1. When has someone introduced you into a new situation?
2. What did you appreciate most about that help?

Respond

1. Read John 10:1-10. Someone could read verses 1-6 and another read verses 7-10.
2. How does Jesus' ministry illustrate this passage?
3. How does this passage explain the Lord's care for us? Compare verses 11 and 14 with Psalm 23 and 1 Peter 2:23-25.
4. How can the church live this out? Note Acts 2:42-47.

Reflect

1. What aspects of church life have conveyed God's care for you?
2. How can you help to convey this care to others?
3. Pray and plan about that together.

12. Jesus the way, truth and life

John 14:1-14

Other readings:

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31:1-8

1 Peter 2:2-10

Jesus himself is the way to God, he himself is the truth, and he himself is the life. Our eternal destiny lies in him. We share in his life, eternally. The sacrifice of that one life, his triumph over death and his eternal dominion are all we need for life now and for ever.

Relate

1. How did you come to know about or believe in Jesus?
2. What difference does that make to your life?

Respond

1. Read John 14:1-14. Different people could read verses 5 and 8.
2. Why are Jesus' claims about himself so revolutionary or radical?
Note Acts 7:55-60 and 1 Peter 2:2-8.
3. What changes come from believing in Jesus? See John 20:31 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.
4. How does faith in the Lord affect daily living? Note Psalm 31:1-8.

Reflect

1. In what ways does Jesus both challenge and comfort us?
2. In what ways do you need that challenge or comfort just now?
3. Pray about that together.

13. Jesus present among his people

John 14:15-21

Other readings:

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

Jesus told his disciples that when he had gone he would still be present with them, and with all who believe in him. We share his life. His Spirit lives in us. We know him. This will show in our love for him as we obey his commands. He unites us with the Father and reveals himself to those who love him and obey him.

Relate

1. Which aspects of God's being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, do you relate to most easily?
2. How do you visualise or think about God when you pray?

Respond

1. Read John 14:15-21, different people reading each verse.
2. How does Jesus describe the Trinity in this passage? See also 1 Peter 3:13-22.
3. How are we caught up into the Trinity? Consider John 14:16-17 and Acts 17:22-31.
4. How can we respond to God? Note Psalm 66:8-20.

Reflect

1. What does this close union with God mean in practice?
2. What prayer or desire do you want to bring to God now?
3. Do that.

14. Jesus prays for his people

John 17:1-11

Other readings:

Acts 1:6-14 Psalm 68:1-10 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Jesus' farewell discourse ends with a prayer. His disciples must live amid opposition as Jesus did. So Jesus prays specifically for their protection. They are sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world. They will live in another kingdom while still in the world. They will march to the beat of another drum. They belong to God.

Relate

1. When has someone praying for you or with you made a big difference in your life or situation?
2. When have you prayed with someone and seen it make a difference?

Respond

1. Read John 17:1-11. Someone could read verses 1-5, another 6-11.
2. How are God's glory and eternal life linked in Jesus?
3. How does God's glory affect our daily living? Note Acts 1:6-14 and 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11.
4. How is God's glory revealed in our unity or harmony? Consider John 17:10-11 and Psalm 68:1-10.

Reflect

1. When or where have you discovered God's glory seen in our unity?
2. What are significant ingredients of unity for you?
3. Pray about that for your group or church.

The Gospels

15. The day of Pentecost

John 7:37-39; 20:19-23

Other readings:

Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:24-34 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
(Isaiah 44:1-8)

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples as streams of living water. After his resurrection he spoke about the kingdom of God and renewed his promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit at the Pentecost harvest festival. The Spirit empowered them. Three thousand were added to them. The church was born.

Relate

1. When has God surprised you?
2. What was a significant encounter with God's Spirit in your life?

Respond

1. Read John 7:37-39. A different person could read Jesus' words.
2. What link do you see between this passage and John 14:16-17 and 20:19-23.
3. How is Pentecost different from the Old Testament accounts of the Spirit?
Consider Psalm 104:30-34, Isaiah 44:3 and Acts 2:17-21.
4. What are some results of the Spirit's indwelling? Note Acts 2:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13.

Reflect

1. What are some of the Spirit's gifts in your life and what gifts of the Spirit do you see in others in your group?
2. What spiritual gifts do you desire? Note 1 Corinthians 14:1.
3. Pray about that together.

16. The Trinity

Matthew 28:16-20

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 4:32-40 Psalm 33:1-11 2 Corinthians 13:5-14

Matthew's gospel ends with the Great Commission. All authority belongs to Jesus now. He sends us into the world to make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he commanded. He is with us to the end.

Relate

1. What qualities do you see in someone with natural authority?
2. When have you exerted your authority?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20. A second person could read Jesus' words.
2. How are Jesus's authority and our mission related?
3. How does the greatness of God affect our mission?

Consider Deuteronomy 4:32-40 and Psalm 33:1-11.

4. How is God's greatness revealed in the Trinity? Note the Trinitarian benediction or blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

Reflect

1. What part of that benediction means most to you just now?
2. What blessing or benediction do you wish to give each person in your small group?
3. Conclude with thanks in your prayer together.

Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

I 4. Mary's Son	Matthew 1:18-25
I 5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus	Matthew 2:13-23
I 2. John the Baptist	Matthew 3:1-12
I 7. The baptism of Jesus	Matthew 3:13-17
II 2. The temptations	Matthew 4:1-11
I 9. The call of the first disciples	Matthew 4:12-23
I 10. The sermon on the mount (1)	Matthew 5:1-12
I 11. The sermon on the mount (2)	Matthew 5:13-16
I 12. The sermon on the mount (3)	Matthew 5:17-26
I 13. The sermon on the mount (4)	Matthew 5:27-37
I 14. The sermon on the mount (5)	Matthew 5:38-48
I 15. The sermon on the mount (6)	Matthew 7:21-29
I 16. The call of Levi	Matthew 9:9-13
I 17. The mission sermon (1)	Matthew 9:35-10:8
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I 19. The mission sermon (3)	Matthew 10:34-42
I 3. The Messiah	Matthew 11:2-11
I 20. The revelation to the simple	Matthew 11:25-30
I 21. The parable sermon (1)	Matthew 13:1-23
I 22. The parable sermon (2)	Matthew 13:24-43
I 23. The parable sermon (3)	Matthew 13:44-52
I 24. The feeding of the five thousand	Matthew 14:13-21
I 25. Jesus walks on the water	Matthew 14:22-33
I 26. The Canaanite woman	Matthew 15:21-28
I 27. Peter's confession	Matthew 16:13-20
I 28. Discipleship	Matthew 16:21-28
II 1. The transfiguration	Matthew 17:1-9
I 29. The community sermon (1)	Matthew 18:15-20
I 30. The community sermon (2)	Matthew 18:21-35
I 31. The parable of the labourers	Matthew 20:1-16
II 7. Palm Sunday	Matthew 21:1-11
I 32. The parable of the two sons	Matthew 21:28-32
I 33. The parable of the tenants	Matthew 21:33-43
I 34. The parable of the marriage feast	Matthew 22:1-14
I 35. Paying tribute to Caesar	Matthew 22:15-22
I 36. The greatest commandment	Matthew 22:34-46
I 37. Hypocrisy and ambition	Matthew 23:1-12
I 1. The coming of the Lord	Matthew 24:36-44
I 38. The final sermon (1)	Matthew 25:1-13
I 39. The final sermon (2)	Matthew 25:14-30

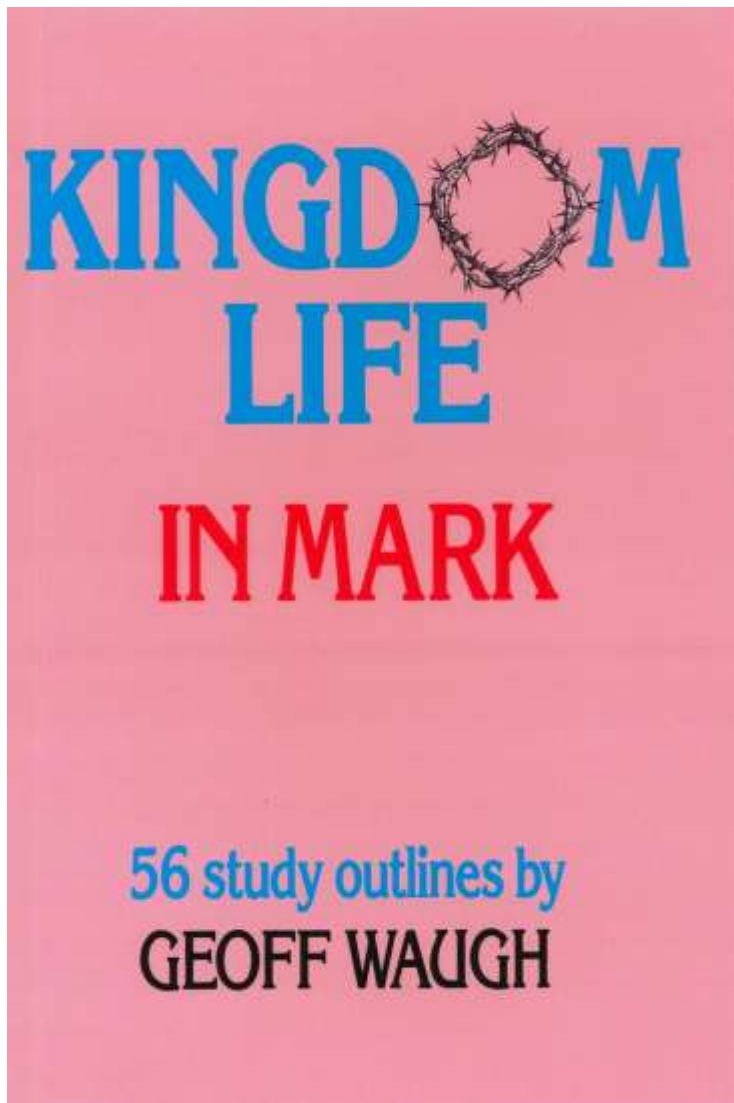
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I 40. Christ the King	Matthew 25:31-46
II 7. The Crucifixion	Matthew 26:14-27:66
II 16. The Trinity	Matthew 28:16-20
II 10. The Emmaus road	Luke 24:13-35
I 6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus	John 1:1-18
I 8. The witness of John the Baptist	John 1:29-34
II 3. The meaning of the cross	John 3:1-17
II 4. Signs of the resurrection (1)	John 4:5-42
II 15. The day of Pentecost	John 7:37-39
II 5. Signs of the resurrection (2)	John 9:1-41
II 11. Jesus the Good Shepherd	John 10:1-10
II 6. Signs of the resurrection (3)	John 11:1-45
II 12. Jesus the way, truth and life	John 14:1-14
II 13. Jesus present among his people	John 14:15-21
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Kingdom Life in Mark



Kingdom Life in Mark

Relational Bible Studies using Lectionary Readings

PART I THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

Preparation: The coming of Jesus the Messiah

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| 1. The coming of the Lord | Mark 13:32-37 |
| 2. John the Baptist | Mark 1:1-8 |
| 3. The Messiah | John 1:6-8, 19-28 |
| 4. Mary's Son | Luke 1:26-38 |
| 5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus | Luke 2:22-40 |
| 6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus | John 1:1-18 |

Commencement: The figure of Jesus the Messiah

- | | |
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| 7. The baptism of Jesus | Mark 1:4-11 |
| 8. The call of Andrew and his friend | John 1:35-42 |

The mystery of the Son of God

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| 9. The call of the first disciples | Mark 1:14-20 |
| 10. A Sabbath day in Capernaum (1) | Mark 1:21-28 |
| 11. A Sabbath day in Capernaum (2) | Mark 1:29-39 |
| 12. The cure of a leper | Mark 1:40-45 |
| 13. The cure of a paralytic | Mark 2:1-12 |
| 14. The question of fasting | Mark 2:18-22 |
| 15. Violation of the Sabbath | Mark 2:23-3:6 |
| 16. Serious criticism of Jesus | Mark 3:20-35 |
| 17. The parables of the kingdom | Mark 4:26-34 |
| 18. The calming of the storm | Mark 4:35-41 |
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| 21. The mission of the twelve | Mark 6:7-13 |
| 22. Compassion for the crowds
(interlude) | Mark 6:30-34 |
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| 29. The cure of a deaf mute | Mark 7:31-37 |

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The way of the Son of Man

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| 35. The sons of Zebedee | Mark 10:35-45 |
| 36. The cure of Bartimaeus | Mark 10:46-52 |
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| 39. The last things | Mark 13:24-32 |

Conclusion: The fulfilment of the mystery

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| 40. Christ the King | John 18:33-37 |
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PART II THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Preparation for the Passion of Jesus

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| 2. The temptations | Mark 1:9-15 |
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| 4. Teaching about the cross (1) | John 2:13-22 |
| 5. Teaching about the cross (2) | John 3:14-21 |
| 6. Teaching about the cross (3) | John 12:20-33 |
| 7. Palm Sunday and the crucifixion | Mark 11:1-11
Mark 15:1-39 |

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| 8. The empty tomb | Mark 16:1-18 |
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| 10. Emmaus postscript | Luke 24:35-48 |

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| 15. The day of Pentecost | John 15:26-27; 16:4-15 |
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Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

Introduction to Mark

Mark gives a vigorous, concise account of Jesus. The narrative moves swiftly. A brief prologue leads immediately into Jesus' ministry as he appears proclaiming and demonstrating the kingdom of God. Kingdom life fills the pages.

Central to that drama is the cross. Mark has been described as a passion narrative with an introduction. Jesus is introduced as the Son of God in the first verse. Chapters 1-8 reveal the mystery of the Son of God seen in Jesus' three year ministry based in Galilee.

Then the drama shifts in chapter 8 with Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus immediately predicts his death and prepares his disciples for it (8:31; 9:30-31; 10:32-34). The Messiah must sacrifice his life. The way of the Son of Man is the way of the cross. Chapters 11-16 describe that final week in Jerusalem.

Holy Week, the last week of the earthly life of Jesus, may be summarized this way as a general guide. The different Gospels record different events, each one telling the Gospel, the good news, in their own way. So this arrangement is just an estimate of the sequence of the momentous developments in Holy Week.

This summary follows the outline in Mark's Gospel:

Palm Sunday - Day of Demonstration
Mark 11:1-11 (Zech 9:9) - Jesus enters Jerusalem

Monday - Day of Authority
Mark 11:12-19 - fig tree, temple cleansed

Tuesday - Day of Conflict
Mark 11:20 - 13:36 - debates with leaders

Wednesday - Day of Preparation
Mark 14:1-11 - anointed at Bethany

Thursday - Day of Farewell
Mark 14:12-42 - last supper

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Good Friday - Day of Crucifixion

Mark 14:43 – 15:47 - trials and death

Saturday - Day of Sabbath

Mark 15:46-47 - tomb sealed

Easter Sunday - Day of Resurrection

Mark 16:1-18 - resurrection appearances

These passages remind us of events from the most momentous week in all history, and indeed in all eternity. The Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, took our sin upon himself, died in our place, and conquered death. He alone is the Saviour of the World. All who believe in him, all who trust him, will not die but live for ever with him.

This book follows the story of Jesus using lectionary readings from the year of Mark (Year B). The readings include passages from other gospels as well, especially John.

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Part I: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

1. The coming of the Lord

Mark 13:32-37

Other readings:

Isaiah 63:16-64:8

Psalm 80:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

God's ways are usually unexpected and mysterious. We cannot tie them down to our ideas or plans. They remain veiled or hidden until they are revealed in surprising simplicity and majestic splendour. So it was, and will be, with the coming of the Lord.

Relate

1. Introduce yourselves in pairs telling about something you like doing, or have achieved, perhaps a hobby, a reward, or a skill you have. Then briefly introduce your partner to the whole group.
2. When, if ever, did God become real to you personally?

Respond

1. Read Mark 13:32-37, someone reading verses 32-34 and another reading verses 35-37.
2. What is your picture of Jesus Christ our Lord now? Note verse 26.
3. What does it mean for us to be on guard, to be alert, to keep watch, and to watch (verses 33, 35, 37)?
4. How might our watching be expressed? Consider Psalm 80:3, 7 and Isaiah 64:3-5,8.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you personally to eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed? Note 1 Corinthians 1:7-9.
2. Is it possible for us to not lack any spiritual gift, to be strong, to be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be in fellowship with God's Son? Compare Psalm 80:3,7 and Isaiah 64:8 with 1 Corinthians 1:9.
3. Claim that in prayer with faith.

2. John the Baptist

Mark 1:1-8

Other readings:

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85:8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15a

Mark tells the greatest news story ever, the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1), God incarnate. Mark plunges quickly into his incredible story: John the Baptist fulfills prophecy as he announces the Lord's coming. Therefore, everyone is called to repent, to turn from sin, to be ready.

Relate

1. How did you get involved in the church originally?
2. What preacher, speaker or leader has had a strong influence in your life? How?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:1-8, different people reading verses 1,2-3,4-6,7-8.
2. How did John prepare the way for the Lord? Consider 2 Kings 1:8, Isaiah 40:3-5, Malachi 3:1; 4:5, and Luke 1:17.
3. Why is repentance so important? Compare John's preaching with Psalm 85:8-13 and 2 Peter 3:8-15a.
4. How did John contrast Jesus' ministry with his (verses 7-8)?

Reflect

1. How does repentance or turning to God prepare us to be baptized in or with the Holy Spirit?
2. What does this mean for you and your ministry to others?
3. Pray about that for one another.

3. The Messiah

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Other readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11

Luke 1:46b-55

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

The light shines. The glory of God appeared in a man. John the Baptist announced this mystery, then rapidly faded from the scene. Jesus is the true light, the light of the world. He takes centre stage. He is revealed to those who welcome him, to those who believe in him. They live in the light.

Relate

1. What characteristics of Jesus do you most admire?
2. What is your idea of the glory of God?

Respond

1. Read John 1:6-8, 19-28, someone narrating, others reading the words of John and the priests and Levites.
2. Why is the coming of the Messiah so unexpected, mysterious and yet glorious? Consider John 1:5,9, 14, 18, 26-27.
3. How did Jesus fulfil the expectations and promises concerning the Messiah? See Isaiah 61:1-4, 11 and Luke 1:46-55.
4. Why do people reject God's surprises?

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to be ready for God's surprises as you wait for the Lord's coming? Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 with 1 Corinthians 1:8-9 and 2 Peter 3:14.
2. What surprises might happen if you live according to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22.
3. Pray for one another about that.

Kingdom Life

4. Mary's Son

Luke 1:26-38

Other readings:

2 Samuel 7:8-16

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-24

Romans 16:25-27

God exalts the lowly and brings low the mighty. The Lord turns things upside down and inside out. We are constantly reminded that God is sovereign. Our thoughts and motives are wide open to God who chooses to bless us all. God's blessings are especially welcomed by humble people who love the Lord. Mary was such a person.

Relate

1. When has some unexpected good news affected your life?
2. What are some life-changing choices you have made?

Respond

1. Read Luke 1:26-38, one person reading verses 26-27 and 29, another reading verses 28, 30-33, 35-37, and another reading verses 34 and 38.
2. What do you learn about God from this passage? Note 2 Samuel 7:8-9, 16 and Psalm 89:1-4, 19-24.
3. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Consider Mark 1:1 and Romans 16:25-27.
4. What do you learn about Mary from this passage? Compare verse 38 with Luke 1:18-20.

Reflect

1. How is your faith or obedience being stretched at present?
2. How can others in the group help you respond to God in faith?
3. Pray about that for each other.

The Gospels

5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus

Luke 2:22-40

Other readings:

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 111

Galatians 4:4-7

God often entrusts divine purposes to us. We participate with God in those purposes. Our availability counts in God's plan more than our ability. God acts. We respond. Then, often to our amazement, we find ourselves caught up in God's great purposes, even while doing our normal tasks. Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna discovered this.

Relate

1. Who are the oldest and youngest people you know?
2. How do old and young people add to your faith development?

Respond

1. Read Luke 2:22-40, a paragraph each.
2. How were routine tasks transformed by Jesus' presence? Consider verses 22,27, and 38.
3. How can we connect more fully with God's purposes? Note verses 25-27 and 37.
4. How are God's purposes linked with this child? Compare verses 30-32 with Psalm 111:9-10, Isaiah 62:1-3, and Galatians 4:4-7.

Reflect

1. How does the presence of God's Spirit in us link us with God's purposes? Note verses 25b-27a and Galatians 4:6-7.
2. How can you be more responsive to the Spirit?
3. Claim that inheritance together in prayer.

6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus

John 1:1-18

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 147:12-20

Ephesians 1:3-6,15-18

We see God revealed in Jesus. The light of God shone brightly in Jesus, and the darkness could not put it out. That light still shines in our lives and in the world. We are bearers of the light in our world. Kingdom life is lived in the light of God.

Relate

1. What do you value most about your beginnings?
2. How have your beginnings helped shape your life?

Respond

1. Read John 1:1-18 silently and meditate on key verses for you.
2. What lights up or has special meaning for you in that passage?
3. What do you learn about Jesus from the passage? See also Ephesians 1:18-23.
4. How might the awesome greatness of Jesus Christ affect our lives? Consider Psalm 147:12-14, Jeremiah 31:12-14 and Ephesians 1:3-6.

Reflect

1. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth mean most to you? Note John 1:14.
2. What aspects of grace and truth do you see in each person in your group? Each person can remain silent as others comment on them.
3. Thank God for this as you ask to grow in grace and truth.

The Gospels

7. The baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:4-11

Other readings:

Genesis 1:1-5

Psalm 29

Acts 19:1-7

Jesus transforms everything. He accepted John's baptism but gave it new meaning. John baptised in water for repentance. Jesus identified with us in his obedience to his Father's will but did not need to repent. He received the Spirit and is the one who baptizes in or with the Spirit. The new era of the Spirit is inaugurated and demonstrated in Jesus, the Son of God.

Relate

1. Were you baptised, and why?
2. What is the significance of baptism for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:4-11, different people reading verses 4-6,7-8,9-11.
2. How did John contrast his ministry with Jesus' ministry?
3. What did Jesus' baptism begin for him? Compare the Spirit's presence and God's pleasure in Genesis 1:1-5 with Mark 1:10-11.
4. Why are we baptized in or into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Consider Acts 19:4-6 and Matthew 28:19.

Reflect

1. In what way is baptism an initiation into God's purposes for you?
2. What link, if any, do you see between baptism and forgiveness and the Spirit's presence in our lives? See Acts 2:38.
3. Conclude with prayer acknowledging God's purposes for you. Note Psalm 29:1-2,10-11.

8. The call of Andrew and his friend

John 1:35-42

Other readings:

1 Samuel 3:1-10 (11-20) Psalm 63:1-8 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Jesus welcomed the sincere enquiry from Andrew and his friend. The Lord invites us into significant relationship with himself and others. Our desire for that intimacy in relationship is fulfilled in Jesus, the source of life abundant. United in Jesus the Christ, we have unlimited potential for the deepest possible relationships.

Relate

1. What do you look for in a friend?
2. What do you offer others in a friendship?

Respond

1. Read John 1:35-42, a verse each.
2. What did Andrew and his friend really want? Note Psalm 63:1-8.
3. What amazing discovery did they make and how did it affect them? See John 1:41-42.
4. How might God's revelation affect us? Look at 1 Samuel 3:10,19-20 and 1 Corinthians 6:18-19.

Reflect

1. What do you want from Jesus?
2. What do you really want in your life now?
3. Pray for one another about that.

The Gospels

9. The call of the first disciples

Mark 1:14-20

Other readings:

Jonah 3:1-5,10

Psalm 62:5-12

1 Corinthians 7:29-35

The Lord chooses us, we don't choose him (John 15:16). Simon, Andrew, James and John discovered this. God is sovereign. We merely respond to God's claim on us. That always has radical implications for us. As we live out our kingdom life our priorities or choices are branded with that stamp of God's claim on us.

Relate

1. How has the good news of Jesus affected your life?
2. How does that good news affect your choices now?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:14-20, a paragraph each.
2. What response to God's rule did Jesus ask of everyone? Consider Jonah 3:1-5,10 and Psalm 62:11-12.
3. What specific response did Jesus ask of some people? Compare with 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.
4. How does the Lord's power and love motive us to respond to the claims of God's kingdom? Note Psalm 62:11-12.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to repent and believe the good news?
2. What specific choices are involved in this for you just now?
3. Pray for one another concerning your obedience and faith.

Kingdom Life

10. A Sabbath day in Capernaum (1)

Mark 1:21-28

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

Psalm 111

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

God's kingdom confronts evil. Since evil taints all aspects of personal and social life, the rule of God continually confronts us in every aspect of life. Jesus has authority to deal with evil. He did. He still does. We can know freedom in his name. Kingdom life sets captives free as the demonized man discovered.

Relate

1. What authority figures influenced you positively?
2. What qualities do you admire in people using authority well?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:21-28, two verses per person.
2. How did the words and works of Jesus demonstrate his authority?
3. Why would Jesus' teaching provoke or unmask evil powers?
4. How does our submission to God's rule free us from evil? Consider Deuteronomy 18:10-13, 17-20, Psalm 111:1,10 and 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, 11-13.

Reflect

1. How have you known freedom through deliverance by Jesus?
2. How can you help others to know freedom this way?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

11. A Sabbath day in Capernaum (2)

Mark 1:29-39

Other readings:

Job 7:1-7

Psalm 147:1-11

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

As Jesus' fame spread people in need crowded around him. He turned no one away. He continually responded to cries for help. His ministry included everyone and every kind of need. He cared for the whole person. Through his close union with God he exercised authority over destructive powers in body and soul. He still does.

Relate

1. When has someone's need led you to do something about it?
2. When have others done something to help you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:29-34, two people reading three verses each.
2. How would those who came to Jesus for help feel before and after his help? Consider Job 7:1-7 and Psalm 147:1-3, 10-11.
3. What kind of ministry does God's compassion and power produce?
4. What compulsion does compassion produce in us? Note Mark 1:38-39 and 1 Corinthians 9:16-18,22-23.

Reflect

1. What needs do you want to do something about?
2. What needs in your life would you like met just now?
3. Pray in faith about these together.

12. The cure of a leper

Mark 1:40-45

Other readings

2 Kings 5:1-14

Psalm 32

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Everywhere Jesus went he found people in need. The demand for his help was constant. He stayed in lonely places away from towns as he moved on, fulfilling his mission. Still the crowds followed him. His compassion reached out to all, especially the most needy, even to touching lepers. He calls us to this inclusive care.

Relate

1. What human need do you find it easiest to respond to?
2. What human need do you find it hardest to respond to?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:40-45, someone narrating and others reading the words of the leper and Jesus.
2. What guided and motivated Jesus in his ministry? Consider verses 35,38,41,44.
3. What attitude in people enabled God's power to meet their needs? Compare verse 40 with 2 Kings 5:9-14.
4. How can we know God's compassion and power in our lives? Note Psalm 32:1-2,8-11 and 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

Reflect

1. How can you reach out to others more effectively?
2. What help do you need in doing that?
3. Pray about that.

The Gospels

13. The cure of a paralytic

Mark 2:1-12

Other readings:

Isaiah 43:18-25

Psalm 41

2 Corinthians 1:18-22

When Jesus returned to his base at Capernaum the crowds swelled. So did opposition. Much of what he said and did was controversial. Already he was accused of blasphemy. Vested interests in doctrine and practice were confronted by God's grace expressed in Jesus' ministry.

Relate

1. When have innovations captured your interest or support?
2. When have innovations have rung alarm bells for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 2:1-12, a paragraph each.
2. What does this passage say about caring and community? Consider Psalm 41:1-3.
3. What does this passage say about Jesus' authority to forgive and heal then and now? Note Isaiah 43:18-21, 25 and 2 Corinthians 1:20-22.
4. Why does all orthodoxy hang on Jesus' divinity? See verse 7.

Reflect

1. What ministry of Jesus today challenges your vested interests?
2. What ministry of Jesus today stretches your obedience and faith?
3. Pray about that in repentance and faith.

14. The question of fasting

Mark 2:18-22

Other readings:

Hosea 2:14-20

Psalm 103:1-13

2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Jesus, the Son of God, fulfils in himself all the laws of God. The new fulfils and replaces the old in him. The old covenant pointed to him; the old laws prepared the way for him. His living presence, then and now, transforms our laws and rituals by his Spirit in us. Religious rules such as fasting took on new meaning in him.

Relate

1. What family rules have become obsolete for you?
2. How did those rules prepare you for your present freedom?

Respond

1. Read Mark 2:18-22, a verse each.
2. How do Jesus' three pictures answer the people's question?
3. Why is relationship with the Lord a cause for celebration? Consider Psalm 103:1-13 and Hosea 2:16, 19-20.
4. How does the Spirit of the Lord in our lives fulfil the law? Note 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6.

Reflect

1. What church traditions have been transformed for you?
2. How might the Spirit transform your present traditions?
3. Pray about the Spirit's leading in these.

15. Violation of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23-3:6

Other readings:

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 20

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Jesus constantly challenged the legalism and prejudice of religious people. He gives life and freedom. The laws which were meant to help had become idols and barriers. The means became an end. Traditions became burdens. Jesus could easily refrain from healing on the Sabbath. There were plenty of other days. But he would not.

Relate

1. What traditions have you had which you do not have now?
2. What made those traditions obsolete for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 2:23-3:6, a verse each.
2. How are these two events similar?
3. Why was Jesus so angry?
4. How does God transform the old with the new? Consider 1 Samuel 16:1,6-7,11-13, Psalm 20:6-9, and 2 Corinthians 4:5-7.

Reflect

1. What traditions might the Spirit of the Lord be changing for you?
2. Why is it difficult for us to respond fully to the Spirit?
3. Pray about that in repentance and faith.

16. Serious criticism of Jesus

Mark 3:20-35

Other readings

1 Samuel 16:14-23

Psalm 57

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

As Jesus' fame increased so did the opposition. Even his family wanted to stop him. Theologians accused him of using demonic power. Conflict became intense. Assassination plots were made. The reign of God confronted entrenched evil in individuals (3:11) and in religious and political systems (3:23). Jesus could not be ignored.

Relate

1. When have you been criticised for doing good?
2. How did you cope with that?

Respond

1. Read Mark 3:20-35, a paragraph each.
2. Why did Jesus provoke such hostility? Note verses 6, 20-22.
3. Why did Jesus so strongly warn people not to identify the Holy Spirit with evil spirits? See verses 28-30.
4. How does God's Spirit renew and transform us? Consider 1 Samuel 16:14, 23, Psalm 57:1,9-11, and 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to be part of God's kingdom in which the king regards his servants as his friends and family? Compare 3:34-35 with John 15:14-17.
2. What do you want to ask the Father in Jesus' name?
3. Do that together.

17. The parables of the kingdom

Mark 4:26-34

Other readings:

2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

Psalm 46

2 Corinthians 5:6-10,14-17

The kingdom of God invades the world's kingdoms from within, transforming people and systems from the inside out. It is hidden and powerful. It keeps growing, directed by God, like the smallest of seeds that grows into the largest of plants. God is the gardener.

Relate

1. When has something small become something big for you (such as learning to talk, write or drive)?
2. What past dream or goal have you seen achieved?

Respond

1. Read Mark 4:26-34, a paragraph each.
2. What do these two stories say about the growth of God's kingdom?
3. How do God's purposes ripen whether we participate or not? Note 2 Samuel 1:1,17-18,23-27 and Psalm 46.
4. How do God's purposes ripen in us? See 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, 14-17.

Reflect

1. What kingdom dream or goal have you seen achieved?
2. What kingdom dream or goal do you have now?
3. Pray about its progress and fulfilment.

Kingdom Life

18. The calming of the storm

Mark 4:35-41

Other readings:

2 Samuel 5:1-12

Psalm 48

2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2

Jesus was exhausted and slept in the storm. When his frightened disciples woke him he spoke with the authority of the creator and stopped the storm. Everything is subject to him. Kingdom life affects all creation and all of life. Nothing lies outside the realm of God's reign. Jesus demonstrated this awesome authority in his words and actions. He still does.

Relate

1. When have you seen the glory of God reflected in nature?
2. When have you seen nature in chaos?

Respond

1. Read Mark 4:35-41, someone narrating, others reading the words of Jesus and the disciples.
2. What did the disciples learn about Jesus that night? Consider John 1:3 and Hebrews 1:2.
3. How does the Lord's authority further his purposes? See 2 Samuel 5:1-4, 9-10 and Psalm 48:1-2, 14.
4. How does the Lord's authority ensure our salvation? Note 2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2.

Reflect

1. When has the Lord's authority surprised you or filled you with awe?
2. Where is the Lord leading you in God's awesome purposes?
3. Pray about that together in faith.

The Gospels

19. Jairus' daughter; a woman's faith

Mark 5:21-43

Other readings:

2 Samuel 6:1-15

Psalm 24

2 Corinthians 8:7-15

Across the lake Jesus brought sanity to a madman and then returned. His awesome authority gave healing with a touch and called the dead to life. God's power surged through Jesus to bring health to sick bodies and life to the dead. His word restored wholeness in his creation. People were continually amazed and astonished (5:20, 42).

Relate

1. How do you feel in the presence of someone famous?
2. Has anything ever surprised or amazed you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 5:21-43, a paragraph each.
2. Why did Jesus commend and encourage faith? See verses 34, 36.
3. Why does God's awesome power cause both fear and wonder. Compare Mark 4:41 and 5:42 with 2 Samuel 6:6-12 and Psalm 24.
4. How are the grace and glory of God revealed in Jesus' actions? Consider also 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Reflect

1. When has an answer to prayer shown you God's power or purposes?
2. How can you connect more fully with God's power or purposes?
3. Pray in faith about that together.

20. Jesus rejected at Nazareth

Mark 6:1-6

Other readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-17

Psalm 89:20-37

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

People in Jesus' home town were amazed at him. They could not see beyond the human family ties. So Jesus could do no miracles there and only healed a few sick people. He was amazed at them. We can be confronted with the mighty works of God, but it may not compute for us. So we deny it or refuse to believe it can happen to us.

Relate

1. What childhood stories do people remember about you?
2. What do you remember most about your childhood?

Respond

1. Read Mark 6:1-6, a verse each.
2. Why would Jesus' hometown take offence at him?
3. How does our faith in God's word connect us with God's purposes and actions? Consider 2 Samuel 7:4, 8-12 and Psalm 89:20-24.
4. How do God's mighty actions show in our weaknesses? See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Reflect

1. What is a growing edge for your faith at present?
2. How might your weakness be a means for God's power to be seen?
3. Pray about your response to God in faith.

The Gospels

21. The mission of the twelve

Mark 6:7-13

Other readings:

2 Samuel 7:18-29

Psalm 132:11-18

Ephesians 1:1-10

Jesus not only ministered in authority but passed that authority on to his followers. They had seen him minister. Now they in turn ministered to others with that same authority. They too called people to repent, to turn from their sins to God, and demonstrated the grace and power of God in their mission.

Relate

1. What did you learn from someone who showed you how to do it?
2. How did you feel when you did that yourself?

Respond

1. Read Mark 6:7-13, a paragraph each.
2. Why would Jesus send the disciples two by two and without supplies?

Compare with verse 6.

3. How were their words and actions like Jesus'? See 1:14-15, 27, 34.
4. How are God's purposes fulfilled in our lives? Consider 2 Samuel 7:18-20, Psalm 132:11-12, and Ephesians 1:3-10.

Reflect

1. How is our mission like the ministry of Jesus and his disciples?
2. What does that mean for you now?
3. Pray about that in faith.

22. Compassion for the crowds

Mark 6:30-34

Other readings:

2 Samuel 11:1-15

Psalm 53

Ephesians 2:11-22

After their mission the disciples reported to Jesus about what they had done. Jesus wanted time away with them to rest. But the crowds followed them. So Jesus continued to minister to people because of his compassion for them. Always his actions were an expression of his compassion for people.

Relate

1. What are some of your favourite picnics?
2. What kind of holidays do you prefer?

Respond

1. Read Mark 6:30-34, one person reading one version, another reading another version.
2. Why would time out with the disciples be especially significant after their mission?
3. What powerful lesson would Jesus' compassion teach his disciples?
4. Why does God persist with us? Consider 2 Samuel 11:2-5, Psalm 53:1-3, and Ephesians 2:19-22.

Reflect

1. How might the Lord's compassion, through his Spirit in us, affect our actions? Note Ephesians 2:19-22.
2. How does that compassion affect your actions?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

23. The feeding of the five thousand

John 6:1-15

Other readings:

2 Samuel 12:1-14

Psalm 32

Ephesians 3:14-21

Jesus' ministry blessed people but was politically dangerous. Mark tells how Herod, who had imprisoned and killed John the Baptist, heard about Jesus (Mark 6:14). Now Jesus' disciples were doing what Jesus did (Mark 6:7, 12-13, 30). A great crowd followed them (Mark 6:34, John 6:2, 5). John tells how Jesus involved his disciples in his ministry. He fed the crowds, but refused to be the kind of king the people wanted.

Relate

1. When have you faced something beyond you?
2. How did you cope?

Respond

1. Read Mark 6:34-44 and John 6:1-15, two people reading one account each.
2. What details does John add to the story and how did Jesus involve the disciples? Compare John 6:9, 14 with 2 Kings 4:42-44.
3. Why was this miraculous sign both a blessing and a problem? Note Jesus' attitude to the temptations (Matthew 4:3-10).
4. When we are overwhelmed or mess up, how can we cope? Consider 2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 32:1-2, 8-11.

Reflect

1. What difficult task or overwhelming situation faces you?
2. How can you help one another in that? Note Ephesians 3:14-21.
3. Claim those realities in prayer together.

24. The bread of life (1)

John 6:24-35

Other readings:

2 Samuel 12:15b-24 Psalm 34:11-22 Ephesians 4:1-6

John 6 gives a significant commentary on Jesus, the bread of life. The discussion is sparked off by Jesus feeding the crowd but refusing to be the king they want. This caused crisis. Many followers left him when he showed them a much deeper reality: he himself is our food, our eternal nourishment (6:66).

Relate

1. When has some ordinary thing or object reminded you of God?
2. What symbols remind you most of Jesus (e.g., cross, fish)?

Respond

1. Read John 6:24-35, a paragraph each.
2. How did Jesus challenge the crowd's shallow motives? Look at verses 27, 29, 35.
3. How does spiritual reality transcend and transform the physical? Consider Ephesians 4:1-6.
4. How can God transcend and transform our failure to understand or do his will? Note 2 Samuel 12:15-16, 22-24 and Psalm 34:17-18, 22.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to believe in Jesus? See verses 29, 35.
2. How can that faith grow stronger? Note Mark 9:24.
3. Pray about that.

The Gospels

25. The bread of life (2)

John 6:35, 41-51

Other readings:

2 Samuel 18:1,5, 9-15 Psalm 143:1-10 Ephesians 4:25-5:2

The cross continually confronts us. Jesus becomes our bread of life by giving his own life. The Word who became flesh (John 1:14) must give that flesh for us and to us. We live because he died, and then conquered death for us all. Those who see him as only another human being and not divine, the Father's Son, cannot accept this mystery.

Relate

1. When has someone you know done something that was extra-ordinary?
2. Has anything unusual happened when you have done something?

Respond

1. Read John 6:35, 41-51, a paragraph each.
2. How does Jesus contrast temporary events with the eternal life he gives? Note verses 35, 44, 47-51.
3. Why is the cross essential? Compare verse 51 with Ephesians 5:2.
4. What is our hope, even in distress? Consider 2 Samuel 18:12-15, and Psalm 143:1-2, 8-10.

Reflect

1. What aspects of Jesus' life do you see growing in you? Reflect on Ephesians 4:25-32.
2. What aspects of Jesus' life do you see in others in your group?
3. Pray for one another about that.

26. The bread of life (3)

John 6:51-58:

Other readings:

2 Samuel 18:24-33 Psalm 102:1-12 Ephesians 5:15-20

The offence of the cross is central to the gospel. We declare this and participate in it in communion: the Eucharist or thanksgiving. John uses that word in 6:11, 23. He shows how Jesus, teaching in the Capernaum synagogue, contrasted the temporary benefits of bread and manna (6:26, 58) with the eternal benefits of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It was offensive then, as now.

Relate

1. What does communion or the Eucharist mean for you?
2. When has communion or the Eucharist been especially meaningful for you?

Respond

1. Read John 6:51-58, a verse each.
2. How does this passage relate to communion or the Eucharist?
3. Why would this teaching be so offensive? Note verse 52.
4. How does Jesus' death give us life and hope? Consider 2 Samuel 18:33, Psalm 102:1-2, 9-12 and Ephesians 5:20.

Reflect

1. How might your participation in Jesus' death transform your life? Note Ephesians 5:15-20.
2. What further transformation would you like see in your life?
3. Pray for one another about that.

27. Incredulity and faith

John 6:55-69

Other readings:

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Psalm 67

Ephesians 5:21-33

Jesus keeps challenging his audience to believe in him alone. That is difficult. It is even more difficult to believe that his death is our life. To express that in terms of eating his flesh and drinking his blood is especially offensive. Yet Jesus pressed the point. Consequently, many of his disciples could no longer follow him.

Relate

1. When have you been incredulous or doubting about Jesus' claims?
2. What claims of Jesus do you still find hard to believe fully?

Respond

1. Read John 6:55-69, a paragraph each.
2. How did Jesus answer his offended followers? See verses 62-63.
3. What satisfied Jesus' loyal followers? Compare verses 64 and 68-69.
4. How can our union with God in Christ satisfy us? Consider 2 Samuel 23:1-2, Psalm 67 and Ephesians 5:21, 29-33.

Reflect

1. What satisfies you most about belonging to Christ?
2. What stretches you most in belonging to Christ?
3. Pray about that with thanks and faith.

28. Jewish customs

Mark 7:1-23

Other readings:

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12

Psalm 121

Ephesians 6:10-20

Jesus clashed with the leaders about traditions. Traditions can help preserve values, but they can easily become gods or grow obsolete. We tend to hang tightly to religious traditions because they are linked with our deepest values. Jesus continually pointed to the inner realities and values rather than the external tradition.

Relate

1. What family tradition do you value?
2. What church tradition do you value?

Respond

1. Read Mark 7:1-23, a paragraph each.
2. How did tradition nullify God's word in Jesus day? See verses 7-8, 13.
3. Why is the heart more important than traditions? Note verses 20-23.
4. How can traditions be kept helpful through a right heart or good attitudes? Consider 1 Kings 2:2-4 and Psalm 121.

Reflect

1. Which traditions do you want to keep and which can you discard?
2. What attitudes keep you strongly on course? See Ephesians 6:10-18.
3. Pray together about those attitudes.

The Gospels

29. The cure of a deaf mute

Mark 7:31-37

Other readings:

Proverbs 2:1-8

Psalm 119:129-136

James 1:17-27

Jesus journeyed north to Tyre and Sidon, and then to the Decapolis, a league of ten free cities with Greek culture stretching from Damascus to Amman. These neighbouring Gentiles were considered outcasts or unclean by orthodox Jews. Jesus continually helped those considered outcasts or unclean. He demonstrated the love and power of God by meeting people's needs everywhere he went.

Relate

1. Who would be considered unclean by your church?
2. When have you seen such people transformed by Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Mark 7:31-37, different people reading verses 31-32, 33-35, 36-37.
2. How does this passage and the preceding one relate to Jesus' clash with the Jewish leaders? Note 7:15, 24-30.
3. How does this passage demonstrate the nature of God's kingdom?
4. What indicates a right relationship with God? Consider Psalm 119:132-136, Proverbs 2:1-5, and James 1:17, 21-22, 26-27.

Reflect

1. Who might you see as unclean or outcast?
2. What can you or your group do about that?
3. Pray together about it.

30. Peter's confession

Mark 8:27-38

Other readings:

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9

Psalm 125

James 2:1-5, 8-10, 14-17

The way of the Son of Man (the title Jesus used of himself) was the way of the cross, identifying totally with sinful humanity. Yet here was more than a man. Peter's radical confession was blasphemy to Jews, for which a person could be killed. Jesus was. This awesome claim marks a mid-point turn in the gospel narrative. Now the drama moves into that final journey, to death. Jesus took his disciples into the hills north of Galilee to prepare them for the inevitable.

Relate

1. What do you find shocking or surprising about Jesus?
2. What excites or grabs you most about Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Mark 8:27-38, a paragraph each.
2. How did Peter's two strong responses to Jesus contradict each other? See verses 29, 32-33.
3. How is our cross linked with Jesus' cross? Note verse 34.
4. How does faith in God's Christ produce action? Consider Psalm 125:4-5, Proverbs 22:8-9 and James 2:14-17.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Jesus?
2. How can the group help you do that?
3. Pray for one another about that.

31. Passion and resurrection prophesied

Mark 9:30-37

Other readings:

Job 28:20-28

Psalm 27:1-6

James 3:13-18

Jesus kept away from the crowds as he trekked with his disciples in the Galilee hills, preparing them for his death and resurrection. His death featured in the transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31; Mark 9:9-10) and their discussions together (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Yet the disciples could not understand. They still thought in terms of political greatness and power, arguing about this on their way back to their base in Capernaum.

Relate

1. What puzzles you about greatness in God's kingdom?
2. What excites you about greatness in God's kingdom?

Respond

1. Read Mark 9:30-37, different people reading verses 30-32, 33-37.
2. How does Jesus' attitude to his death graphically illustrate his teaching about greatness? See verses 31 and 35.
3. How does the first being last, everyone's slave, show the rugged, radical nature of God's kingdom?
4. What is true wisdom? Note Job 28:20-24, 28, Psalm 27:4-6 and James 3:13-17.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to be the servant of all?
2. How can you do that in obedience to the Lord, not just to people's demands?
3. Pray about that for one another.

32. Instructions for the disciples

Mark 9:38-50

Other readings:

Job 42:1-6

Psalm 27:7-14

James 4:13-17; 5:7-11

The ministry of Jesus was spreading. Not only did his disciples do what he did, but others were doing the same in his name. Jesus welcomed that. He warned his disciples not to stop it. Anyone who gives even a cup of water in Jesus' name will be rewarded. The kingdom of God cannot be tied to any one group, especially those who see themselves as the in-group or privileged.

Relate

1. When has some small act of kindness meant a lot to you?
2. When has some small act of yours meant a lot to someone?

Respond

1. Read Mark 9:38-50, someone reading verses 38-41, another reading 42-50.
2. How does Jesus encourage new believers? Compare verse 42 with verse 38.
3. How does Jesus welcome commitment and diversity? See verse 50.
4. How does a big view of God free us to encourage others who are different from us? Consider Job 42:1-6, Psalm 27:13-14 and James 4:13-17; 5:7-11.

Reflect

1. When has someone's encouragement helped you to obey God?
2. What encouragement can you give each person in your group now?
3. Do that for each person in turn and pray for each other.

33. What God has joined together

Mark 10:2-16

Other readings:

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 128

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:9-11

As he journeyed toward Jerusalem, Jesus challenged the leaders and his own disciples with the cost of discipleship. He strongly defended women and children, especially as they were often ill-treated or ignored. People used bible texts to support their own interests, but Jesus showed God's greater purpose which cuts right across our selfish interests.

Relate

1. What do you like most about weddings?
2. What do you like most about children?

Respond

1. Read Mark 10:2-16, a verse each..
2. How does Jesus cut right across self-interest and legalism? Compare verses 5-9 with John 8:3, 7, 10-11, and verse 13 with Mark 9:36-37.
3. Why was Jesus' position politically dangerous? Note Mark 6:17-19.
4. How does Jesus stress God's purpose for us? Consider Genesis 2:18-24 and Psalm 128.

Reflect

1. How does knowing Jesus help to overcome legalism for you? Comment on Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:9-11.
2. How can the group help you receive Jesus' help? See Hebrews 2:18.
3. Pray for one another about that.

34. The problem of wealth

Mark 10:17-30

Other readings:

Genesis 3:8-19

Psalm 90:1-12

Hebrews 4:1-3, 9-13

Discipleship costs. Jesus challenged sincere seekers with the total reign of God over every area of life. The radical nature of Jesus' claims came sharply into focus as he faced the cross. His followers would need to lay down their lives also, many to face martyrdom. Many still face that, but all of us are called to the same commitment. Kingdom life turns priorities around: the first will be last, the last first.

Relate

1. What hero from history do you especially admire?
2. What qualities of heroes or leaders do you want to adopt?

Respond

1. Read Mark 10:17-30, a paragraph each.
2. Why would Jesus drive home the lesson that no one is good, except God, and that the kingdom of God cannot be earned? Note verses 15 and 23.
3. Why did Jesus both love this fine young man and expose his priorities? See verses 21, 24-27.
4. Why does God expose our thoughts, bringing us into the light? Consider Genesis 3:8-11, Psalm 90:8,11-12 and Hebrews 4:12-13.

Reflect

1. What priorities do you want to adjust or change?
2. How can the group or others help you do that?
3. Pray about that for one another.

The Gospels

35. The sons of Zebedee

Mark 10:35-45

Other readings:

Isaiah 53:7-12

Psalm 35:17-28

Hebrews 4:14-16

The serving and suffering Son of Man insisted on the same attitude and lifestyle in his followers. Kingdom life calls the disciple to serve and suffer as the master does. Still they missed it. Their messianic hopes included sharing political power. Jesus turned that upside down: not so with you. The great must be a servant, the first must be a slave.

Relate

1. When have you wanted authority or position?
2. When have you seen authority used well in serving others?

Respond

1. Read Mark 10:35-45, a verse each.
2. Why did James and John miss the point? Compare verses 42-45 with 8:31-32, 9:31-32 and 10:32-34.
3. Why did Jesus point to the cup of his suffering and the baptism of his death? See verses 38-39.
4. How does Jesus' suffering help us in our discipleship? Consider Isaiah 53:7-12, Psalm 35:26-28 and Hebrews 4:14-16.

Reflect

1. What tough bit of discipleship challenges you just now?
2. How can you help each other face that?
3. Pray about that together.

36. The cure of Bartimaeus

Mark 10:46-52

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:7-9

Psalm 126

Hebrews 5:1-6

The journey to Jerusalem passed through Jericho in the Jordan valley. Jesus still met the needs of those who called for help, especially those who were oppressed and hindered by others. A blind man saw, and followed Jesus. Yet many who can see are blind to Jesus' mission. God's love and power are available to all, for all in need.

Relate

1. How do you usually respond to collectors for charities?
2. How do you usually respond to beggars, blind or seeing?

Respond

1. Read Mark 10:46-52, a verse each.
2. What is a typical response to those who don't fit the norm? See verse 48.
3. What is Jesus' response to need? Note Psalm 126.
4. What does this mean for us? Consider Jeremiah 31:7-9 and Hebrews 5:1-6.

Reflect

1. What changes does Jesus' attitude and action mean for you?
2. How can the group help you make any changes?
3. Pray about that for one another.

37. The first commandment

Mark 12:28-34

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Psalm 119:33-48 Hebrews 7:23-28

Jesus came to Jerusalem in great popularity. Was he the Messiah, the deliverer from oppression? Vested interests were challenged. The leaders wanted Jesus killed (11:18; 12:12). Tension mounted. Debate flared in attempts to trap him. Yet Jesus firmly stood his ground and emphasised the kingdom essentials such as loving God and others.

Relate

1. What motto do you like?
2. What is a guiding principle in life for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 12:28-34, a paragraph each.
2. How was this leader's attitude different from many others? Note 11:28; 12:13,18.
3. Why was this leader close to God's kingdom? See verses 32-34.
4. How does Jesus both demonstrate and fulfil the law in himself? Consider Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Psalm 119:33-37 and Hebrews 7:24-27.

Reflect

1. What does this commandment in its two parts mean for you?
2. How does this relate to kingdom living in your life?
3. Pray together about your response to this commandment.

38. The scribes; the widow's mite

Mark 12:38-44

Other readings:

1 Kings 17:8-16

Psalm 146

Hebrews 9:24-28

Jesus confronted and unmasked the hypocrisy and ambition of religious and political leaders and at the same time commended and praised those whose hearts were right with God. The confrontation led directly to his arrest, trial and execution. Yet the kingdom of God came powerfully this way, the way of giving everything over to God.

Relate

1. When has someone's small gift meant a lot to you?
2. When have you given something small that meant a lot for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 12:38-44, someone reading verses 38-40, someone else verses 41-44.
2. How does the double reference to widows sharpen Jesus' contrast? See verses 40 and 42.
3. Why are position and power so dangerous and corrupting?
4. Why does God show special favour to the poor and oppressed? Consider 1 Kings 17:8-9, 15-16 and Psalm 146:5-10.

Reflect

1. How can you keep a heart soft toward God and others?
2. What does giving everything to God mean for you?
3. Pray for each other in this regard.

The Gospels

39. The last things

Mark 13:24-32

Other readings:

Daniel 7:9-14

Psalm 145:8-13

Hebrews 10:11-18

Sitting with his four apostles on the Mount of Olives directly opposite the huge temple buildings, Jesus tells of the end of all things (13:1-4). The old order is passing; the new has come. Jesus withdrew from the mounting conflict in Jerusalem to his friends in Bethany (14:1-3) before returning for the Passover and his passion, death and triumph. Here he speaks of that ultimate triumph in the new era.

Relate

1. When have you had deep talks with someone before they left you?
2. What was significant about that for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 13:24-32, a verse each.
2. Why does the Lord's coming in power and glory transform everything else?
See verses 26 and 31.
3. How did the resurrection and ascension announce this new era?
4. Why is the ultimate triumph of the Son of Man so significant? Consider Daniel 7:13-14, Psalm 145:8-13 and Hebrews 10:12-14.

Reflect

1. What is your picture of Jesus now? Note Revelation 1:12-16.
2. How might this picture affect the way you live?
3. Pray in faith with vision.

40. Christ the King

John 18:33-37

Other readings:

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 93

Revelation 1:4b-8

The people wanted a king, the Messiah. He came. Yet his kingdom was not of this world. It is far greater. Eternal. The ultimate. Jesus the Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. He shall reign for ever. He won this kingdom in his death and resurrection, his total triumph over all other kingdoms. Every knee shall bow to him.

Relate

1. What was one of your favourite childhood stories?
2. What is your picture of Jesus' final kingdom?

Respond

1. Read John 18:33-37, two people reading alternate verses including verse 37 a and b.
2. What kind of king did Jesus claim to be?
3. How does his kingdom permeate and transform all other kingdoms? See verse 37.
4. Where are we headed? Note Psalm 93:1-2,5, Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Revelation 1:4b-8.

Reflect

1. How do you want to respond to the kingly reign of Jesus?
2. Give symbolic gifts in words to each person in your group to help each one respond to Jesus' reign.
3. Pray for each person in the group?

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Part II: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

1. The transfiguration

Mark 9:2-9

Other readings:

2 Kings 2:1-12a

Psalm 50:1-6

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Mark's gospel narrative takes a sharp turn with Peter's astounding confession that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus taught them what that meant in terms of his death and resurrection, and what is involved in discipleship (8:27-38; 9:30-31; 10:32-33). He prepared his disciples for the end of his ministry as he spent time with them in the hills north of Galilee. The last journey to Jerusalem started there with his transfiguration. His glory was revealed.

Relate

1. What is a favourite place of retreat or R & R (rest and recreation) for you?
2. When have you felt especially close to God?

Respond

1. Read Mark 9:2-9, one narrating and two others reading verses 5-6 and 7.
2. What is the connection of this story with seeing God's kingdom come with power? Note 9:1?
3. Why would the transfiguration be important to Jesus and to his disciples? See Luke 9:30-31 and Mark 8:31-32.
4. How might we have glimpses of God's glory? Consider 2 Kings 2:9-12, Psalm 50:1-3 and 2 Corinthians 4:6.

Reflect

1. What are some glimpses of God's glory you have known?
2. Why might those encouraging glimpses not remain yet? See Mark 9:5.
3. Give thanks as you move on in anticipation.

Kingdom Life

2. The temptations

Mark 1:9-15

Other readings:

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Jesus' mission included the cross. He chose to give his life. He lived in full obedience. He alone could proclaim and demonstrate God's kingdom rule in its fulness. We only glimpse it. The way of the cross is the hardest way of all. Temptations divert us. They did not divert Jesus from his total obedience to God's will.

Relate

1. What is some way in which you chose to obey God?
2. What blessing resulted from that?

Respond

1. Read Mark 1:9-15, three people reading verses 9-11, 12-13, and 14-15.
2. What did obedience mean for Jesus? Note 1:11-12 and 9:7.
3. What does obedience mean for us? See 1:15.
4. How does Jesus' obedience open God's new covenant to us? Consider Genesis 9:12-16, Psalm 25:1-10 and 1 Peter 3:18-22.

Reflect

1. How can you have a good conscience toward God?
2. How can the group help you obey God?
3. Pray for one another about that.

3. The meaning of the cross

Mark 8:31-38

Other readings:

Genesis 17:1-10,15-19 Psalm 105:1-11 Romans 4:16-25

Mark records how Jesus prepared his disciples for the end of his ministry by teaching them three times about his death and resurrection (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). They could not understand. It did not make sense. Their concept of the Messiah and the reign of God remained tied to a political kingdom. Jesus pointed out that the way of the cross means self-denial and losing life for him and his followers. Losing life is the only way to find it.

Relate

1. When has letting something go set you free?
2. What does freedom mean for you?

Respond

1. Read Mark 8:31-38, a verse each.
2. What did the cross mean for Jesus? Compare 9:31-33, 38 with Daniel 7:13-14.
3. What does the cross mean for us? Note 9:34-37.
4. How does God's covenant to us transform losing life to finding life? Consider Genesis 17:1-10, Psalm 1-11 and Romans 4:16-25.

Reflect

1. What does losing your life involve for you just now?
2. How can that free you to serve God more faithfully?
3. Pray about that for one another and others.

4. Teaching about the cross (1)

John 2:13-22

Other readings:

Exodus 20:1-17

Psalm 19:7-14

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Jesus' zeal for God's glory clashed with evil in all its forms. Trading of animals at the temple had been introduced as a means of helping people to make sacrifices required by the law. It easily became corrupt, favouring the rich who sold stock to the temple, providing profits for temple administration and cheating the poor who had to buy there. Jesus' own death fulfilled and ended all sacrifices.

Relate

1. What are you enthusiastic or zealous about?
2. What makes you feel like singing or dancing?

Respond

1. Read John 2:13-22, someone narrating and others reading the words of Jesus and the Jews.
2. Why did anyone, and especially Jesus, have the right to challenge the racket in the temple? See Mark 11:17.
3. How was Jesus' authority directly linked with the Passover and his death? Compare verses 13, 18-22 with 1 Corinthians 1:22-25.
4. How is God's covenant fulfilled in Jesus? Consider Exodus 20:1-17 and Psalm 19:7-14.

Reflect

1. How does Jesus' zeal on our behalf affect you?
2. How is Jesus' death an invitation to life for you?
3. Respond to that in prayer together.

The Gospels

5. Teaching about the cross (2)

John 3:14-21

Other readings:

2 Chronicles 36:14-23 Psalm 137:1-6 Ephesians 2:4-10

The Son of Man must be lifted up - to die. What a paradox! The title Son of Man, like Messiah, spoke of authority, glory and power (Daniel 7:13-14). Yet Jesus interpreted it in terms of giving life through his death. The most loved and memorised gospel statement in the Bible comes in that context.

Relate

1. What version of John 3:16 do you know from memory?
2. What does that verse mean to you?

Respond

1. Read John 3:14-21, a verse each.
2. Why does Jesus compare himself with the snake on a pole? See Numbers 21:8-9.
3. Why does God not condemn the world? Note John 3:17; 8:11 and Ephesians 2:4-10.
4. Can we be condemned? Consider John 3:18-21, 2 Chronicles 36:14-17 and Psalm 137:1-6.

Reflect

1. What do you appreciate most about John 3:16.
2. How would you use that verse in talking with people?
3. Pray about the implications of that for your group.

6. Teaching about the cross (3)

John 12:20-33

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:31-34 Psalm 51:10-17 Hebrews 5:7-10

Jesus' death means life for us. Even Gentiles, those outside God's covenant people, are included in the new covenant. In that one death the whole world lies embraced in God's love and forgiveness. A grain of wheat dies, and produces life. So with Jesus. So with us in following him.

Relate

1. What does the cross mean to you?
2. Why is the cross the chief Christian symbol?

Respond

1. Read John 12:20-33, a paragraph each.
2. How does the wheat seed parable apply to Jesus? See verses 24,32-33 and Hebrews 5:7-10.
3. How does that parable apply to us? See verses 24-26.
4. How do we participate in the new covenant? Consider Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Psalm 51:10-17.

Reflect

1. What does it mean for you to know the Lord? Note Jeremiah 31:34.
2. How can the group help you know the Lord more fully?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

7. Palm Sunday and the Crucifixion

Mark 11:1-11; 15:1-39

Other readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a Psalm 118:19-29; 31:9-16 Philippians 2:5-11

Holy Week! No other week in all history can touch it. Jerusalem saw the cosmic drama of the universe enacted then. Yet no one there but Jesus knew what really happened. From hosannas to ‘crucify him’; from the disciples highest hopes to their deepest despair; from triumph to tragedy. The end? No. The beginning.

Relate

One approximate scenario for that week could be:

Day 1 - triumph; entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11).

Day 2 - authority; temple cleansed (11:12-19).

Day 3 - conflict; clash with leaders (11:20-13:37)

Day 4 - preparation; anointing (14:1-10)

Day 5 - farewell; passover begins (14:12-31)

Day 6 - passion; Gethsemane, trials and crucifixion (14:32-15:47)

Day 7 - silence; sabbath till sundown (16:1).

Day 8 - conquest - resurrection (16:2-20).

What dramatic day intrigues you most from that week?

Respond

1. Read Mark 11:1-11 and 15:21-39 and comment on its impact on you.
2. Comment on Psalm 31:9-16 and 118:19-29.
3. Comment on Isaiah 50:4-9a.
4. Comment on Philippians 2:5-11.

Reflect

Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11):

Comment on what this means for you and respond in prayer.

8. The empty tomb

Mark 16:1-18 and John 20:1-18

Other readings:

Isaiah 25:6-9 (Acts 10:34-43) Psalm 118:14-24 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Resurrection! Hope. Doubt. Reports. Rumours. Confusion. Glimpses. Angels? Miracles? Stone rolled away? The tomb empty? A spirit? A real body? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Relate

1. What is your favourite Easter hymn or song?
2. What do you like about Easter?

Respond

1. Read John 20:1-18 and Mark 16:1-18.
2. How does the resurrection declare God's ultimate victory? Note Isaiah 25:6-9.
3. How were the witnesses' lives changed? See Acts 10:34-43 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.
4. What does the resurrection confirm about God? Consider Psalm 118:14-24.

Reflect

1. What does the resurrection mean for you?
2. How can the resurrection affect your daily life?
3. Celebrate in prayer and worship.

The Gospels

9. Easter evening

John 20:19-31

Other readings:

Acts 4:32-35

Psalm 133

1 John 1-2:2

The incredible was true. Jesus had conquered even death. God's Messiah was vindicated. The new order had begun. The king reigned. The mystery deepened. This king lives in his people by his Spirit. He imparted his own Spirit to his followers. Even doubters began to believe. Kingdom life flourished.

Relate

1. What doubts have you struggled with?
2. What answers have you found?

Respond

1. Read John 20:19-31, a paragraph each.
2. What does believing in Jesus involve? Note verses 29-31.
3. Why did Jesus breathe the Holy Spirit into his disciples? See verses 21-23.
4. How is the risen Lord present among us? Consider Psalm 133, Acts 4:32-35 and 1 John 1:1-3.

Reflect

1. What difference does the risen Lord make in your life?
2. What more do you think the Lord's presence can mean for you?
3. Pray about that.

10. Emmaus postscript

Luke 24:35-48

Other readings:

Acts 3:12-19

Psalm 4

1 John 3:1-7

Jesus' mission continued. He reassured his followers of his presence and imparted his Spirit to them. Although he could materialise at any time and place, he prepared them for his physical absence and his powerful presence in the Holy Spirit. He lives on in his people. Kingdom life is Jesus' life in us.

Relate

1. When have you had evidence of the Lord's presence with you?
2. Why does that evidence require faith?

Respond

1. Read Luke 24:35-48, someone narrating and someone reading Jesus' words.
2. How did Jesus encourage his disciples? See verses 36,39,43,45.
3. How did Jesus' mission continue? Note verses 47-49 and Acts 3:15-16.
4. How may the Lord's presence affect our lives? Consider Psalm 4 and 1 John 3:1-7.

Reflect

1. What does the Lord's presence mean for you just now?
2. What do you want the Lord to do in your life and work?
3. Pray about that for one another.

11. Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

Other readings:

Acts 4:8-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3:18-24

John recorded many discourses which give further insights into the claims and nature of Jesus. Those claims are astounding, and relate to his authority and divinity. A good shepherd! Shepherds in those days were disregarded as unwashed country bumpkins. Jesus not only identifies himself with them, but transforms the image into a noble one. He is the shepherd who gives his own life for his sheep.

Relate

1. When has someone gone out of their way to help you?
2. How did you respond to that?

Respond

1. Read John 10:11-18, a verse each.
2. How does Jesus contrast himself with the Jewish leaders? Compare verses 11-13 with Psalm 23.
3. How does Jesus look worldwide in his mission? See verses 14-18.
4. How does Jesus continue his shepherd ministry through us? Consider Acts 4:8-12 and 1 John 3:18-24.

Reflect

1. When has Jesus ministered directly to you through another person?
2. How can Jesus minister through you to others?
3. Pray about that.

12. Jesus the true vine

John 15:1-8

Other readings:

Acts 8:26-40

Psalm 22:25-31

1 John 4:7-12

Jesus' radical claims show up again in the image of the true vine. The Old Testament uses the vine as a symbol for Israel. Now Jesus claims to be the true Israel. Life is found only in union with him. This will show by the fruit in our lives. The life and nature of Jesus will be evident in us, and will give glory to God as Jesus' life did.

Relate

1. Who is someone who seems especially Christ-like to you?
2. What do you see as Christ-like qualities?

Respond

1. Read John 15:1-8, two people reading four verses each.
2. Why would Jesus emphasise remaining in him so much?
3. How can we remain in him? See verses 4 and 7 and 1 John 4:7-12.
4. How might God's glory and love be seen in us? Consider Psalm 22:25-31 and Acts 8:26-40.

Reflect

1. What Christ-like qualities do you see in each person in your group?
2. What Christ-like qualities do others see ripening in you?
3. Pray with thanks and faith.

The Gospels

13. Jesus present among his people

John 15:9-17

Other readings:

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

Jesus emphasised the importance of being united to him. He told his disciples that when he had gone he would still be present with them, and with all who believe in him. We share his life. His Spirit lives in us. We know him. This will show in the fruit of his life in us. That essential fruit is love for one another.

Relate

1. When have you felt closest to God?
2. When have you known God's care even without feeling close to God?

Respond

1. Read John 15:9-17, a verse each.
2. How can we show love for God? Compare this passage with 1 John 5:2-3.
3. How does God show love for us? Note verses 13-16 and Acts 10:44-48.
4. How might this intimate friendship with God affect us? See Psalm 98.

Reflect

1. What does friendship with the Lord mean for you?
2. How might it affect your living and praying? Note verse 16.
3. Pray about that.

14. Jesus prays for his people

John 17:11-19

Other readings:

Acts 1:15-17,21-26

Psalm 1

1 John 5:9-13

Jesus' farewell discourse ends with a prayer. His disciples must live amid opposition as Jesus did. So Jesus prays specifically for their protection. They are sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world. They will live in another kingdom while still in the world. They will march to the beat of another drum. They belong to God.

Relate

1. Who has prayed for you (e.g. parents, relatives, friends)?
2. What happened?

Respond

1. Read John 17:11-19, one person reading the prayer.
2. Why did Jesus pray for unity? See verse 11.
3. What does it mean to be set apart for God? Note verses 17-19.
4. How does belonging to God make a difference? Consider Psalm 1, Acts 1:21-22 and 1 John 5:11-13.

Reflect

1. How would you like Jesus to intercede for you? See Hebrews 7:25.
2. What intercessions do you want to bring to God now?
3. Do that.

The Gospels

15. The day of Pentecost

John 15:26-27; 16:4-15; Acts 2:1-21

Other readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:24-34

Romans 8:22-27

In his farewell discourse Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples. During the forty days in which he appeared to them after his resurrection he spoke about the kingdom of God and renewed his promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit at the Pentecost harvest festival. The promised dynamic of the Spirit empowered them. Three thousand were added to their community that day. The church was launched. God's kingdom grew.

Relate

1. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. What is most significant about the Spirit's presence for you?

Respond

1. Read John 15:26-27; 16:4-15 and Acts 2:1-21, a section each.
2. What did Jesus promise about the Holy Spirit? See also Romans 8:26-27.
3. What did Pentecost mean for the believers? Consider Ezekiel 37:1-14.
4. What does Pentecost mean for us? Note Psalm 104:30-34.

Reflect

1. What does being filled with the Spirit mean for you?
2. What empowering do you need for service or ministry?
3. Pray for that.

Kingdom Life

16. The Trinity

John 3:1-17

Other readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm 29

Romans 8:12-17

God reigns. The love and glory of God was revealed in Jesus. We are united with God the Father through Jesus the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God has come in Jesus, is coming in us by his Spirit, and in the end will come in all its fulness when God's reign is complete. We are kingdom people. Our God reigns.

Relate

1. What has been significant in these studies for you?
2. What is significant about the kingdom of God for you?

Respond

1. Read John 3:1-17, two people reading the verses in which Nicodemus and Jesus speak.
2. What is the link between being born again or born of the Spirit and kingdom life? Compare verses 3-8 with Romans 8:12-17.
3. Why is believing or trusting in God's Son essential for kingdom life? See verses 16-17.
4. How is God's glory revealed in kingdom life? Consider Isaiah 6:1-8 and Psalm 29:1-2,10-11.

Reflect

1. What does kingdom life mean for you?
2. What kingdom blessings does your group want to give each person in your group?
3. Express those blessings in prayer together.

Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

I 2. John the Baptist	Mark 1:1-8
II 2. The temptations	Mark 1:9-15
I 9. The call of the first disciples	Mark 1:14-20
I 10. A day in Capernaum (1)	Mark 1:21-28
I 11. A day in Capernaum (2)	Mark 1:29-39
I 12. The cure of a leper	Mark 1:40-45
I 13. The cure of a paralytic	Mark 2:1-12
I 14. The question of fasting	Mark 2:18-22
I 15. Violation of the Sabbath	Mark 2:23-3:6
I 16. Serious criticism of Jesus	Mark 3:20-35
I 17. The parables of the kingdom	Mark 4:26-34
I 18. The calming of the storm	Mark 4:35-41
I 19. Jairus' daughter; a woman's faith	Mark 5:21-43
I 20. Jesus rejected at Nazareth	Mark 6:1-6
I 21. The mission of the twelve	Mark 6:7-13
I 22. Compassion for the crowds	Mark 6:30-34
I 28. Jewish customs	Mark 7:1-23
I 29. The cure of a deaf mute	Mark 7:31-37
I 30. Peter's confession	Mark 8:27-38
II 3. The meaning of the cross	Mark 8:31-38
II 1. The transfiguration	Mark 9:2-9
I 31. Passion and resurrection prophesied	Mark 9:30-37
I 32. Instructions for the disciples	Mark 9:38-50
I 33. What God has joined together	Mark 10:2-16
I 34. The problem of wealth	Mark 10:17-30
I 35. The sons of Zebedee	Mark 10:35-45
I 36. The cure of Bartimaeus	Mark 10:46-52
II 7. Palm Sunday	Mark 11:1-11
I 37. The first commandment	Mark 12:28-34
I 38. The scribes; the widow's mite	Mark 12:38-44
I 39. The last things	Mark 13:24-32
I 1. The coming of the Lord	Mark 13:32-37
II 7. The crucifixion	Mark 15:1-39
II 8. The empty tomb	Mark 16:1-18
I 4. Mary's Son	Luke 1:26-38
I 5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus	Luke 2:22-40
II 10. Emmaus postscript	Luke 24:35-48

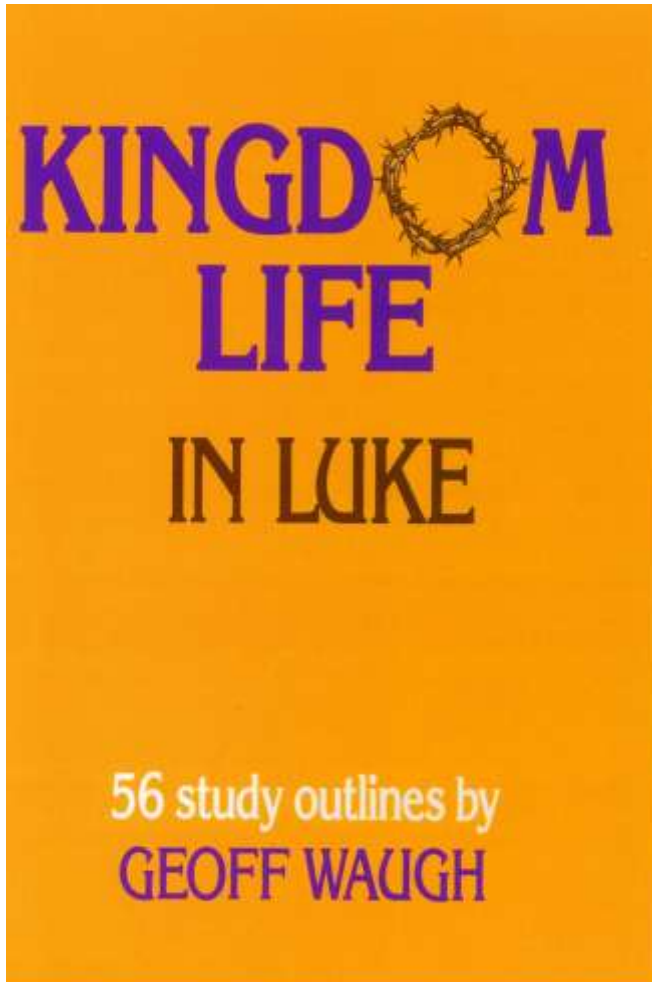
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I 3. The Messiah	John 1:6-8, 19-28
I 6. Reflections of the birth of Jesus	John 1:1-18
I 8. The call of Andrew and his friend	John 1:35-42
II 4. Teaching about the cross (1)	John 2:13-22
II 16. The Trinity	John 3:1-17
II 5. Teaching about the cross (2)	John 3:14-21
I 23. The feeding of the five thousand	John 6:1-15
I 24. The bread of life (1)	John 6:24-35
I 25. The bread of life (2)	John 6:35, 41-51
I 26. The bread of life (3)	John 6:51-58
I 27. Incredulity and faith	John 6:55-69
II 11. Jesus the Good Shepherd	John 10:11-18
II 6. Teaching about the cross (3)	John 12:20-33
II 12. Jesus the true vine	John 15:1-8
II 13. Jesus present among his people	John 15:9-17
II 15. The day of Pentecost	John 15:26-27; 16:4-15
II 14. Jesus prays for his people	John 17:11-19
I 40. Christ the King	John 18:33-37
II 9. Easter evening	John 20:19-31

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Kingdom Life in Luke



Kingdom Life in Luke

Relational Bible studies using lectionary readings

PART I THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

Preparation: The coming of Jesus the Messiah

1. The coming of the Lord Luke 21:25-36
2. John the Baptist Luke 3:1-6
3. The Messiah Luke 3:7-18
4. Mary's Son Luke 1:39-55
5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus Luke 2:41-52
6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus John 1:1-18

Commencement: The figure of Jesus the Messiah

7. The baptism of Jesus Luke 3:15-17,21-22
8. The marriage feast at Cana John 2:1-11

Luke's program for Jesus' ministry

9. The visit to Nazareth (1) Luke 4:14-21
10. The visit to Nazareth (2) Luke 4:21-30

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11. The call of the first disciples Luke 5:1-11
12. The sermon on the plain (1) Luke 6:17-26
13. The sermon on the plain (2) Luke 6:27-38
14. The sermon on the plain (3) Luke 6:39-49
15. The cure of the centurion's servant Luke 7:1-10
16. The widow of Nain Luke 7:11-17
17. Jesus' feet anointed Luke 7:36-8:3
18. Peter's confession of faith Luke 9:18-24

The travel narrative: part one

19. The journey to Jerusalem begins Luke 9:51-62
20. The mission of the seventy-two Luke 10:1-12, 17-20
21. The good Samaritan Luke 10:25-37
22. Martha and Mary Luke 10:38-42
23. The importunate friend Luke 11:1-13
24. The parable of the rich fool Luke 12:13-21
25. The need for vigilance Luke 12:32-40
26. Not peace but division Luke 12:49-56

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- 27. Few will be saved Luke 13:22-30
- 28. True humility Luke 14:1,7-14
- 29. The cost of discipleship Luke 14:25-33

The Gospel within the Gospel

- 30. The lost coin, sheep, and son Luke 15:1-10 (11-32)

The travel narrative: part two

- 31. The unjust steward Luke 16:1-13
- 32. The rich man and Lazarus Luke 16:19-31
- 33. A lesson on faith and dedication Luke 17:5-10
- 34. The ten lepers Luke 17:11-19
- 35. The unjust judge Luke 18:1-8
- 36. The Pharisee and the tax collector Luke 18:9-14
- 37. Zacchaeus Luke 19:1-10

The ministry in Jerusalem

- 38. The resurrection debated Luke 20:27-38
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Conclusion: The fulfilment of the ministry

- 40. Christ the King John 12:9-19

PART II THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Preparation for the Passion of Jesus

1. The transfiguration Luke 9:28-36
2. The temptations Luke 4:1-13
3. The meaning of the cross Luke 13:31-35
4. Teaching about repentance (1) Luke 13:1-9
5. Teaching about repentance (2) Luke 15:1-3,11-32
6. Mary anoints Jesus John 12:1-8
7. Palm Sunday and the crucifixion Luke 19:28-40
Luke 22:14-23:56

Resurrection Appearances of Jesus

8. The empty tomb Luke 24:1-12
9. Easter evening John 20:19-31
10. Jesus and Peter John 21:1-19

Observations about Jesus

11. Jesus the Good Shepherd John 10:22-30
12. Jesus the way of love John 13:31-35
13. Jesus present among his people John 14:23-29
14. Jesus prays for his people John 17:20-26

The coming of the Holy Spirit

15. The day of Pentecost John 14:8-17,25-27

Conclusion: The Godhead

16. The Trinity John 16:12-15

Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

Introduction to Luke

Luke is the only Gentile author in the Bible. He wrote to his Gentile friend, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1) with a different emphasis from the other writers of the New Testament who all grew up steeped in Israel's traditions. He writes especially for his community.

Luke the historian describes Jesus' central place in human events. Jesus is the saviour of the whole world. No one is excluded from God's offer of salvation in Jesus. The poor, despised and outcasts (such as Gentiles) are especially invited into the kingdom of God. Luke gives a clear, ordered account of the spread of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus (Luke's Gospel) and in the early church (The Acts of the Apostles).

Luke the traveller makes 'journey' a strong theme in both his books. He tells of events along the way, on the road. This especially applies to Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem (9:51, 57). That last journey began after Peter's declaration that Jesus was the Messiah, which Jesus explained in terms of his death and resurrection (9:20-22), and after Jesus' glory was seen at the transfiguration where Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus about his coming departure (9:28-31).

Luke the missionary, who often accompanied Paul, tells of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, first in Jesus (3:21-22; 4:18-19), then in his followers (9:1-2 and 10:1,9), and then in the church's missionary expansion (24:46-49). Luke makes many references to the Holy Spirit in both his gospel and The Acts of the Apostles.

Luke the doctor emphasises Jesus' compassion and healing power for all who came to him. His gospel abounds with stories of Jesus' care for people. He includes many accounts of Jesus' compassion for the poor and for outcasts.

Luke the evangelist, tells of Jesus' saving power and includes some of the most famous parables which summarise the good news of God's kingdom. Parables of the prodigal son, the lost coin, the good Samaritan, the rich man and Lazarus, and the rich fool are unique to Luke's evangelism story. So are the accounts of the Samaritan leper, the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet, and Zacchaeus. These were despised people who responded to Jesus.

If you have a Bible with section headings containing cross references, as in the Good News Bible and New Revised Standard Version, you can easily locate the passages unique to Luke. They have no cross references! Those passages give a feel for Luke's emphasis in telling the good news about the kingdom of God.

Kingdom Life

This study book follows the story of Jesus using lectionary readings from the year of Luke (Year C). The readings include passages from John also.

These group studies may be used following the lectionary dates or may be used independently, in full or in part, at any time. You could try one section to see if it suits your group or meets your needs, such as studies for Lent from Part II – the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

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Part I: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

1. The coming of the Lord

Luke 21:25-36

Other readings:

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Psalm 25:1-10 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

The Messiah establishes God's kingdom or reign. Jesus fulfilled and will fulfil that task. He announced the kingdom of God and demonstrated its presence on earth, but also pointed to its fulfilment when the Son of Man is revealed in power and great glory. He warns us to be ready, to welcome his reign.

Relate

1. Form pairs and introduce yourself to your partner. Comment on a favourite or challenging book, movie or activity you appreciated. Then briefly introduce your partner to the rest of the group.
2. What impresses you most about Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Luke 21:25-36, different people reading verses 25-28,29-31,32-33,34-36.
2. What picture of the kingdom of God is given here?
3. How does this fit with the coming of the Son of Man? Note Jeremiah 33:14-16 and Daniel 7:13-14.
4. What does kingdom life require? See verses 34-36 and 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13.

Reflect

1. How can we prepare for the Lord's coming now and in the future? Consider Psalm 25:1-10.
2. What does this mean for you personally?
3. Pray about that for one another.

2. John the Baptist

Luke 3:1-6

Other readings:

Malachi 3:1-4

Psalm 126

Philippians 1:3-11

John the Baptist announced the coming of the Lord. He prepared the way for the Messiah, the Christ. In true prophetic style he declared the word of God, confronted evil and called for repentance. The Lord's coming requires our response. We need to get ready, to confess and quit our sin and turn to God. So it was then. So it is now.

Relate

1. What coming events are special for you or ones you really look forward to?
2. Why do these events give you so much fulfilment?

Respond

1. Read Luke 3:1-6, different people reading verses 1-3,4-6.
2. What does the picture in verses 4-6 signify? See Isaiah 40:3-5.
3. What does the Lord's coming mean for us? Consider Psalm 126.
4. Why is repentance essential? Note Malachi 3:1-4 and Philippians 1:9-11.

Reflect

1. What does the advent of Jesus, the Messiah, mean for you?
2. How can you make this more significant for one another and others?
3. Pray and plan about that together.

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3. The Messiah

Luke 3:7-18

Other readings:

Zephaniah 3:14-20 Isaiah 12:2-6 Philippians 4:4-9

Israel's hopes lay with their coming Messiah, the deliverer. He would save his people from oppression. John the Baptist's ministry stirred these hopes again as he confronted injustice. Yet the advent of the Messiah was unexpected and disappointed many. The Messiah would establish God's eternal kingdom of righteousness and truth. That cannot be limited to national politics. It confronts us all, personally and socially.

Relate

1. What do you find most surprising about the Christmas story?
2. In what ways have you found God's activity mysterious and surprising?

Respond

1. Read Luke 3:7-18, someone reading verses where John speaks, others reading other verses.
2. What were the hopes about the Messiah? Consider Zephaniah 3:14-20.
3. Why would John the Baptist shock people? Note verses 8-9 and 19-20.
4. Why are those who repent so glad? See Isaiah 12:1-6.

Reflect

1. Why is the good news of Jesus the Messiah so surprising for us as well as for John's generation? Note verses 16-18.
2. How might this good news affect our attitudes and actions now? Consider Philippians 4:4-9.
3. Pray about that.

4. Mary's Son

Luke 1:39-55

Other readings:

Micah 5:2-4

Psalm 80:1-7

Hebrews 10:5-10

How could God become a human being? That's impossible! Yet the incarnation declares the impossible. Mary and Elizabeth realised this. They celebrated the amazing mystery together (Luke 1:36, 56). They both burst into prophetic statements. God found in them an attitude of faith, wonder and awe. So the Holy Spirit could fill them both and bring the miraculous to birth.

Relate

1. What do you like most about Christmas?
2. How do you like to celebrate the real meaning of Christmas?

Respond

1. Read Luke 1:39-55, someone narrating, others reading the words of Elizabeth and Mary.
2. What attitudes in Elizabeth and Mary made them receptive to God's Spirit? Note verses 36-38,45.
3. Why is Mary honoured and blessed? Consider verses 43-48.
4. Why are Christmas and the cross so closely linked? Note Psalm 80:3-7 and Hebrews 10:9-10.

Reflect

1. How does God's salvation turn things upside down for us? See verses 46-55 and Micah 5:2-4.
2. How can we be more receptive to God's purposes for us?
3. Pray for one another about that.

5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus

Luke 2:41-52

Other readings:

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 Psalm 111 Colossians 3:12-17

The child Jesus grew strong, he was filled with wisdom, and God's grace was on him. Here was the Son of Man in developing as a human being. He grew. He participated in family life and responsibilities, a son and brother. Yet unique. He grew to understand his destiny, undoubtedly supported by Joseph and Mary. Even so, they did not grasp his total commitment to his Father, God.

Relate

1. What insights about God can you remember from your childhood?
2. What ideas about God have you outgrown now?

Respond

1. Read Luke 2:41-52, someone narrating and others reading the conversation.
2. Why is growth in wisdom normal and essential? Note verses 40, 52 and 1 Samuel 2:18, 26.
3. How may children have insights adults can miss? Consider verses 49-50 and Psalm 111:1-2, 10.
4. Why was the Passover especially significant to Jesus? See Luke 22:15-16.

Reflect

1. How can we have favour with God and people? Note verse 52 and Colossians 3:12-17.
2. How can the group help that to happen?
3. Pray and act on that.

6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus

John 1:1-18

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 147:12-20

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

We see God revealed in Jesus. The light of God shone brightly in Jesus, and the darkness could not put it out. Many of Jesus' own people rejected that light, but it transcends limited national aspirations. That light still shines in all who believe in him. They become children of God. We are bearers of the light in our world. Kingdom life is lived in the light of God.

Relate

1. What do you value most about your beginnings?
2. How have your beginnings helped shape your life?

Respond

1. Read John 1:1-18 silently and meditate on key verses for you.
2. What lights up or has special meaning for you in that passage?
3. What do you learn about Jesus from the passage? See also Ephesians 1:18-23.
4. How might the awesome greatness of Jesus Christ affect our lives? Consider Psalm 147:12-14, Jeremiah 31:12-14 and Ephesians 1:3-6.

Reflect

1. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth mean most to you? Note verse 14.
2. What aspects of grace and truth do you see in each person in your group? Each person can remain silent as others comment on them.
3. Thank God for this as you ask to grow in grace and truth.

7. The baptism of Jesus

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Other readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Baptism is a watershed; always significant, often controversial. John the Baptist called people to change their ways and acknowledge that change in a baptism for repentance. Jesus did not need to do that, but identified with us in his baptism in obedience to the Father's will. Then the Spirit came powerfully upon him for his mission. He baptises us in his Holy Spirit and in fire.

Relate

1. What was a significant turning point in your life?
2. What has brought you close to God?

Respond

1. Read Luke 3:15-22, a paragraph each.
2. Why was John the Baptist so controversial?
3. How are verses 16 and 22 related? See also Acts 8:14-17.
4. How did this event affect Jesus? Note Isaiah 61:1-4 and Psalm 29:1-2, 10-11.

Reflect

1. What have you discovered about the Holy Spirit?
2. What does obedience to God mean for you just now?
3. Pray about that for one another.

8. The marriage feast at Cana

John 2:1-11

Other readings:

Isaiah 62:1-5

Psalm 36:5-10

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Jesus touches life with his grace and glory. At the wedding in Cana he and his disciples mixed with friends and relatives. He celebrated with them. There he quietly revealed his glory. Inconspicuously. Graciously. Generously. He saved others from embarrassment. He responded to Mary's faith. The miraculous transformed the mundane. About 700 litres (around 150 gallons) of water became the best wine.

Relate

1. What do you enjoy most about weddings?
2. What kind of gifts do you get most pleasure in giving?

Respond

1. Read John 2:1-11, someone narrating, others reading the conversations.
2. What does this first miracle suggest about Jesus' concern for friends and family?

Note verses 11-12.

3. What does this miracle foreshadow about Jesus' ministry beyond friends and family? Consider Mark 3:20-21, 34-35 and Isaiah 62:1-5.
4. What does this miracle say about the Lord's generous love? See also Psalm 36:5-10.

Reflect

1. How generously does God give us his Spirit? Note 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.
2. How can you relate to friends and family as Jesus did?
3. Pray specifically about that.

9. The visit to Nazareth (1)

Luke 4:14-21

Other readings:

Nehemiah 8:1-4a, 5-6, 8-10 Psalm 19:7-14 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Jesus ministered in the power of the Spirit, fulfilling the prophecies about the servant of the Lord, the Messiah. That was controversial. Here was good news for the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. The Lord's favour lifts the lowly and pulls down the mighty. That good news confronts all unjust systems and all unrighteousness. We are set free to love and serve, not to dominate.

Relate

1. What is a guiding principle or motto for you?
2. What Bible verse or statement is especially significant for you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 4:14-21.
2. How are verses 14 and 18-19 linked?
3. How might obedience to God's word change our attitudes and actions? Consider Nehemiah 8:8-10 and Psalm 19:7-14.
4. How can we obey God's word in the power of the Spirit? Note 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27-30.

Reflect

1. How can we do more of what Jesus demonstrated?
2. In what ways do you seek the Lord's release or help?
3. Claim that in prayer for one another.

10. The visit to Nazareth (2)

Luke 4:21-30

Other readings:

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Psalm 71:1-6

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

The way Jesus used scripture caused problems. He seemed to claim too much for himself! He offended many who knew him best, the people of his home town. They tried to kill him. He could not be limited to narrow ideas which try to put God's activity into our tiny boxes or categories. Jesus unnerves us all. He brings God's word with disturbing authority. He challenges our prejudices and traditions.

Relate

1. What speaker has stirred or challenged you?
2. What attitudes or beliefs of yours have been challenged?

Respond

1. Read Luke 4:21-30, a verse each.
2. What prejudices or beliefs did Jesus challenge?
3. Why is Spirit-filled, prophetic ministry so controversial? Note Jeremiah 1:4-10.
4. How is this disturbing, prophetic ministry comforting to those who trust in God? Consider Psalm 71:1-6.

Reflect

1. How can we cope with the disturbing challenge of God's Spirit in our lives? See 1 Corinthians 13:1-13.
2. What aspects of Jesus' ministry confront or challenge you?
3. Pray for one another about that.

11. The call of the first disciples

Luke 5:1-11

Other readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8 (9-13) Psalm 138 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Jesus called for and inspired total commitment. He did not come just to make people feel good or get better. He came to establish the kingdom of God now and ultimately. To that he was totally committed. He acknowledged the reign of God in all of life, and called others to do that also. Many of his followers would suffer and die for him. His miracles demonstrate the awesome presence of God's kingdom and reign.

Relate

1. When or how did you first respond to the call of Jesus?
2. What did that involve for you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 5:1-11, a paragraph each.
2. Why did this miracle shock Peter so much?
3. What response fits the discovery of God's presence? Consider verses 8-10, Isaiah 6:5, and 1 Corinthians 15:9.
4. How might God's greatness and glory inspire worship and service? Note verses 9-11, Psalm 138, Isaiah 6:8 and 1 Corinthians 15:10.

Reflect

1. How might Jesus' presence with us affect us and others? See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 and Isaiah 6:9-10.
2. What does Jesus' call mean for you just now?
3. Pray together about your response to that call.

Kingdom Life

12. The sermon on the plain (1)

Luke 6:17-26

Other readings:

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

First the good news! Then the bad news! Blessings and woes. This kingdom charter surprises and disturbs us. It turns things upside down. Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, oppressed and persecuted. But this meant bad news for the rich, and those who ignore the poor and needy. Jesus wields a sharp two edged sword which cuts deep into us all. He thrusts at the heart. We don't escape.

Relate

1. When has good news surprised you?
2. What good news in the gospel really grabs you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 6:17-26, someone reading verses 17-19, four others reading the blessings, and four reading the woes.
2. How does Jesus describe kingdom people? See Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10.
3. What does Jesus warn against? Note verses 10-11.
4. What did Jesus demonstrate and teach to his disciples about the kingdom?
Consider verses 12-13, 17-20.

Reflect

1. How might our discipleship affect our attitudes and living? Consider 1 Corinthians 15:19-20.
2. What does Jesus' description of kingdom life require of you?
3. Pray together about your response.

13. The sermon on the plain (2)

Luke 6:27-38

Other readings:

Genesis 45:3-11,15 Psalm 37:1-11 1 Corinthians 15:35-38,42-50

Kingdom life transforms everything. It cuts right across the world system and traditional social behaviour. Jesus renounced status, personal ambition, claiming our rights, and materialism. He served. He calls us to this same radical servanthood. Kingdom people, his disciples, will follow his example. He lives his life in us. This will show in our attitudes and actions.

Relate

1. Who has impressed you by their discipleship?
2. What person in history has impressed you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 6:27-38, different people reading verses 27-31, 32-36, 37-38.
2. What does Jesus commend and condemn in this passage? List these.
3. How does Jesus challenge our ideas of love and fairness? See Genesis 45:4, 8, 11, 15 and Psalm 37:1-11.
4. How is meekness greatness, not weakness? Consider Numbers 12:3, Philippians 2:5-11, and 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 50.

Reflect

1. How might obeying verse 31 change your life?
2. How can others help you live this out?
3. Plan and pray about that together.

14. The sermon on the plain (3)

Luke 6:39-49

Other readings:

Isaiah 55:10-13 Psalm 92:1-4,12-15 1 Corinthians 15:51-58

Jesus turns things inside out. Not only did he live in total obedience to God's will, but he requires that of his followers. We are to change our ways, then we may see how to help others. Obedience to Jesus' radical teaching is the key to kingdom life. Only that obedience can provide a lasting foundation for life.

Relate

1. What rules guided your life as a child?
2. What foundations do you build your life on now?

Respond

1. Read Luke 6:39-49, a paragraph each.
2. What authority does Jesus claim over his followers? Note verses 40, 46-47.
3. What lasting change does kingdom life produce? See verses 45, 48, Psalm 92:12-15, and Isaiah 55:10-13.
4. What can motivate us to keep going this way? Consider 1 Corinthians 15:57-58.

Reflect

1. What change or repentance does this passage require of you?
2. How might change in attitudes produce change in actions for you?
3. Pray for one another about that.

15. The cure of the centurion's servant

Luke 7:1-10

Other readings:

1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43 Psalm 100 Galatians 1:1-10

Jesus lived out the kingdom principles he taught as he fulfilled his mission. He often surprised people and was sometimes surprised himself. In contrast to his surprise at the lack of faith in him at Nazareth, where people knew him well, he was amazed to find such strong and humble faith in the centurion at Capernaum, a foreigner who did not inherit Israel's beliefs.

Relate

1. When has someone's faith or response surprised you?
2. What do you find risky about having faith in Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Luke 7:1-10, someone narrating and others reading the conversations.
2. What qualities did the centurion show? Note verses 6-8.
3. How was the Jewish elders' request different from the centurion's? Consider 1 Kings 8:41-43.
4. Why must faith be based on our Lord's authority, not ours? See Galatians 1:6, 10.

Reflect

1. How can we have strong faith? Consider Psalm 100.
2. In what areas would you like your faith and action to be strengthened?
3. Pray in faith about that.

16. The widow of Nain

Luke 7:11-17

Other readings:

1 Kings 17:17-24

Psalm 113

Galatians 1:11-24

Human need deeply touched Jesus' compassion. He came to save and deliver us from evil and the havoc and destruction it brings. Jesus gives life. He saves. He heals. He makes us whole. He alone has conquered evil, even death. He gave life to the widow's son, demonstrating God's love and compassion as well as God's mighty power. His touch gives life.

Relate

1. When has someone's compassion helped you?
2. When has the Lord's presence or touch helped you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 7:11-17, a paragraph each.
2. What does this event say about the Lord's authority and compassion? Note verses 8-10, 13-15.
3. Why did people call Jesus a great prophet that day? Consider verse 16, Psalm 113 and 1 Kings 17:17-24.
4. What does this miracle confirm about Jesus' identity? See verses 20-23 and Galatians 1:11-12, 15.

Reflect

1. What does Jesus' identity mean for us in our need?
2. What does this mean for us concerning others' need?
3. Pray about your response for (1) your need, and (2) others' need.

The Gospels

17. Jesus' feet anointed

Luke 7:36-8:3

Other readings:

1 Kings 19:1-8

Psalm 42

Galatians 2:15-21

Jesus welcomed sinners, especially those recognising their need. This was astounding then, and still is. The religious people found it hard to cope with. We do too! God's grace often floods into unworthy people just because they know they need it so much. Good people can miss that. Those who know they are forgiven much, love much. We too must recognise we have been forgiven much. We too can love much.

Relate

1. How do you like to express your love or gratitude?
2. What kind of gift has meant a lot to you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 7:36-8:3.
2. How did the women show their love for Jesus?
3. Why was Jesus so pleased with the sinful woman? See verses 47, 50 and Galatians 2:15-16,20.
4. Why was this response of Jesus difficult to cope with?

Reflect

1. When has the Lord made his grace real to you? Note 1 Kings 19:1-8 and Psalm 42:1-2, 5, 8, 11.
2. How would you like to respond extravagantly to the Lord?
3. Express some response in prayer and song.

18. Peter's confession of faith

Luke 9:18-24

Other readings:

1 Kings 19:9-14

Psalm 43

Galatians 3:23-29

Peter's shocking and daring confession that the prophet Jesus was actually the Messiah marks a dramatic turning point in the gospel narrative. Jesus immediately applied this revelation to his death and resurrection. The Messiah must die. The fateful journey to Jerusalem begins after this. Not only that, but his followers must also lay down their lives for him. Those who lose their lives will save them.

Relate

1. What insight or revelation opened new dimensions for you?
2. What surprises you most about Jesus?

Respond

1. Read Luke 9:18-24, a verse each.
2. Why was Peter's statement so surprising?
3. Why was Jesus' explanation even more surprising? Note verses 30-31, 51.
4. How did Jesus transform the concept of Messiah? See Galatians 3:26-29.

Reflect

1. How has the Lord surprised you? Consider 1 Kings 19:11-12 and Psalm 43:5.
2. What is God's gentle whisper to you at present?
3. Act on that as you pray together.

19. The journey to Jerusalem begins

Luke 9:51-62

Other readings:

1 Kings 19:15-21 Psalm 44:1-8 Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Destiny strikes. The journey to Jerusalem must lead inevitably to Jesus' death. Life beyond death lies in God's hands. It did for Jesus also. Nothing must stop Jesus' steady commitment to his destiny. Even though others did not and could not understand, Jesus would press on. He challenged others to give their lives for God's kingdom also, even if that meant death for them too. It has for many.

Relate

1. What journey or change have you faced with apprehension?
2. What gave you comfort or help in such times?

Respond

1. Read Luke 9:51-62, different people reading the conversations.
2. Why did both the Samaritans and the disciples misunderstand kingdom life? Compare verses 53-54 with Galatians 5:19-24.
3. Why does God's kingdom call for total commitment? Consider 1 Kings 19:21.
4. How are Jesus' demands explained by his own journey?

Reflect

1. What motivates you to follow Jesus? See Psalm 44:4-8.
2. What do Jesus' demands mean for you just now?
3. Pray together concerning that.

20. The mission of the seventy-two

Luke 10:1-12, 17-20

Other readings:

1 Kings 21:1-3, 17-21 Psalm 5:1-8 Galatians 6:7-18

Jesus' mission involved passing on his ministry to others, including us. His disciples and followers learned from Jesus and did what he did. God's kingdom comes in the power of the Spirit. So it came into people's lives as the disciples helped others in the way that Jesus had taught them to speak and work in the Spirit's power. So with us. That too is our mission.

Relate

1. Who has been a mentor or example for you?
2. How have you learned to help people in new ways?

Respond

1. Read Luke 10:1-12, 17-20, someone reading verses 1-12, another reading verses 17-20.
2. What was tough about this assignment? See also Luke 9:1-6.
3. How did Jesus prepare his followers for that work? Consider Galatians 6:7-10.
4. What does this passage teach about priorities and God's kingdom overcoming evil? Note 1 Kings 21:20-21 and Psalm 5:1-8.

Reflect

1. Are we supposed to do these things now?
2. How can you learn to do these things in your situation?
3. Pray about that for one another.

The Gospels

21. The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

Other readings:

2 Kings 2:1, 6-14 Psalm 139:1-12 Colossians 1:1-14

What a shocking story! The despised, hated Samaritan is the hero. The good guys become the bad guys. The priest and temple worker ignore the human need they see. Do we? They are bound by religious scruples. Are we? Here is a savage, stinging story for religious people, busy about other things. Jesus got his hands dirty helping those in need. Who is my neighbour?

Relate

1. Who was a Good Samaritan for you?
2. Who are the despised Samaritans in your experience?

Respond

1. Read Luke 10:25-37, two people reading alternate verses but include verses 30-36 as one.
2. How is this story a commentary on the greatest commandments? Compare with Numbers 19:11-16.
3. How does loving God show itself in attitudes and actions? Note Psalm 139:1-12 and Colossians 1:3-7.
4. How did Jesus demonstrate these commandments?

Reflect

1. How can you obey these commandments with God's help? Consider 2 Kings 2:1,6-14 and Colossians 1:9-14.
2. How can the group help you do that?
3. Pray for one another about that.

22. Martha and Mary

Luke 10:38-42

Other readings:

2 Kings 4:8-17

Psalm 139:13-18

Colossians 1:21-29

Jesus' travels took him into various homes. One of his favourite places was the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus on the Bethany hillside near Jerusalem. Here Jesus and his disciples could relax with friends. Here too Jesus, who served others and valued serving, kept priorities right. He insisted on service with a right attitude that comes from a right relationship with himself.

Relate

1. When have you enjoyed helping or serving others?
2. When have you enjoyed being still with the Lord?

Respond

1. Read Luke 10:38-42, three people reading two verses each..
2. How do both Martha and Mary show their strengths? Note John 12:1-3
3. How are right attitudes and priorities shown? Consider 2 Kings 4:8-17 and Colossians 1:24-29.
4. How does an intimate relationship with the Lord affect living? See Psalm 139:13-18 and Colossians 1:21-23.

Reflect

1. What strengths of Martha and Mary do you have?
2. What changes in attitude or actions do you need to make?
3. Express that in prayer together.

23. The importunate friend

Luke 11:1-13

Other readings:

2 Kings 5:1-15

Psalm 21:1-7

Colossians 2:6-15

Our relationship with God requires faith. Faith takes hold of what we cannot yet see, but do believe. Prayer requires faith. In prayer we relate to God. Jesus taught that God's purposes could be claimed and fulfilled here on earth. He demonstrated that. He taught his followers to do the same, even if it required persistence. It often does. We may have God's Spirit in fulness as we persist in faith.

Relate

1. What childhood prayer or grace at meals did you pray often?
2. What was or is one of your favourite prayers?

Respond

1. Read Luke 11:1-13, a paragraph each.
2. How did Jesus pray? Note verses 1-4.
3. Why is persistence sometimes important? See Colossians 2:6-7.
4. What is ours through faith? Consider verse 13, Psalm 21:1-2, 7, and Colossians 2:9-15.

Reflect

1. How might your faith show in action? Reflect on 2 Kings 5:10, 13-14.
2. What is your response to the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit?
3. Pray about it. You could lay hands on those desiring that.

24. The parable of the rich fool

Luke 12:13-21

Other readings:

2 Kings 13:14-20a Psalm 28 Colossians 3:1-11

This embarrassing parable arises out of materialism, and confronts it. We squirm under the challenge here! Our society and values are strongly materialistic. Kingdom life cuts right across that. So, of course, we tone down Jesus' radical demands. We water down the gospel to suit our own life styles. This parable hits that compromising attitude hard and calls for commitment.

Relate

1. What possessions could you easily leave if God called you to Outer Mongolia?
2. What would you hang on to?

Respond

1. Read Luke 12:13-21, a verse each.
2. What attitudes does Jesus challenge here? Note verses 14-15, 18-19, 21.
3. What wholehearted commitment does Jesus want? Consider 1 Kings 13:18-19 and Colossians 3:1-11.
4. Where must our trust and security lie? See verses 29-31 and Psalm 28:6-9.

Reflect

1. How can you seek God's kingdom first in your situation?
2. What adjustments of attitude or action do you need to make?
3. Pray for one another about that.

25. The need for vigilance

Luke 12:32-40

Other readings:

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Psalm 14

Hebrews 11:1-3,8-19

Here the demands of kingdom life bite even deeper! We think it's okay for Saint Francis, Mother Teresa, or some missionaries we know, to leave all and follow Jesus. But us? What has radical kingdom life got to do with us? Yet Jesus insists. All his followers must find their treasure in God's kingdom, not in materialism. We are to serve our king wholeheartedly, ready for his sudden appearance.

Relate

1. What do you feel most secure about?
2. What do you tend to worry about most?

Respond

1. Read Luke 12:32-40, three people reading three verses each.
2. What kind of kingdom life does Jesus offer? Note Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-19.
3. What kingdom goal or purpose do we work and watch for? Consider Psalm 14.
4. How does kingdom living change attitudes or actions? See Jeremiah 18:1-11.

Reflect

1. What is your reaction to Jesus' instructions?
2. How can your group act on this or help you to do so?
3. Pray for guidance and help.

26. Not peace but division

Luke 12:49-56

Other readings:

Jeremiah 20:7-13 Psalm 10:12-18 Hebrews 12:1-2,12-17

The reign of Jesus is both inclusive of all who will come, but exclusive. He divides. Here is the tender-tough paradox of the kingdom of God. This is not popular in our age of religious pluralism. God's kingdom will come, and all who welcome and live by his reign welcome that his dominion. Others will reject and fight it, even people within one family.

Relate

1. When have you been confronted in love?
2. How do you confront in love?

Respond

1. Read Luke 12:49-56, two people reading a paragraph each.
2. Why is Jesus' claim on us so radical? Consider Hebrews 12:1-2, 12-17.
3. Why does wholehearted commitment to God cause problems? Note Jeremiah 20:7-13 and Psalm 10:12-18.
4. How do approaching storms or hot winds depict kingdom life? See verses 54-56.

Reflect

1. How are you confronted by the Lord's claim on you?
2. What help do you want from God?
3. Pray for one another or others.

The Gospels

27. Few will be saved

Luke 13:22-30

Other readings:

Jeremiah 28:1-9

Psalm 84

Hebrews 12:18-29

Jesus was heading toward Jerusalem and his destiny there. He warns the chosen people, Israel, that they can miss God's kingdom while others will find it. The way is hard. Not religious activities, but discipleship. The door or gate is narrow. It means submission to God's reign, involvement in his kingdom. Jesus keeps the standard tough, not easy, for kingdom life. Few will find it. Few will live it.

Relate

1. When has wholehearted involvement in something thrilled you?
2. What are you keen about?

Respond

1. Read Luke 13:22-30, a verse each.
2. Why is Jesus' journey significant in this passage?
3. How does the narrow door call for humble submission to God? Note Hebrews 12:22-24, 28-29.
4. How does God's reign turn things around? See verses 28-30 and Jeremiah 28:8-9, 15-17.

Reflect

1. How do we enter God's kingdom? Consider Psalm 84.
2. What does Jesus' warning mean for you?
3. Pray in repentance and submission.

Kingdom Life

28. True humility

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Other readings:

Ezekiel 18:1-9, 25-29 Psalm 15 Hebrews 13:1-8

Kingdom life constantly challenges the usual patterns of living. Jesus turns things upside down. The mighty are brought low; the humble exalted. Position, status, and power are challenged. Loving service characterises kingdom people, especially serving the poor, and those in need. Kingdom motives are to love and serve, not to be noticed, admired or repaid. Jesus lived this way.

Relate

1. When do you like to be unnoticed or left alone?
2. When do you like to be noticed or at least appreciated?

Respond

1. Read Luke 14:1,7-14, a section each.
2. Why was Jesus' social life both threatening and liberating?
3. What qualities or attitudes does Jesus commend? Consider Psalm 15 and Hebrews 13:1-8.
4. How do these qualities reflect God's love and justice? Note Ezekiel 18:1-9, 25-29.

Reflect

1. How does this passage affect your social life?
2. What changes do you want to make?
3. Act on that in prayer together.

29. The cost of discipleship

Luke 14:25-33

Other readings:

Ezekiel 33:1-11

Psalm 94:12-22

Philemon 1-20

Jesus shocks us. He demands everything of his followers. He insists on kingdom priorities. God first. Everything else must be subject to that. We squirm. That is not popular. Not easy. Not comfortable. So we take the sting out of it by spiritualising it. We side step the tough requirements and settle for compromise. Like the crowds, we can miss kingdom life; or like the few, we can choose it, if we will count the cost and pay the price.

Relate

1. What tough task have you tackled or achieved?
2. What tough task would you like to have a go at?

Respond

1. Read Luke 14:25-33, a paragraph or 3 verses each plus the last two.
2. What is significant about Jesus saying this to large crowds as he journeyed to his death? Note requirements in Ezekiel 33:1-11.
3. How do the two stories illustrate Jesus' demands? Note Paul's commitment in Philemon 8-19.
4. Why are true disciples like salt?

Reflect

1. What motivates you for discipleship? See Psalm 94:12-23.
2. What help do you want or need?
3. Pray about that.

30. The lost coin, sheep, and son

Luke 15:1-10 (11-32)

Other readings:

Hosea 4:1-3, 5:15-6:6 Psalm 77:11-20 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Two of these three famous parables are unique to Luke. Here he gives us the gospel within his gospel. The gospel of the kingdom is good news for sinners, for outcasts, for the despised and hated. God seeks the lost. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Sinners who turn to God are welcomed home. That applies to us all. The self-righteous miss out. Those who repent and trust God find life.

Relate

1. When did someone find or rescue you?
2. What kind of people accept you as you are?

Respond

1. Read Luke 15:1-10, grouped in verses 1-2,3-7,8-10.
2. What is contrasted in the first two verses? Note 1 Timothy 1:12-17.
3. What makes God glad? See Hosea 5:15-6:6.
4. What do these stories say about God? Consider Psalm 77:11-20.

Reflect

1. What should our attitude be to others, especially unbelievers?
2. In what ways may you need to repent?
3. Act on that in prayer together.

The Gospels

31. The unjust steward

Luke 16:1-13

Other readings:

Hosea 11:1-11

Psalm 107:1-9

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Kingdom life cuts across materialism, gaining more, and competing with or climbing over others. It's about loving, serving, helping, forgiving, building relationships and making communities of care and goodness. So those who use money or authority to build relationships, rather than to compete and destroy are wise. At least the shrewd manager or steward in Jesus' story had this wisdom. People matter more than things or status.

Relate

1. When has someone surprised you by their care for you?
2. What do you appreciate about this group?

Respond

1. Read Luke 16:1-13, a paragraph each.
2. Why did those with wealth and status hate this story? See verses 14-15.
3. Why does serving God involve forgiving debts or sins? Consider Hosea 11:1-2,8-11 and Psalm 107:1-9.
4. How does God's goodness and mercy affect daily living? Note 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

Reflect

1. What can you do as a group to help or serve others?
2. What can you do personally to care for others?
3. Pray and plan about that.

32. The rich man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

Other readings:

Joel 2:23-30 Psalm 107:1, 33-43 1 Timothy 6:6-19

What an embarrassing story for us! We have Lazarus at our door. Not one, but millions. We see them in our homes on TV. Yet we tend to ignore the problem. It's too big. Instead, we accumulate more for ourselves, or acquire the latest consumer conveniences. That's our right! Or is it? Jesus rejected such consumer attitudes in his life and teaching. Kingdom life is tough.

Relate

1. Who is someone you admire who left all to follow Jesus?
2. Who is someone you admire who used their wealth in serving God?

Respond

1. Read Luke 16:19-31, a paragraph each.
2. How does this story link with verses 14-15? See 1 Timothy 6:6-19.
3. What encouragement does Jesus give about our destiny? Consider verses 22-25, Luke 19:8-10 and Psalm 107:1, 33-43.
4. How can God's Spirit transform us and others? Note Joel 2:23-30.

Reflect

1. What does this passage say to you about your attitudes or actions?
2. What do you want to do about that?
3. Act on that as you pray for one another and others.

33. A lesson on faith and dedication

Luke 17:5-10

Other readings:

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 Psalm 101 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Jesus constantly demonstrated kingdom life. He lived in total union with God, in full submission to God's will. Such faith and servanthood stands in brilliant contrast to our usual concern for our own interests. Jesus' disciples wanted to learn his way. He kept flinging out challenges, impossible for us, yet not impossible for God to do in us.

Relate

1. When have you taken a leap of faith or commitment?
2. When has God surprised you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 17:5-10, someone reading verses 5-6, another verses 7-10.
2. How does faith show in action? Note 2 Timothy 1:1-14.
3. Why are we unworthy servants? Consider Amos 5:6-7, 10-15.
4. How might faith exult or sing in service? See Psalm 101.

Reflect

1. How would you like your faith to increase?
2. How can you act on this in service?
3. Do that in prayer together.

34. The ten lepers

Luke 17:11-19

Other readings:

Micah 1:2; 2:1-10 Psalm 26 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Jesus kept surprising people. He reached out to all kinds of people, especially those rejected by others. Lepers and Samaritans were the most despised, seen as unclean, physically and socially. Notice how the most despised person is the most grateful, the Samaritan leper. God's grace does that for us in our need. We are transformed, we are made whole by the Lord. We too need to be the most thankful.

Relate

1. How has someone helped you feel accepted?
2. When have you felt especially accepted by God?

Respond

1. Read Luke 17:11-19, a verse each.
2. What was Jesus' attitude to these outcasts? Compare Psalm 26 with Micah 1:2; 2:1-10.
3. What response did Jesus expect? See verses 14, 17-19.
4. What did Jesus affirm? Note 2 Timothy 2:8-15.

Reflect

1. How can you help others be accepted, especially the unwanted?
2. What acceptance do you need just now?
3. Express that together in prayer and support.

35. The unjust judge

Luke 18:1-8

Other readings:

Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4 Psalm 119:137-144 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Jesus came to establish God's kingdom of justice and righteousness. The Lord does what is just and right. So must his people. Worldly power and wealth easily corrupt, and many officials could be bribed. What hope for the poor, such as a widow? Her only weapon was persistence. She used it. Jesus reminds us how God will indeed defend and rescue his people who continue to pray and seek justice in faith.

Relate

1. When has persistence paid off for you?
2. What do you enjoy sticking at?

Respond

1. Read Luke 18:1-8, a paragraph each.
2. How is this social justice issue linked with prayer and faith? Note Habakkuk 1:1-3; 2:1-4, Matthew 12:18-21 and Luke 11:42.
3. What does God reward? See verses 1,7-8 and Psalm 119:137-144.
4. What does faith in God hang on to?

Reflect

1. What do you need to persist with at present? Consider 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5.
2. How can the group help you do that?
3. Pray and act in faith.

36. The Pharisee and the tax collector

Luke 18:9-14

Other readings:

Zephaniah 3:1-9

Psalm 3

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

Jesus keeps turning things upside down. The exalted are humbled; the humble exalted. People usually respected the religious and national leaders but despised the cheating and corrupt collaborators and traitors who were agents of oppressive tyranny. Tax collectors were especially hated. Yet Jesus commends the tax collector's faith and condemns the religious leader's bigotry and self-righteousness.

Relate

1. When have you seen faith in unlikely places?
2. Where have you found unbelief when you expected faith?

Respond

1. Read Luke 18:9-14, a verse each.
2. What is required to be right with God? Consider Zephaniah 3:1-5,9 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8,16-18
3. Why is humility essential for salvation?
4. Who discover God's deliverance? Note Psalm 3.

Reflect

1. What does being humble mean for you?
2. What strengths do you see in one another?
3. Pray your own version of the tax collector's prayer.

The Gospels

37. Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

Other readings:

Haggai 2:1-9

Psalm 65:1-8

2 Thessalonians 1:5-12

Tax collectors not only collaborated with the foreign invaders but they cheated as well to line their own pockets. Their masters condoned that. No wonder people hated them. Luke continues to show how Jesus reached out to the outcasts and the despised people and enlisted them in his kingdom. Jesus changed them. That showed in their changed attitudes and actions as they in turn helped others in need.

Relate

1. When has someone reached out to include you?
2. What has been your response at such times?

Respond

1. Read Luke 19:1-10, someone narrating, others reading the dialogue.
2. What attitude did Jesus affirm? Note verses 3, 6, 8-9 and 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12.
3. How is God's glory revealed in us? Consider Psalm 65:1-8.
4. How was God's glory revealed in Jesus' life? See Haggai 2:5-9.

Reflect

1. How does salvation affect our lives?
2. What attitudes do we need to foster?
3. Pray about that.

38. The resurrection debated

Luke 20:27-38

Other readings:

Zechariah 7:1-10 Psalm 9:11-20 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5

Jesus not only challenges materialism but shows how a materialistic world view is inadequate and unscriptural. God's kingdom invades life now, changing our values and priorities, precisely because it is an eternal kingdom. God is the God of the living, in time/space and beyond time/space. So our decisions and life styles are profoundly affected by this perspective, as Jesus' were.

Relate

1. How does belief in God affect your choices right now?
2. What is your dream or desire for this group?

Respond

1. Read Luke 20:27-38 in two sections, verses 27-33 and 34-38.
2. What is significant about the time of this discussion just before Jesus' death? Note also 2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5.
3. What theology does Jesus challenge? See verse 27 and Acts 23:8.
4. How does this perspective affect living now? See Psalm 9:11-20 and Zechariah 7:8-10.4.

Reflect

1. How does this perspective affect your choices now?
2. What do you appreciate about the choices or examples of the others in your group? Comment together on each person.
3. Conclude with prayers of thanks or commitment.

The Gospels

39. The signs announcing the end

Luke 21:5-19

Other readings:

Malachi 4:1-6

Psalm 82

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Jesus faced death, but saw beyond it to the age to come. That vision kept him going. Similarly he told his followers to expect tough times, persecution and even death. There is a clash of kingdoms. But Jesus promised victory to his followers. God's kingdom would endure and ultimately triumph. It is a kingdom worth living and dying for. Jesus did. We can.

Relate

1. What goal has kept you going in the past (e.g., raising a family; study)?
2. What goal keeps you going now?

Respond

1. Read Luke 21:5-19, a verse each.
2. Why was Jesus' news a shock? Note verses 5-6, 12-19.
3. What motivates our endurance? See verse 19 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.
4. Why do 'end times' include both disaster and triumph? Consider Psalm 82 and Malachi 4:1-6.

Reflect

1. What motivates you to live for God?
2. How can the group help you persist?
3. Pray for one another about that.

40. Christ the King

John 12:9-19

Other readings:

2 Samuel 5:1-5

Psalm 95

Colossians 1:11-20

Jesus triumphed over even death itself. He demonstrated this in the resurrection of Lazarus, and foreshadowed his own resurrection. The crowds swelled. They wanted him to be their king, their deliverer, their saviour from oppression. He was. But not as expected. His kingdom transcends all nationalism. He reigns for ever, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Relate

1. What do you feel patriotic about?
2. What grabs you about God's kingdom?

Respond

1. Read John 12:9-19, a paragraph each.
2. Why did the people, including the disciples, miss the point of Jesus' demonstration? Note expectations in 2 Samuel 5:1-5.
3. What was the point of Jesus' demonstration? See Colossians 1:11-20.
4. What does this show about God's saving purpose? Consider Psalm 95.

Reflect

1. How do you want to respond to the kingly reign of Jesus?
2. Give symbolic gifts in words to each person in your group to help each one respond to Jesus' reign.
3. Pray for each person in the group.

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Part II: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

1. The transfiguration

Luke 9:28-36

Other readings:

Exodus 34:29-35

Psalm 99

2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2

After Peter's astounding confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus taught his disciples what that meant in terms of his death and resurrection and their discipleship (9:20-28). The last journey to Jerusalem started at that time with his transfiguration. His glory was revealed in the context of preparation for the cross. God gave unqualified approval of his Son.

Relate

1. How have you seen God's hand in your life? Comment in pairs.
2. What is typical or common about God's presence in our lives?

Respond

1. Read Luke 9:28-36, someone narrating, others reading the words of Peter and God.
2. What is the connection between Peter's declaration, Jesus' response, and the transfiguration? Note verses 20-31.
3. Why were the glorious splendour and God's voice so significant? Compare with Exodus 34:29-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:12-4:2.
4. What is an appropriate response to God's glory? Note Psalm 99.

Reflect

1. When has God's glory touched you?
2. How does this affect you in your daily life?
3. Pray about that, acknowledging God's presence.

2. The temptations

Luke 4:1-13

Other readings:

Deuteronomy 26:1-11 Psalm 91:9-16 Romans 10:8b-13

The way of the cross is the hardest way of all. Temptations divert us. They did not divert Jesus from his total obedience to God's will. Jesus' mission included the cross. He chose to give his life. He lived in full obedience. He alone could proclaim and demonstrate God's kingdom rule in its fulness. Kingdom life resists and overcomes evil in obedience to God.

Relate

1. When have you been tempted to doubt God's word?
2. How has God's word helped you deal with temptations?

Respond

1. Read Luke 4:1-13, people reading four verses each plus verse 13.
2. What did the temptations challenge for Jesus? Note 3:22; 4:3,9.
3. How is God's claim on us challenged? Consider Deuteronomy 26:1-2, 10-11.
4. How is evil overcome in our lives? Note Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 and Romans 10:8-13.

Reflect

1. How have you dealt with temptation?
2. How does God's faithfulness to his word apply to you?
3. Pray in confession, repentance or gratitude to God.

3. The meaning of the cross

Luke 13:31-35

Other readings:

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 Psalm 127 Philippians 3:17-4:1

Jesus came as saviour and deliverer. Yet he was rejected. God's kingdom confronts evil in society and in individuals. So Jesus' demonstration of kingdom life met with opposition from entrenched systems and personal ambition or self-interest. This had been the prophets' fate. Now it was Jesus' fate, in spite of his great love. He wept over Jerusalem, yet looked beyond its rejection of him to the fulfilment of his destiny.

Relate

1. When have you felt desolate or empty?
2. What brought you comfort or hope?

Respond

1. Read Luke 13:31-35, a paragraph each.
2. How does Jesus pursue his goal? Note verses 32-33,35.
3. How does that goal affect us? See verse 35 and Philippians 3:17-4:1.
4. How does faith in God conquer desolation? Consider Genesis 15:5-6,18 and Psalm 127.

Reflect

1. What goal do you have?
2. What faith and persistence do you need?
3. Pray for one another about that.

4. Teaching about repentance (1)

Luke 13:1-9

Other readings:

Exodus 3:1-15

Psalm 103:1-13

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

God's justice is revealed in his mercy. Jesus fulfilled the just demands of God and taught how repentance obtained God's mercy. A common attitude then, as now, was that calamities indicated God's punishment on sin. Jesus rejected that, and taught that God's justice is expressed in mercy. He urged people to repent and receive mercy, rather than fall under judgement.

Relate

1. When has someone shown mercy to you?
2. When has someone helped you by persisting with you

Respond

1. Read Luke 13:1-9, a verse each.
2. What is the point of the fig tree parable? Note Psalm 103:1-13.
3. What does Jesus teach here about God's grace and faithfulness? See also Exodus 3:1-15 and 1 Corinthians 10:13.
4. Why is repentance vital? Consider 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

Reflect

1. How might you tend to presume on God's grace?
2. What does repentance mean for you?
3. Express repentance in prayer together.

5. Teaching about repentance (2)

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Other readings:

Joshua 5:9-12

Psalm 34:1-10

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

The prodigal son story is unique to Luke. Here again we find Jesus' startling description of God's grace and mercy for those who repent and his rebuke of those who do not. The loving father in this story went out to both his sons. One recognised his need of grace, the other did not see it, and found such grace unfair. Yet we all need it. Repentance enables us to receive it.

Relate

1. What is one of your favourite stories or sayings about forgiveness?
2. When has someone's acceptance or forgiveness opened doors for you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 15:1-3, 11-32, someone narrating, others reading the dialogue.
2. Why would this story sting Jesus' critics? Note verses 1-2 and Psalm 34:1-10.
3. What does it say about God's faithfulness and grace? Consider Joshua 5:9-12.
4. What does it say about reconciliation? See 2 Corinthians 5:16-21.

Reflect

1. Are you most like the younger or the elder son?
2. What is the message of the parable for you?
3. Apply that message in prayer together.

6. Mary anoints Jesus

John 12:1-8

Other readings:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:8-14

Mary's extravagant expression of love for Jesus caused criticism. It cost a year's wages. Jesus defended her action. He knew the perfume had been bought for his burial and that Mary realised this was an appropriate time to use it. He affirmed her. Mary sensed the impending crisis. Jesus knew his time had come. That gave deep significance to Mary's action. He commended such love and devotion.

Relate

1. When has someone's extravagant act surprised or pleased you?
2. When have you been extravagant in showing love or appreciation?

Respond

1. Read John 12:1-8, a paragraph each.
2. How did Jesus' friends show their devotion in different ways? See verses 1-3.
3. What did Jesus foreshadow? Consider also Isaiah 43:16-21 and Psalm 126.
4. Why is loving Jesus a goal beyond any price? Note Philippians 3:8-14.

Reflect

1. How do you integrate loving the Lord and helping the poor?
2. What ways do you seek to show love to the Lord?
3. Express that in prayer together.

7. Palm Sunday and the passion of Jesus

Luke 19:28-40; 22:14-23:56

Other readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a Psalm 118:19-29; 31:9-16 Philippians 2:5-11

Holy Week! No other week in all history is like it. Jerusalem saw the cosmic drama of the universe enacted then. Yet no one there but Jesus knew what really happened. From hosannas to ‘crucify him’; from the disciples highest hopes to their deepest despair; from Palm Sunday’s celebration to Good Friday’s agony. The end? No. The beginning.

Relate

1. What qualities do you admire most in great people?
2. What do you admire most about Jesus’ life?

Respond

1. Read Luke 19:28-40; 22:14-30; 23:32-46.
2. What kind of Messiah did the people want, and get? Compare Psalm 118:19-29 with Psalm 31:9-16 and Isaiah 50:4-9a.
3. Why is Jesus’ reign or Lordship so radical and powerful? Compare Luke 22:24-30 with Philippians 2:5-11.

Reflect

1. What servant qualities do you value or desire in your life?
2. What servant qualities do you see in one another in your group? Comment together on each person.
3. Pray with thanks and faith.

8. The empty tomb

Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-18

Other readings

Isaiah 65:17-25 Psalm 118:14-24 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

(Acts 10:34-43)

Resurrection! Hope. Doubt. Reports. Rumours. Confusion. Glimpses. Earthquake? Angels? Miracles? Stone rolled away? The tomb empty? A spirit? A real body? Women rushing back from a dawn visit. Disciples not believing them. Peter and John run to investigate. Mary Magdalene sees the risen Lord. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Relate

1. When were you surprised in your faith journey?
2. What has been a new or profound insight for you?

Respond

1. Read Luke 24:1-12 and John 20:1-18.
2. Why do you think Jesus revealed the resurrection to the women first? Note Luke 23:49, 55-56.
3. Why is the resurrection so significant? See Acts 10:39-43 and 1 Corinthians 15:19-26.
4. What hope does the resurrection affirm? Note Psalm 118:14-24 and Isaiah 65:17-25.

Reflect

1. What does the presence of the risen Lord mean for you?
2. What hope or dream do you have for your future?
3. Pray about that together.

The Gospels

9. Easter evening

John 20:19-31

Other readings:

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 2

Revelation 1:4-8

The incredible was true. Jesus had conquered death. God's Messiah was vindicated. The new order had begun. The king reigned. The mystery deepened. This king lives in his people by his Spirit. He imparts his own Spirit to his followers. Even doubters begin to believe. Kingdom life flourishes.

Relate

1. What gives you hope?
2. What destiny do you seek?

Respond

1. Read John 20:19-31, different people reading the words of Jesus and Thomas.
2. Why do you think Jesus kept reassuring his friends? Note verses 19, 21, 26 and Luke 24:22-27.
3. What impact did the resurrection have on these leaders? See verses 20 and 28, Acts 5:27-32 and Psalm 2.
4. What does the resurrection mean for us? Consider verses 21-22 and Revelation 1:4-8.

Reflect

1. How do you want to respond to the glory of the Lord?
2. How can others help you respond?
3. Do that as you pray together.

10. Jesus and Peter

John 21:1-19

Other readings:

Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 30:4-12

Revelation 5:11-14

The risen Lord continued to establish his kingdom purposes in his followers. Again Jesus showed his mastery over events when his disciples were at their trade. Again they were astounded by him. Again Jesus emphasised commitment to himself. Again he called them to follow him. Again he affirmed Peter's leadership. Failure is not the end; it can be a beginning for a humbler, wiser, deeper commitment.

Relate

1. When have you had a second chance or another go?
2. When have you done better after failure or struggle?

Respond

1. Read John 21:1-19, someone narrating, others reading dialogue.
2. What's the point of this miracle? See Luke 5:4-11.
3. How did amazement turn to worship and commitment? Note Acts 9:3-6, 17-20 and Revelation 5:11-14.
4. How did Jesus affirm Peter's commitment? Consider Psalm 30:4-12.

Reflect

1. Where do you need to be affirmed or encouraged just now?
2. What are the strengths you see in people in your group? Comment on each person together, and write down what people say to you.
3. Pray in affirmation for one another.

The Gospels

11. Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:22-30

Other readings:

Acts 13:15-16, 26-33 Psalm 23 Revelation 7:9-17

At the winter Hanukkah festival, celebrating deliverance from foreign oppression, nationalism ran high. Jewish leaders wanted to pin down Jesus' claims. Was he the Messiah? He was, but not as they expected. His kingdom has no end. Jesus exercises his authority and divinity especially among his own people. Those who share kingdom life know their king, their shepherd, their guardian, their protector, their friend.

Relate

1. When has someone taken the trouble to guide or shepherd you?
2. When have you given time to help or care for someone?

Respond

1. Read John 10:22-30, a paragraph each.
2. Why did Jesus' claims cause so much anger? See verses 30-33.
3. Why are those claims so revolutionary? Note verses 25-30, Acts 13:26-33.
4. What does the Lord's shepherding involve? Consider Psalm 23 and Revelation 7:9-17.

Reflect

1. What shepherding do you need or hope for?
2. How can this group help?
3. Pray and plan about that together.

12. Jesus the way of love

John 13:31-35

Other readings:

Acts 14:8-18

Psalm 145:13b-21

Revelation 21:1-6

Jesus lived and demonstrated a new dimension of love. Strong love. Divine love. Self-giving love. God-centred love. He also commanded this for his followers. They were to be known for that kind of love. Pure. Strong. Selfless. Sacrificial. This was a new commandment, not just a repeat of the old. We are to love as Jesus did, with his love. That's the true mark of his followers.

Relate

1. When did someone's love for you surprise you?
2. When have you been surprised by God's love?

Respond

1. Read John 13:31-35, a verse each.
2. How is the Lord's love unique? Note Psalm 145:13b-21.
3. How did Jesus demonstrate this love? Compare with Acts 14:8-10.
4. How is that love to be fulfilled? See verses 31-32 and Revelation 21:1-6.

Reflect

1. How do you want to apply this command to your life?
2. How can the group help?
3. Do that as you pray together.

The Gospels

13. Jesus present among his people

John 14:23-29

Other readings:

Acts 15:1-2, 22-29

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22-27

Jesus would not remain physically present with his followers, but he promised something greater. Just as he was in the Father, the Father in him, and the Spirit one in them, so Jesus would send his Spirit through whom he and the Father would be intimately present with his people. He prepared his followers for the coming of the Holy Spirit who would bring a new dimension of intimacy and power.

Relate

1. How have you experienced the Lord's intimacy or presence?
2. How have you experienced the Lord's action or power?

Respond

1. Read John 14:23-29, a paragraph each.
2. Why is this promise astounding? See Luke 24:48-49.
3. What does close union with God involve? Consider Acts 15:24-29 and Revelation 21:22-27.
4. How does this affect society and nations? Note Psalm 67.

Reflect

1. In what way do you want greater intimacy with the Lord?
2. In what way do you want the Lord's power in your life?
3. Pray together about that.

14. Jesus prays for his people

John 17:20-26

Other readings:

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

Jesus' prayer for all believers boggles the mind. He prayed for a unique kind of unity, impossible apart from his Spirit in us. He prayed that his people would be one. Not merely of one mind, but one. One in him, as he is one with the Father. He repeated this astounding request, that the unity he had with the Father will be the unity we have in him, and that the love he shared with the Father will be the love we share in him.

Relate

1. How have you discovered intimacy with God?
2. How has this intimacy changed your view of others?

Respond

1. Read John 17:20-26, one person reading/praying.
2. What is Jesus' goal for us on earth? Note Acts 16:17-18, 29-34.
3. What is Jesus' ultimate goal for us? See Revelation 22:12-21.
4. How does this affect us now? Consider Psalm 97.

Reflect

1. What kind of love and intimacy with the Lord can you expect?
2. What will this mean in daily life?
3. Pray for that.

The Gospels

15. The day of Pentecost

John 14:8-17, 25-27

Other readings:

Genesis 11:1-9 Psalm 104:24-34 Romans 8:14-17

(Acts 2:1-21)

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples as their Counsellor, the Spirit of truth. During the forty days in which he appeared to them after his resurrection he spoke about the kingdom of God and renewed his promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit at the Pentecost harvest festival. The Spirit empowered them. Three thousand were added to their community that day. The church was launched. God's kingdom grew.

Relate

1. What has been your experience of the Holy Spirit?
2. How has this changed you?

Respond

1. Read John 14:8-17, 25-27, a paragraph each.
2. What difference does the coming of the Spirit make? See verses 12-17 and Romans 8:14-17.
3. How did the Spirit's coming affect people. Compare Genesis 11:1-9 with Acts 2:1-21.
4. How does the Spirit glorify God? Note Psalm 104:30-34.

Reflect

1. What expressions of the Spirit do you see in others in your group? Comment together on each person.
2. What expressions of the Spirit do you seek more fully now?
3. Pray about that together.

Kingdom Life

16. The Trinity

John 16:12-15

Other readings:

Proverbs 8:22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

God the Father is revealed in God the Son by God the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised this incredible union with God through the presence of God's Spirit in our lives and in the world. Kingdom life is God's life in us, procured by the Son of God and imparted by the Spirit of God. We share God's life. God's life in us transforms us and others.

Relate

1. How has your understanding of God grown?
2. How do you understand God's greatness and intimacy?

Respond

1. Read John 16:12-15, a verse each.
2. How does the Spirit of truth unite God's vastness with our lives? See Psalm 8 and Proverbs 8:22-31.
3. How does the Holy Spirit bring glory to Christ? Note Romans 5:1-2, 5.
4. How does God's presence change us? Consider Romans 5:3-5.

Reflect

1. What have you valued about God's presence in your group?
2. What verbal gifts of appreciation or encouragement can you give to each person in your group?
3. Do that and conclude with prayers of thanks and worship.

Appendix: Studies arranged according to gospel readings

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I 5. Infancy and childhood of Jesus	Luke 2:41-52
I 2. John the Baptist	Luke 3:1-6
I 3. The Messiah	Luke 3:7-18
I 7. The baptism of Jesus	Luke 3:15-17, 21-22
II 2. The temptations	Luke 4:1-13
I 9. The visit to Nazareth (1)	Luke 4:14-21
I 10. The visit to Nazareth (2)	Luke 4:21-30
I 11. The call of the first disciples	Luke 5:1-11
I 12. The sermon on the plain (1)	Luke 6:17-26
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I 22. Martha and Mary	Luke 10:38-42
I 23. The importunate friend	Luke 11:1-13
I 24. The parable of the rich fool	Luke 12:13-21
I 25. The need for vigilance	Luke 12:32-40
I 26. Not peace but division	Luke 12:49-56
II 4. Teaching about repentance (1)	Luke 13:1-9
I 27. Few will be saved	Luke 13:22-30
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I 32. The rich man and Lazarus	Luke 16:19-31
I 33. A lesson on faith and dedication	Luke 17:5-10
I 34. The ten lepers	Luke 17:11-19
I 35. The unjust judge	Luke 18:1-8
I 36. The Pharisee and the tax collector	Luke 18:9-14
I 37. Zacchaeus	Luke 19:1-10
II 7. Palm Sunday	Luke 19:28-40

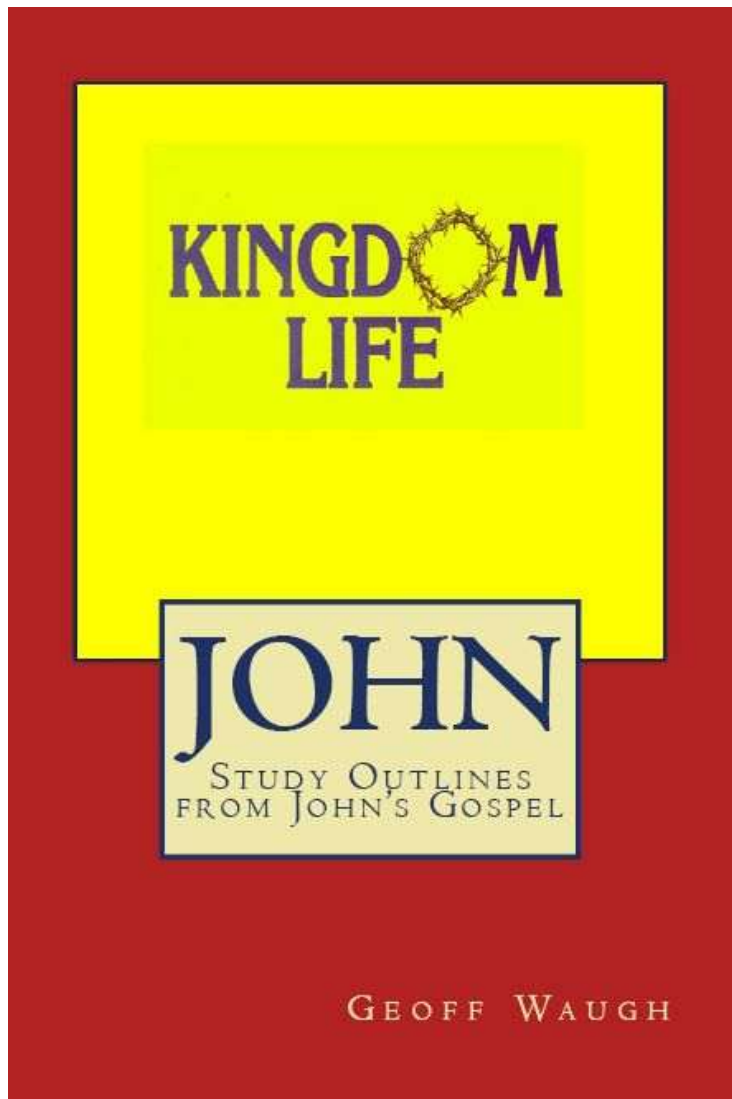
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I 39. The signs announcing the end	Luke 21:5-19
I 1. The coming of the Lord	Luke 21:25-36
II 7. The crucifixion	Luke 22:14-23:56
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I 6. Reflections on the birth of Jesus	John 1:1-18
I 8. The marriage feast at Cana	John 2:1-11
II 11. Jesus the Good Shepherd	John 10:22-30
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The Gospels

Kingdom Life in John



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Kingdom Life: John

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Compiled from *Kingdom Life in Matthew, Mark and Luke*

Part 1: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

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Appendix: *Renewal Journals* and books

Introduction to John

John was an eye-witness to the ministry of Jesus. He belonged to the inner circle of disciples with his brother James and with Peter the natural leader. John may have been the youngest of the disciples, uniquely remembered as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

J B Phillips concludes his translation of the closing verses in John's Gospel this way:

All the above was written by an eye-witness. Now it is this same disciple who is hereby giving his testimony to these things and has written them down. We know that his testimony is reliable. Of course, there are many other things which Jesus did, and I suppose that if each one were written down in detail, there would not be room in the whole world for all the books that would have to be written (21:24-25).

Throughout his gospel John emphasized that he recorded what he had seen and heard. He states early in the Gospel that he with others witnessed the life of Jesus the Christ, the Logos – the living Word of God. He declares, “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father (1:14).

John describes how he was there at the crucifixion witnessing that stupendous, agonizing death, “*And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe*” (19:35). Here again he underlines the main purpose of writing his Gospel as he does in his conclusion before the Appendix of Chapter 21:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (20:30-31).

John's purpose is evangelistic – “that you may believe”. This book surveys John's own approach to telling his story as a close eye-witness.

Kingdom Life

Section 1: *Details exclusive to John*, briefly surveys John's unique account of Jesus' life and ministry and focuses his very personal record of the crucifixion and resurrection.

Section 2: *Study Outlines* covers key passages in John's Gospel compiled from relational Bible from the three books *Kingdom Life in Matthew, Mark and Luke*, which use common lectionary readings from John scattered through those three books.

John's intimate, personal Gospel story transcends time and space to show us his living Lord, the Son of God, revealed in human flesh, living among us, full of grace and truth, "*for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (3:16).

Details exclusive to John

Personal eye-witness account

Many details are exclusive to John's Gospel about the words and deeds of Jesus, people, timing, numbers, places and treatment of Jesus and his body. The details reveal John's close, personal participation in these events as an intimate eye-witness.

1. Signs

John writes his Gospel around 7 signs Jesus demonstrated revealing his true nature and glory. The three synoptic Gospels focus on the many narrative events with teaching added, but John focuses on Jesus teaching, built around these signs of his power and authority.

1. Turning water into wine (2:1-12)
2. Healing the nobleman's son (4:46-54)
3. Healing the man at Bethesda (5:1-47)
4. Feeding the 5000 (6:1-4)
5. Walking on Water (6:15-21)
6. Healing the Blind Man (9:1-41)
7. Raising of Lazarus (11:1-57)
8. Christ's Resurrection (2:18-22; 20:21)

John calls these events 'signs', and shows how Jesus explained that his signs pointed to his divinity and authority as the Son of God.

2. Sayings

John gives us the "I am" statements of Jesus. His original Greek manuscript used the strong emphasis, *ego aimi – I alone am ...*, or *I myself am* These sayings of Jesus are unique claims.

1. I am the Bread of Life (6:35)
2. I am the Light of the World (8:12)
3. Before Abraham was, I am (8:58)
4. I am the Good Shepherd (10:11)
5. I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. I am the True Vine (15:1)

Jesus often claimed to be the only way to God and the only true revelation of the nature of God his Father. As with his parables, these sayings of Jesus punch home vital truths in brief gems of truth.

John was an eye-witness to these events and teachings and remained faithful to Jesus to the end of John's long and loving life.

Now we focus on John's unique eye-witness account of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection with some reference to the rest of his Gospel.

3. People

John was intimately involved with Jesus in his life and death and resurrection. As one of the close circle of Peter, James and John, he saw and heard more of Jesus than most others.

Those three saw Jesus raise Jairus' 12 year old daughter to life and they witnessed the transfigured Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah about his destiny in Jerusalem, and Jesus wanted them near him in Gethsemane. Interestingly, and perhaps humbly, John leaves those stories to others (Jairus: Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56; the Transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; 2 Peter 1:16-18; Gethsemane: Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42).

Following the Transfiguration Jesus began his final journey to Jerusalem with his growing band of followers. He sent 70 of them before him to prepare for his final visits to town and villages on the journey south, and gave his followers power and authority to say and do what he had been doing as he declared and demonstrated the kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-8; 10:1-24).

All the Gospel writers give at least a third of their story to one week in Jesus' life, and John gives more to that week than the others do (chapters 12-20). John's account includes details about Jesus' teaching and the implications of his actions.

So for example, Luke tells how at the Last Supper Passover meal the disciples still argued about who was the greatest, so Jesus confronted them with his challenge to be the servant of all (Luke 22:24-27).

John gives more details. He tells how Jesus shocked them (probably while they still argued) by laying aside his garments, wrapping a towel around his waist and washing and drying their feet, dressed as the lowliest servant. Peter reacted strongly. But Jesus insisted his followers must be servants as he was (John 13:1-17).

Then John gives us his unique account of Jesus' final teaching before he was arrested that night and crucified the next morning (chapters 13-17). Jesus said he would leave them but that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and be their guide, counsellor, teacher and friend who would glorify Jesus. John then gives us the earnest high priestly prayer that Jesus prayed for them and for us, a prayer for unity and love (chapter 17:20-21).

John mentions people involved in the crucifixion story who are not included in the other Gospels.

In the events leading to Jesus' arrest and false conviction John describes his own involvement in those traumatic events. It is

John who notes that Malchus, whose ear Peter sliced off and Jesus healed in the garden or grove of Gethsemane, was the servant to the high priest (18:10).

Only John describes the relationship of Annas to Caiaphas the high priest (18:13), that ‘the other disciple’ had access to the courtyard (18:15). John reports specific accusations and comments from the trial there (18:19-24) and that Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas for sentencing (18:24).

John includes the names of the women gathered near the cross with him, Jesus’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene (19:25, cf. Matthew 27:56). John then adds the poignant concern of Jesus for the care of his mother.

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!” Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!” And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home (19:26-27).

Similarly John gives us a further glimpse into Jesus’ excruciating (from *ex-cru* – out of the cross) suffering, savagely dehydrated from the loss of blood and fluid, and his gasping cry, “I thirst”.

Then John records Jesus’ final, triumphant declaration: “*It is finished*” or “*It is accomplished*” (19:28-30).

4. Times

John also mentions times involved in these events. He notes that Jesus was on the cross by noon and that his body had to be removed before sundown as the Sabbath began then. The crucifixion day was the Day of Preparation for the Passover Sabbath commencing after sundown. So Jesus chose to die on that day when the Passover lamb was killed for the Passover feast (19:31).

Neither the Jewish leaders nor the Roman governor wanted to kill him then, but Jesus chose to die that day. The chief priests feared a riot at the feast so did not want to arrest Jesus then (Matthew 26:5; Mark 14:2) but Jesus delivered himself to them then. Pilate tried every way he could to release Jesus but was forced to comply with the Jewish leaders' urgent demands because he saw a riot developing.

Following Jesus' death and burial, John notes how it was still dark when Mary Magdalene ventured to the garden tomb early on the resurrection morning, alarmed to discover the stone had been rolled away. So she returned to tell the disciples, and John that younger 'other disciple' raced Peter to the tomb but did not go in, whereas Peter in his forthright style with his usual leadership initiative did. So 'the other disciple' then did so too 'and saw and believed'.

5. Numbers

John notes other interesting details in his own personal story. He tells us that the Jewish leaders and temple guard also brought Roman soldiers with them to arrest Jesus (18:3).

Only John informs us that it was four soldiers who shared Jesus' clothes among themselves and gambled for his seamless tunic, so fulfilling Psalm 22:18:

*They divided My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots (19:24).*

A squad of four soldiers was typical for each Roman crucifixion, that cruel form of public humiliation and torture for criminals and political prisoners. They crucified victims along the main road just outside a village or town. All the Gospel records support this.

Hymns, not Scripture, tell of "a green hill" far away outside a city wall. The Gospels confirm that Golgotha (Calvary in Latin) was

the place of a skull, not a hill. Cemeteries and tombs typically lay just outside a town or city wall as at the Old City of Jerusalem today, and Joseph of Arimathea had a new tomb near Golgotha. John notes that the crucifixion site was near the city (19:20).

John also notes that those soldiers hastened the deaths of the other two crucified along the road with Jesus by breaking their legs. This torture would speed up death if necessary. Then the victims could no longer raise themselves up on the spikes through their feet or ankles in order to breathe, so they would suffocate. However, the Roman preference was to cause the longest most painful torture possible as a terrible deterrent to their conquered peoples.

They did not break Jesus' legs because he was already dead, so he fulfilled prophecy concerning the Passover lamb whose bones would not be broken (19:36; Cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12; Psalm 34:20).

Jesus fulfilled the many prophecies concerning the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Isaiah 53 is one of the most soaring examples:

Who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.

He has no form or comeliness;

And when we see Him,

There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

³ He is despised and rejected by men,

A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him;

He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs

And carried our sorrows;

Yet we esteemed Him stricken,

Smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

⁸ He was taken from prison and from judgment,
And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

⁹ And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor *was any* deceit in His mouth.

¹⁰ Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put *Him* to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.

¹¹ He shall see the labour of His soul, *and* be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

[Note that the KJV and NKJV use *italics* for words not found in the original text, but used to clarify the English translation.]

Jesus referred to these passages after his resurrection (Luke 24:27, 32, 45-46). So did Philip when talking to the Ethiopian returning home after visiting the Passover in Jerusalem (Acts 8:32-35).

This prophetic poem shines bright among Isaiah's Servant Songs. The Servant Songs in Isaiah portray how God's purposes for his people will be fulfilled in his anointed Servant.

These messianic passages describe the Servant of the Lord who fulfills Israel's destiny:

Isaiah 42:1-9, God's servant will deliver and save (Mt. 12:18-21).

Isaiah 49:1-6, God's servant will bring salvation to the whole world.

Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12, God's servant dies for us to save us all.

Jesus became that Suffering Servant, the sacrificial Lamb of God. Previously people tried to kill him, but failed. Jesus survived many assassination attempts. Two kings wanted to kill him (Matthew 2:13; Luke 13:31). His relatives attempted to push him over a cliff (Luke 4:29). People in Jerusalem tried to stone him more than once (John 8:59, 10:31). Leaders plotted to kill him many times (Matthew 12:14, 26:4; Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). Eventually they did kill him. But Jesus chose the time, the place and the method (John 10:17-18).

John links his eye-witness story with the prophetic statements concerning Jesus' clothes and bones, and gives us the eternally resounding cry from the cross, "*It is finished/accomplished*".

6. Places

We noted John's careful description of events in Gethsemane, the trials with Annas and Caiaphas and Pilate, the scourging and torture with the soldiers and the victim's walk carrying his crossbeam to the stakes on the main road just outside the city wall at Golgotha, the place of a skull.

Then John continues his account with his unique reference to Joseph's tomb being in a garden near Golgotha (19:41).

Here Nicodemus reappears in John's story, also unique to his account. A respected spiritual leader, Nicodemus talked with Jesus at night (3:1-21), spoke for him at the council (7:49-51), and came with 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes for his burial (39:40) in Joseph's garden tomb.

Then early on Easter morning John saw the empty tomb and he alone tells us about the napkin or cloth which had been wrapped around Jesus' head being rolled up separately in a place by itself. John and most of the others saw and worshipped their risen Lord that evening, though some still doubted that he was really risen.

During that eventful Sunday Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and the other women who came to the tomb, to Peter and to Cleopas and his friend at Emmaus. Those two hurried back the eight miles to Jerusalem to share the exciting news and then discovered that others had seen him too. Then all those gathered there that night saw him together (Luke 24).

The second time they saw him together, the following Sunday night a week later, Thomas was with them, and saw and believed. John alone recorded Jesus' reminder, "Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

John saw the risen Lord with the other disciples many times during the 40 days before his ascension. That included the dramatic events on the shore at Galilee when John was the first of those all-night fishermen to recognise Jesus. Peter swam ashore leaving the others to haul in the miraculous catch of 153 fish. There they enjoyed breakfast of bread and fish cooked by Jesus on a charcoal fire (John 20).

John followed behind Jesus and Peter as they strolled along the short of the lake. Then a rumour began that John would not die. Jesus did not say that, but some people reported him incorrectly (20:21-23).

Chapter 21 may be an inspired appendix added after John's death (20:20, 24).

John concluded his gospel with his strong evangelistic declaration at the end of chapter 20, that "*these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*" (20:31).

7. General details

In addition to John's unique eye-witness testimony, his Gospel also shows careful reporting of a close eye-witness in passages also common to one or more of the other Gospels, so not unique to John alone. However, even in these common reports, John often adds his own eye-witness observation.

The inscription on the cross, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, was written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin, adds John. It was common for criminals to have their crimes inscribed at their execution made as public as possible to be read by as many a possible (19:19-20).

John's narrative includes the soldiers, the women identified by name, the hyssop dipped into cheap vinegar wine and put to Jesus' lips, the Jews' request to remove the bodies before sundown, the legs of the two thieves broken, the spear thrust into Jesus' side, and three of Jesus' gasped saying on the cross. All these show John's close involvement in this excruciating torture to death with some of Jesus' closest friends enduring the ghastly scene to its inevitable, decisive end.

The burial account is one of poignant, specific detail. John notes Joseph's request and Pilate's agreement, Nicodemus' involvement with 100 pounds of spices, and the location of the new garden tomb near Golgotha.

John continues his story with his involvement in the startling, confusing discovery of the same new tomb now empty again. He relates the time, day and reason for his discovery with Peter after hearing Mary's alarming news. Only John tells us of his own involvement early that Easter morning.

John's account of those crucial events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection are filled with eye-witness detail as well as the general events common to all the Gospel writers.

Reflecting on his privileged, intimate involvement with Jesus, John recalled how he reclined at the Passover meal in Jewish style with the others, rested on Jesus' chest and leaned back to ask privately, at Peter's request, about who would betray Jesus (13:23-26). John's Gospel story is one of intimate detail like that, from a life shared closely with the Lord he loved and who loved him in a special way.

So John captures for us something of the great grace and glory he found in his Lord:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (1:14, 18).

John knew Jesus intimately and gives us a unique, personal and theological account of his life, death and resurrection. Many famous verses, loved throughout history, shine from John's Gospel, the best known of any verse in the Bible being John 3:16.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

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Part I: The Life and Ministry of Jesus

1. Reflections on the birth of Jesus

John 1:1-18

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:12-20 Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18

The Word was God. The Word became flesh, a human being. The glory of God is seen in him, full of grace and truth. God, veiled in flesh. The incarnate deity. God with us. John's gospel begins with these profound reflections on the mystery of the incarnation.

Relate

1. What do you value most about your beginnings?
2. How have your beginnings helped shape your life?

Respond

1. Read John 1:1-18 silently and meditate on it for a few minutes.
2. What lights up or has special meaning for you in that passage?
3. What do you learn about Jesus from this passage? Note Ephesians 1:18-23.
4. What does this passage promise ultimately? See also Jeremiah 31:7-14.

Reflect

1. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth mean most to you? Note John 1:14, Psalm 147:12-14, Ephesians 1:3-6.
2. What aspects of Jesus' grace and truth do you see in others in your group? Each person in turn remains silent as others comment on them.
3. How does the awesome greatness of Jesus Christ our Lord affect your life? Respond in worship and prayer.

2. The witness of John the Baptist

John 1:29-34

Other readings:

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalm 40:1-11

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. God's unblemished sacrificial lamb is announced to the world by God's prophet, John. God's Spirit rests on Jesus. He baptizes us in the Holy Spirit. He is the Son of God. These astounding claims and incredible titles herald Jesus' ministry.

Relate

1. What titles or descriptions of Jesus have special meaning for you? Examples in John 1: Word, Light, Christ, Lamb of God, Son of God.
2. How did you come to know Christ personally?

Respond

1. Read John 1:29-34 aloud.
2. How does the title Lamb of God fit Jesus? Consider Psalm 40:1-11.
3. How do John's witness and the Holy Spirit's empowering testify to Jesus as the Son of God? Note Isaiah 49:1-7.
4. What are some results of the Lord imparting his Spirit to us? See 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

Reflect

1. What have been some of your most significant discoveries of the Holy Spirit in your life?
2. What would you like the Holy Spirit to do in your life?
3. Pray about this for one another and others.

3. The marriage feast at Cana

John 2:1-11

Other readings:

Isaiah 62:1-5 Psalm 36:5-10 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Jesus touches life with his grace and glory. At the wedding in Cana he and his disciples mixed with friends and relatives. He celebrated with them. There he quietly revealed his glory. Inconspicuously. Graciously. Generously. He saved others from embarrassment. He responded to Mary's faith. The miraculous transformed the mundane. About 700 litres (around 150 gallons) of water became the best wine.

Relate

1. What do you enjoy most about weddings?
2. What kind of gifts do you get most pleasure in giving?

Respond

1. Read John 2:1-11, someone narrating, others reading the conversations.
2. What does this first miracle suggest about Jesus' concern for friends and family? Note verses 11-12.
3. What does this miracle foreshadow about Jesus' ministry beyond friends and family? Consider Mark 3:20-21,34-35 and Isaiah 62:1-5.
4. What does this miracle say about the Lord's generous love? See also Psalm 36:5-10.

Reflect

1. How generously does God give us his Spirit? Note 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.
2. How can you relate to friends and family as Jesus did?
3. Pray specifically about that.

4. The meaning of the cross

John 3:1-17

Other readings:

Genesis 12:1-8 Psalm 33:12-22 Romans 4:1-5 (6-12) 13-17

Jesus knew that his destiny involved sacrificial death on the cross, an ugly instrument of public torture and humiliation. This passage likens his death to the time God's people were saved from death when they looked at the brass serpent on a pole. God's great love gave us salvation through Jesus' death. We only have to 'look and live' or trust God because of Jesus' death.

Relate

1. What gave you security in your childhood or youth?
2. What gives you security now?

Respond

1. Read John 3:1-17. One could narrate, others read the words of Nicodemus and Jesus.
2. What point did Nicodemus miss? Consider Genesis 12:1-8 and Romans 4:1-5, 13-17.
3. Why would Nicodemus miss the point?
4. Why is Christianity based on the cross? Note Psalm 33:12-22.

Reflect

1. What difference does believing or trusting God make for you?
2. What security do you have in trusting in Jesus now as well as for life beyond death?
3. Pray with thanks and faith.

5. The Messiah and Samaritans

John 4:5-26 (27-42)

Other readings:

Exodus 17:3-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well at Sychar looks to the time when in Jesus crucified and risen all people will have access to eternal life and will worship God, especially the outcasts and oppressed like that woman. Jesus, in himself, transcends our divisions and hostilities by making us one in him alone.

Relate

1. What non-conformist or different things have you done?
2. What non-conformist or different things would you like to do?

Respond

1. Read John 4:5-26. One could narrate, others read the words of Jesus and the woman.
2. Why was Jesus' action so startling and radical?
3. What did Jesus mean by living water? Consider Exodus 17:3-7 and Psalm 95.
4. How does the living water affect life now? Note Romans 5:1-11.

Reflect

1. How have you become aware of living water or an inner spring?
2. How does Jesus' life in us free us to be like him?
3. Pray about the implications of that for you now.

6. The Holy Spirit promised

John 7:37-39

Other readings:

Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:24-34 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13
(Isaiah 44:1-8)

Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his disciples as streams of living water. After his resurrection he spoke about the kingdom of God and renewed his promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Spirit at the Pentecost harvest festival. The Spirit empowered them. Three thousand were added to them. The church was born.

Relate

1. When has God surprised you?
2. What was a significant encounter with God's Spirit in your life?

Respond

1. Read John 7:37-39. A different person could read Jesus' words.
2. What link do you see between this passage and John 14:16-17 and 20:19-23.
3. How is Pentecost different from the Old Testament accounts of the Spirit? Consider Psalm 104:30-34, Isaiah 44:3 and Acts 2:17-21.
4. What are some results of the Spirit's indwelling? Note Acts 2:1-4 and 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13.

Reflect

1. What are some of the Spirit's gifts in your life and what gifts of the Spirit do you see in others in your group?
2. What spiritual gifts do you desire? Note 1 Corinthians 14:1.
3. Pray about that together.

7. Jesus the light of the world

John 9:1-41

Other readings:

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

Jesus healed a man born blind. He did this on the Sabbath. Jesus pointed out that he himself was the light of the world (9:5), that the blind will see and those who see will become blind (9:39). He broke the traditions to help people. He gave life and wholeness. He still does. Our traditions may blind us to God's great grace and compassion.

Relate

1. When has someone gone out of their way to help you?
2. When has your concern for someone made you break traditions?

Respond

1. Read John 9:1, 6-9, 13-17, 34-38. Different people could read each section.
2. Why did Jesus' compassionate act cause so much strife?
3. Why are God's ways often unexpected and disturbing? Compare this story of the blind man with 1 Samuel 16:7, 10-13 and David's attitude in Psalm 23.

Reflect

1. How does living in the light of the Lord's presence and power affect daily life? Note Ephesians 5:8-14.
2. How would you like to be more like the man born blind or like David?
3. Pray about that.

8. Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:1-10

Other readings:

Acts 2:42-47

Psalm 23

1 Peter 2:19-25

John recorded many discourses which give further insights into the claims and nature of Jesus. Those claims are astounding, and relate to his authority and divinity. Jesus himself is the doorway or gate for his followers. In him we enter into life in all its fullness.

Relate

1. When has someone introduced you into a new situation?
2. What did you appreciate most about that help?

Respond

1. Read John 10:1-10. Someone could read verses 1-6 and another read verses 7-10.
2. How does Jesus' ministry illustrate this passage?
3. How does this passage explain the Lord's care for us? Compare verses 11 and 14 with Psalm 23 and 1 Peter 2:23-25.
4. How can the church live this out? Note Acts 2:42-47.

Reflect

1. What aspects of church life have conveyed God's care for you?
2. How can you help to convey this care to others?
3. Pray and plan about that together.

9. The Shepherd knows his sheep

John 10:22-30

Other readings:

Acts 13:15-16, 26-33 Psalm 23 Revelation 7:9-17

At the winter Hanukkah festival, celebrating deliverance from foreign oppression, nationalism ran high. Jewish leaders wanted to pin down Jesus' claims. Was he the Messiah? He was, but not as they expected. His kingdom has no end. Jesus exercises his authority and divinity especially among his own people. Those who share kingdom life know their king, their shepherd, their guardian, their protector, their friend.

Relate

1. When has someone taken the trouble to guide or shepherd you?
2. When have you given time to help or care for someone?

Respond

1. Read John 10:22-30, a paragraph each.
2. Why did Jesus' claims cause so much anger? See verses 30-33.
3. Why are those claims so revolutionary? Note verses 25-30, Acts 13:26-33.
4. What does the Lord's shepherding involve? Consider Psalm 23 and Revelation 7:9-17.

Reflect

1. What shepherding do you need or hope for?
2. How can this group help?
3. Pray and plan about that together.

10. Signs of the resurrection

John 11:1-45

Other readings:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 116:1-9

Romans 8:6-11

God's power transcends and conquers death. Jesus demonstrated this in the raising of Lazarus and declared that he himself was the resurrection and the life (11:25). Those who believe in him will never die but live beyond death. Life continues into greater dimensions. We have only just begun.

Relate

1. Who had a strong influence on your life by their example?
2. What is your idea of life after death?

Respond

1. Read John 11:3-7, 17, 20-27, 32-45. Different people could read each section.
2. What do verses 25-26 mean for us now and in the future?
3. How does Jesus' resurrection life apply to us? Compare John 10:10 with Psalm 116:1-9 and Ezekiel 37:13-14.
4. How does God's Spirit make this a reality in us? See Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Romans 8:6-11.

Reflect

1. How has God's Spirit changed you?
2. What further changes do you want from the Spirit in your life?
3. Pray about that together.

11. Mary anoints Jesus

John 12:1-8

Other readings:

Isaiah 43:16-21

Psalm 126

Philippians 3:8-14

Mary's extravagant expression of love for Jesus caused criticism. It cost a year's wages. Jesus defended her action. He knew the perfume had been bought for his burial and that Mary realised this was an appropriate time to use it. He affirmed her. Mary sensed the impending crisis. Jesus knew his time had come. That gave deep significance to Mary's action. He commended such love and devotion.

Relate

1. When has someone's extravagant act surprised or pleased you?
2. When have you been extravagant in showing love or appreciation?

Respond

1. Read John 12:1-8, a paragraph each.
2. How did Jesus' friends show their devotion in different ways? See verses 1-3.
3. What did Jesus foreshadow? Consider also Isaiah 43:16-21 and Psalm 126.
4. Why is loving Jesus a goal beyond any price? Note Philippians 3:8-14.

Reflect

1. How do you integrate loving the Lord and helping the poor?
2. What ways do you seek to show love to the Lord?
3. Express that in prayer together.

12. Christ the King

John 12:9-19

Other readings:

2 Samuel 5:1-5

Psalm 95

Colossians 1:11-20

Jesus triumphed over even death itself. He demonstrated this in the resurrection of Lazarus, and foreshadowed his own resurrection. The crowds swelled. They wanted him to be their king, their deliverer, their saviour from oppression. He was. But not as expected. His kingdom transcends all nationalism. He reigns for ever, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Relate

1. What do you feel patriotic about?
2. What grabs you about God's kingdom?

Respond

1. Read John 12:9-19, a paragraph each.
2. Why did the people, including the disciples, miss the point of Jesus' demonstration? Note expectations in 2 Samuel 5:1-5.
3. What was the point of Jesus' demonstration? See Colossians 1:11-20.
4. What does this show about God's saving purpose? Consider Psalm 95.

Reflect

1. How do you want to respond to the kingly reign of Jesus?
2. Give symbolic gifts in words to each person in your group to help each one respond to Jesus' reign.
3. Pray for each person in the group.

Part II: The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

1. Jesus the way of love

John 13:1-35

Other readings:

Acts 14:8-18

Psalm 145:13b-21

Revelation 21:1-6

Jesus lived and demonstrated a new dimension of love. Strong love. Divine love. Self-giving love. God-centred love. He also commanded this for his followers. They were to be known for that kind of love. Pure. Strong. Selfless. Sacrificial. This was a new commandment, not just a repeat of the old. We are to love as Jesus did, with his love. That's the true mark of his followers.

Relate

1. When did someone's love for you surprise you?
2. When have you been surprised by God's love?

Respond

1. Read John 13:31-35, a verse each.
2. How is the Lord's love unique? Note Psalm 145:13b-21.
3. How did Jesus demonstrate this love? Compare with Acts 14:8-10.
4. How is that love to be fulfilled? See verses 31-32 and Revelation 21:1-6.

Reflect

1. How do you want to apply this command to your life?
2. How can the group help?
3. Do that as you pray together.

2. Jesus the way, truth and life

John 14:1-14

Other readings:

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31:1-8

1 Peter 2:2-10

Jesus himself is the way to God, he himself is the truth, and he himself is the life. Our eternal destiny lies in him. We share in his life, eternally. The sacrifice of that one life, his triumph over death and his eternal dominion are all we need for life now and for ever.

Relate

1. How did you come to know about or believe in Jesus?
2. What difference does that make to your life?

Respond

1. Read John 14:1-14. Different people could read verses 5 and 8.
2. Why are Jesus' claims about himself so revolutionary or radical? Note Acts 7:55-60 and 1 Peter 2:2-8.
3. What changes come from believing in Jesus? See John 20:31 and 1 Peter 2:9-10.
4. How does faith in the Lord affect daily living? Note Psalm 31:1-8.

Reflect

1. In what ways does Jesus both challenge and comfort us?
2. In what ways do you need that challenge or comfort just now?
3. Pray about that together.

3. Jesus present among his people

John 14:15-21

Other readings:

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

Jesus told his disciples that when he had gone he would still be present with them, and with all who believe in him. We share his life. His Spirit lives in us. We know him. This will show in our love for him as we obey his commands. He unites us with the Father and reveals himself to those who love him and obey him.

Relate

1. Which aspects of God's being, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, do you relate to most easily?
2. How do you visualise or think about God when you pray?

Respond

1. Read John 14:15-21, different people reading each verse.
2. How does Jesus describe the Trinity in this passage? See also 1 Peter 3:13-22.
3. How are we caught up into the Trinity? Consider John 14:16-17 and Acts 17:22-31.
4. How can we respond to God? Note Psalm 66:8-20.

Reflect

1. What does this close union with God mean in practice?
2. What prayer or desire do you want to bring to God now?
3. Do that.

4. Jesus promises his Spirit

John 14:23-29

Other readings:

Acts 15:1-2,22-29

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10,22-27

Jesus would not remain physically present with his followers, but he promised something greater. Just as he was in the Father, the Father in him, and the Spirit one in them, so Jesus would send his Spirit through whom he and the Father would be intimately present with his people. He prepared his followers for the coming of the Holy Spirit who would bring a new dimension of intimacy and power.

Relate

1. How have you experienced the Lord's intimacy or presence?
2. How have you experienced the Lord's action or power?

Respond

1. Read John 14:23-29, a paragraph each.
2. Why is this promise astounding? See Luke 24:48-49.
3. What does close union with God involve? Consider Acts 15:24-29 and Revelation 21:22-27.
4. How does this affect society and nations? Note Psalm 67.

Reflect

1. In what way do you want greater intimacy with the Lord?
2. In what way do you want the Lord's power in your life?
3. Pray together about that.

5. Jesus the true vine

John 15:1-17

Other readings

Exodus 3:1-14

Psalm 24

Revelation 1:1-20

Jesus made unique, startling claims about himself. John records these in his Gospel and from his vision in The Revelation. Those statements include these claims:

1. I am the Bread of Life (6:35)
2. I am the Light of the World (8:12)
3. Before Abraham was, I am (8:58)
4. I am the Good Shepherd (10:11)
5. I am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
6. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
7. I am the True Vine (15:1)

Relate

1. What claims of Jesus have challenged you most?
2. What claims of Jesus comfort or help you most?

Respond

1. Note the claims of Jesus in John 15:1-17.
2. Consider how Jesus' claims reveal his divinity, as seen in Exodus 3:14-15 and Revelation 1:8, 17.
3. How do we open the gates for the King of Glory? Note Psalm 24.

Reflect

1. How can you help one another welcome the King?
2. How can you draw on his life as the True Vine?
3. Pray together about that.

6. The Trinity

John 16:12-15

Other readings:

Proverbs 8:22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

God the Father is revealed in God the Son by God the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised this incredible union with God through the presence of God's Spirit in our lives and in the world. Kingdom life is God's life in us, procured by the Son of God and imparted by the Spirit of God. We share God's life. God's life in us transforms us and others.

Relate

1. How has your understanding of God grown?
2. How do you understand God's greatness and intimacy?

Respond

1. Read John 16:12-15, a verse each.
2. How does the Spirit of truth unite God's vastness with our lives? See Psalm 8 and Proverbs 8:22-31.
3. How does the Holy Spirit bring glory to Christ? Note Romans 5:1-2,5.
4. How does God's presence change us. Consider Romans 5:3-5.

Reflect

1. What have you valued about God's presence in your group?
2. What verbal gifts of appreciation or encouragement can you give to each person in your group?
3. Do that and conclude with prayers of thanks and worship.

7. Jesus prays for his people

John 17:1-11

Other readings:

Acts 1:6-14

Psalm 68:1-10

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Jesus' farewell discourse ends with a prayer. His disciples must live amid opposition as Jesus did. So Jesus prays specifically for their protection. They are sent into the world as Jesus was sent into the world. They will live in another kingdom while still in the world. They will march to the beat of another drum. They belong to God.

Relate

1. When has someone praying for you or with you made a big difference in your life or situation?
2. When have you prayed with someone and seen it make a difference?

Respond

1. Read John 17:1-11. Someone could read verses 1-5, another 6-11.
2. How are God's glory and eternal life linked in Jesus?
3. How does God's glory affect our daily living? Note Acts 1:6-14 and 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11.
4. How is God's glory revealed in our unity or harmony? Consider John 17:10-11 and Psalm 68:1-10.

Reflect

1. When or where have you discovered God's glory seen in our unity?
2. What are significant ingredients of unity for you?
3. Pray about that for your group or church.

8. Jesus prays for all believers

John 17:20-26

Other readings:

Acts 16:16-34

Psalm 97

Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20

Jesus' prayer for all believers boggles the mind. He prayed for a unique kind of unity, impossible apart from his Spirit in us. He prayed that his people would be one. Not merely of one mind, but one. One in him, as he is one with the Father. He repeated this astounding request, that the unity he had with the Father will be the unity we have in him, and that the love he shared with the Father will be the love we share in him.

Relate

1. How have you discovered intimacy with God?
2. How has this intimacy changed your view of others?

Respond

1. Read John 17:20-26, one person reading/praying.
2. What is Jesus' goal for us on earth? Note Acts 16:17-18,29-34.
3. What is Jesus' ultimate goal for us? See Revelation 22:12-21.
4. How does this affect us now? Consider Psalm 97.

Reflect

1. What kind of love and intimacy with the Lord can you expect?
2. What will this mean in daily life?
3. Pray for that.

9. Trials and the Crucifixion

John 18:1-19:42

Other readings:

Isaiah 50:4-9a Ps 118:19-29; 31:9-16 Philippians 2:5-11

Holy Week! No other week in all history can touch it. Jerusalem saw the cosmic drama of the universe enacted then. Yet no one there but Jesus knew what really happened. From hosannas to 'crucify him'; from the disciples highest hopes to their deepest despair; from triumph to tragedy. The end? No. The beginning.

Relate

A scenario for that week from Mark could be:

Day 1 - triumph; entry into Jerusalem (11:1-11).

Day 2 - authority; temple cleansed (11:12-19).

Day 3 - conflict; clash with leaders (11:20-13:37)

Day 4 - preparation; anointing (14:1-10)

Day 5 - farewell; passover begins (14:12-31)

Day 6 - Gethsemane, trials and crucifixion (14:32-15:47)

Day 7 - silence; sabbath till sundown (16:1).

Day 8 - conquest - resurrection (16:2-20).

What dramatic day intrigues you most from that week?

Respond

1. Note John's eye-witness account and comment on its impact on you.
2. Comment on Psalm 31:9-16 and 118:19-29.
3. Comment on Isaiah 50:4-9a.
4. Comment on Philippians 2:5-11.

Reflect

Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:11):

Comment on what this means for you and respond in prayer.

10. The empty tomb

John 20:1-18; Matthew 28:1-10

Other readings:

Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalm 118:14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

(Acts 10:34-43)

Resurrection! Hope. Doubt. Reports. Rumours. Confusion. Glimpses. Earthquake? Angel? Miracles? Stone rolled away? The tomb empty? A spirit? A real body? Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Relate

1. When have you been surprised or amazed in your faith journey?
2. What was a new or profound insight for you in your growth?

Respond

1. Read Matthew 28:1-10. Different people could read verses 1-4, 5-7, 8-10.
2. Why do you think Jesus revealed the resurrection to the women first? Note Matthew 27:55-56 and Luke 23:55-56 and John 20:1,14-18.
3. Why is the resurrection so significant? See Acts 10:39-43.
4. What hope does the resurrection affirm? Note Psalm 118:14-24 and Jeremiah 31:1-6.

Reflect

1. What difference does the resurrection make to your life? Note Colossians 3:1-4.
2. What hope or dream do you have for your future?
3. Pray about that together.

11. The leaders react

John 20:19-31

Other readings:

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Psalm 16:5-11

1 Peter 1:3-9

The incredible was true. Jesus had conquered death. God's Messiah was vindicated. The new order had begun. The king reigned. The mystery deepened. This king lives in his people by his Spirit. He imparted his own Spirit to his followers. Even doubters began to believe. Kingdom life flourished.

Relate

1. What was a celebration especially significant for you?
2. What kind of celebrations do you like most?

Respond

1. Read John 20:19-31. Different people could read the words of Jesus and Thomas.
2. Why do you think Jesus kept reassuring his friends? See verses 19, 21, 26.
3. What impact did the resurrection have on these leaders? See verses 20 and 28, Acts 2:22-32 and Psalm 16:8-11.
4. Why were these details recorded for us? Note John 20:30-31.

Reflect

1. Why is the resurrection a cause of celebration for us? Note 1 Peter 1:3, 8-9.
2. How can our worship and fellowship celebrate that?
3. Do so.

12. Jesus and Peter

John 21:1-19

Other readings:

Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 30:4-12

Revelation 5:11-14

The risen Lord continued to establish his kingdom purposes in his followers. Again Jesus showed his mastery over events when his disciples were at their trade. Again they were astounded by him. Again Jesus emphasised commitment to himself. Again he called them to follow him. Again he affirmed Peter's leadership. Failure is not the end; it can be a beginning for a humbler, wiser, deeper commitment.

Relate

1. When have you had a second chance or another go?
2. When have you done better after failure or struggle?

Respond

1. Read John 21:1-19, someone narrating, others reading dialogue.
2. What's the point of this miracle? See Luke 5:4-11.
3. How did amazement turn to worship and commitment? Note Acts 9:3-6,17-20 and Revelation 5:11-14.
4. How did Jesus affirm Peter's commitment? Consider Psalm 30:4-12.

Reflect

1. Where do you need to be affirmed or encouraged just now?
 2. What are the strengths you see in people in your group?
- Comment on each person together, and write down what people say to you.

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Appendix: Books

Renewal Journal Publications

See

www.renewaljournal.com

for Blogs on each book

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[Pentecost on Pentecost & the South Pacific](#)

[Great Revival Stories](#), comprising:

[Best Revival Stories](#) and

[Transforming Revivals](#)

[Renewal and Revival](#), comprising:

[Renewal: I make all things new](#), and

[Revival: I will pour out my Spirit](#)

[Anointed for Revival](#)

[Church on Fire](#)

[God's Surprises](#)

Renewal Books

Body Ministry, comprising:

The Body of Christ, Part 1: Body Ministry, and
The Body of Christ, Part 2: Ministry Education, with
Learning Together in Ministry

Great Commission Mission comprising:

Teaching Them to Obey in Love, and
Jesus the Model for Short Term Supernatural Mission

Living in the Spirit

Your Spiritual Gifts

Fruit & Gifts of the Spirit

Keeping Faith Alive Today

The Leader's Goldmine

Word and Spirit by Alison Sherrington

Study Guides

Signs and Wonders: Study Guide

The Holy Spirit in Ministry

Revival History

Holy Spirit Movements through History

Renewal Theology 1

Renewal Theology 2

Ministry Practicum

Devotional Books

[Inspiration](#)

[Jesus on Dying Regrets](#)

[The Christmas Message – The Queen](#)

[Holy Week, Christian Passover &](#)

[Resurrection](#) comprising:

[Holy Week](#), and

[Christian Passover Service](#), and

[Risen: 12 Resurrection Appearances](#)

[Risen: Short Version](#)

[Risen: Long version & our month in Israel](#)

[Mysterious Month – expanded version](#)

[Risen: Long version](#)

[Kingdom Life series](#)

[Kingdom Life: The Gospels](#) – comprising:

[Kingdom Life in Matthew](#)

[Kingdom Life in Mark](#)

[Kingdom Life in Luke](#)

[Kingdom Life in John](#)

[A Preface to the Acts of the Apostles](#)

[The Lion of Judah series](#)

[The Titles of Jesus](#)

[The Reign of Jesus](#)

[The Life of Jesus](#)

[The Death of Jesus](#)

[The Resurrection of Jesus](#)

[The Spirit of Jesus](#)

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[Discovering Aslan - comprising:](#)

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[Discovering Aslan in Prince Caspian](#)

[Discovering Aslan in the Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'](#)

[Discovering Aslan in the Silver Chair](#)

[Discovering Aslan in the Horse and his Boy](#)

[Discovering Aslan in the Magician's Nephew](#)

[Discovering Aslan in the Last Battle](#)

General Books

[*You Can Publish for Free*](#)

[*My First Stories* by Ethan Waugh](#)

[*An Incredible Journey by Faith* by Elisha Chowtapalli](#)

Biographical:

[*God's Surprises*](#)

[*Looking to Jesus: Journey into Renewal & Revival* - Geoff's autobiography](#)

[*Journey into Mission*](#) – Geoff's mission trips

[*Journey into Ministry and Mission*](#)

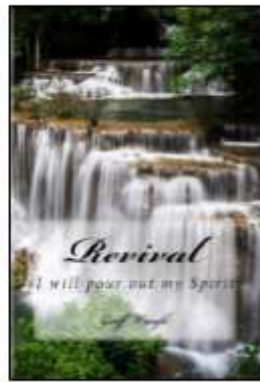
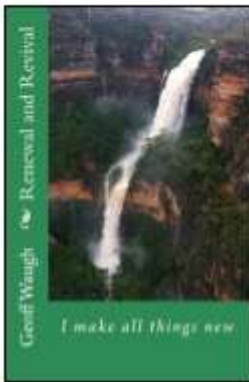
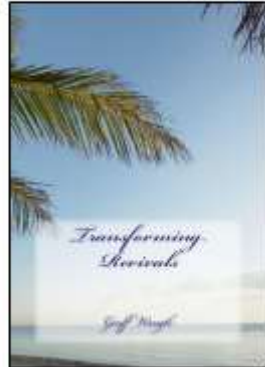
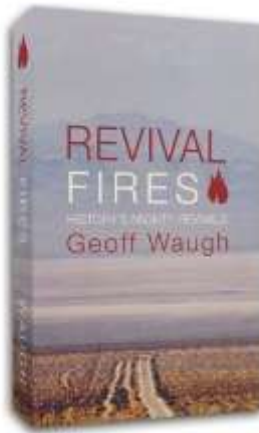
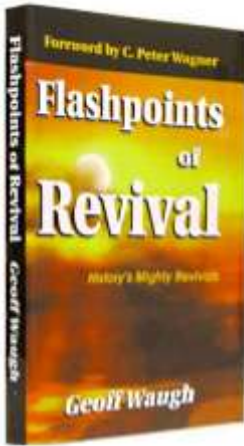
[*King of the Granny Flat* by Dante Waugh](#)

[*Exploring Israel*](#) – Geoff's family's trip

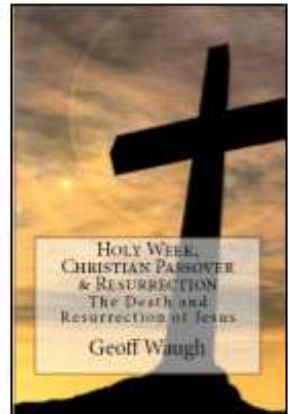
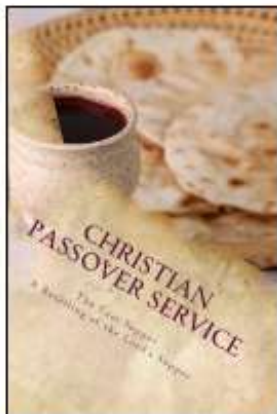
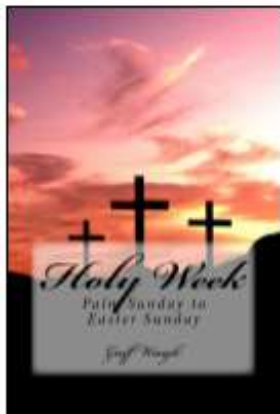
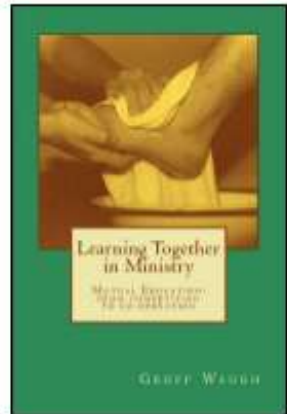
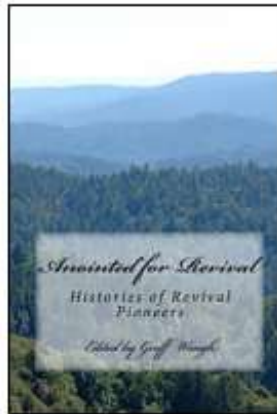
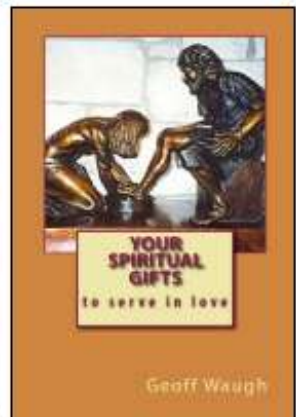
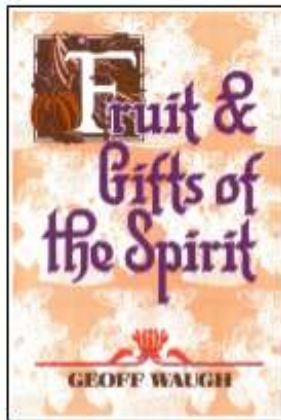
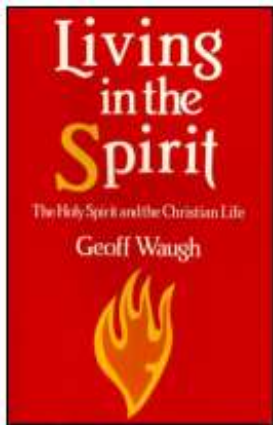
[*Light on the Mountains*](#) – Geoff in PNG

[*Travelling with Geoff* by Don Hill](#)

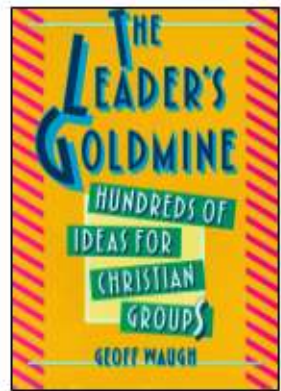
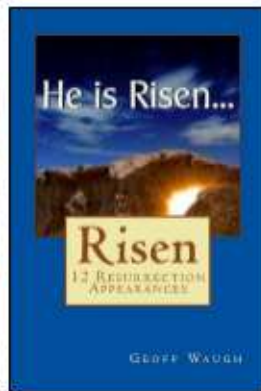
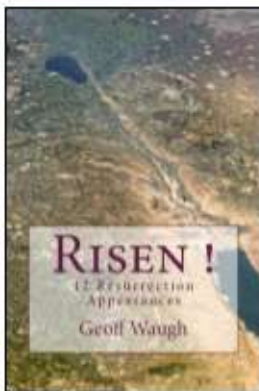
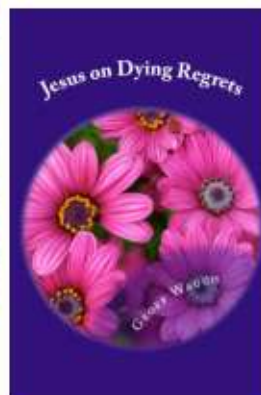
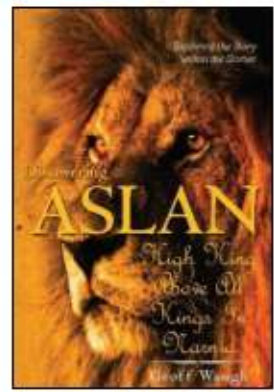
[*By All Means* by Elaine Olley](#)



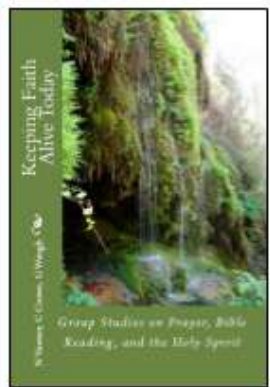
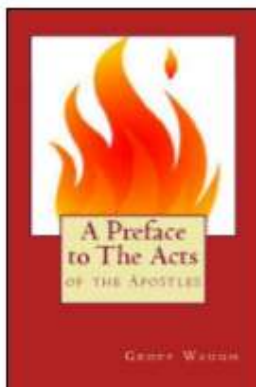
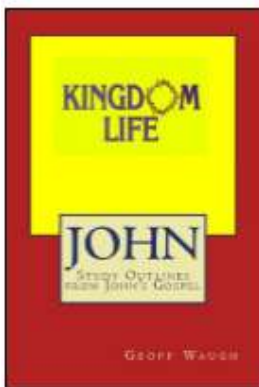
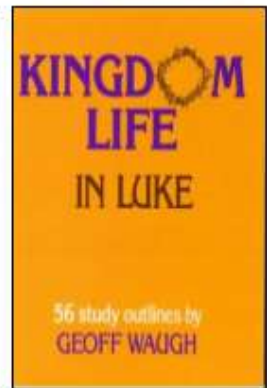
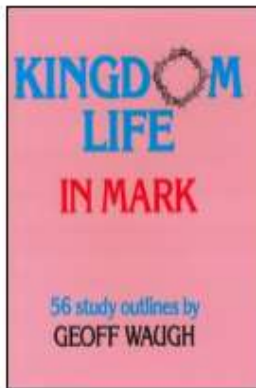
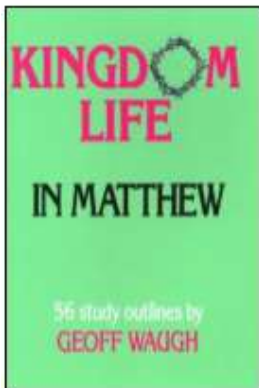
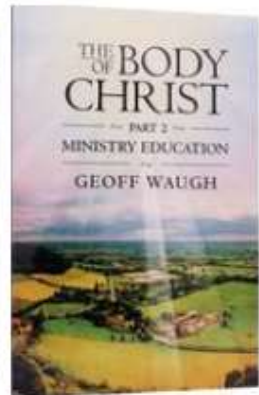
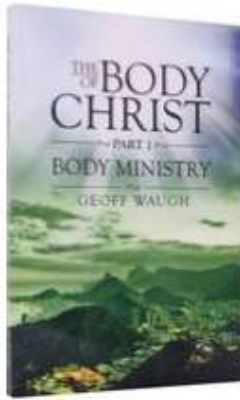
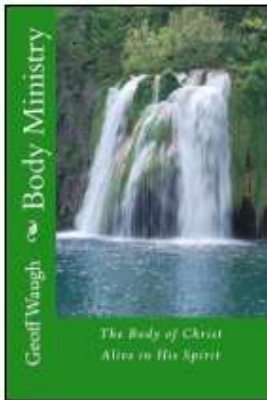
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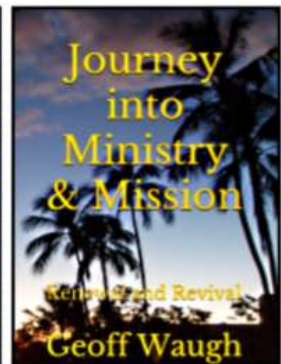
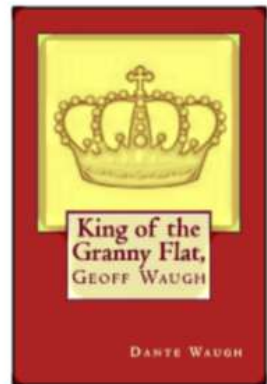
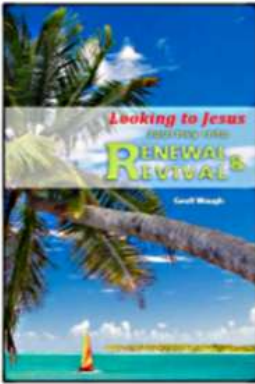
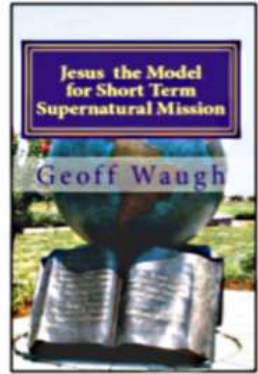
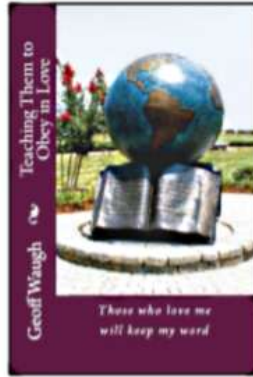
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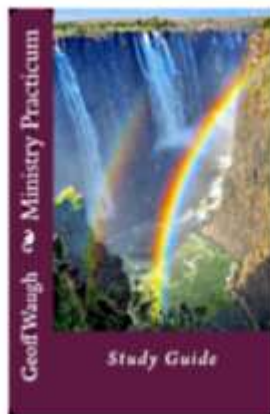
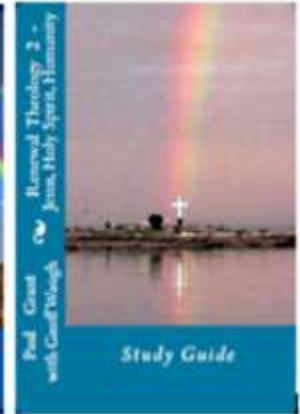
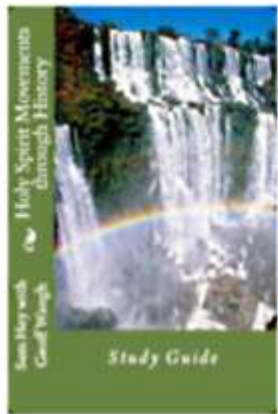
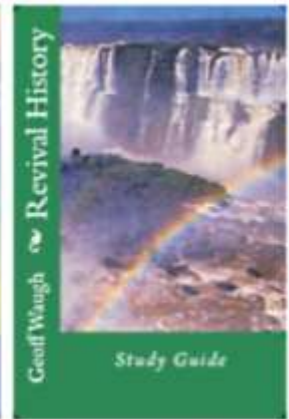
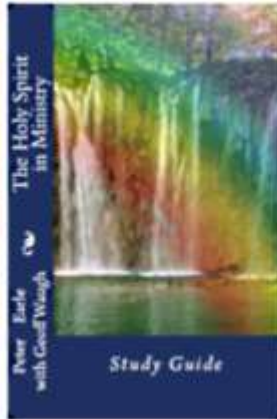
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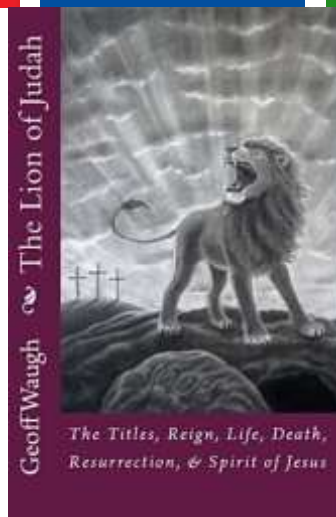
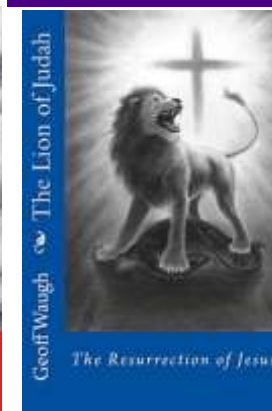
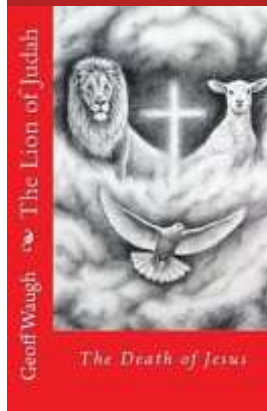
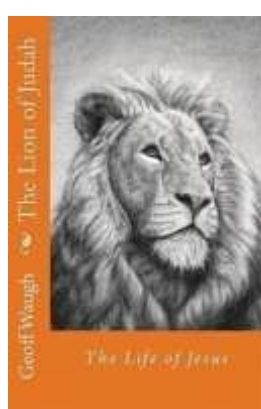
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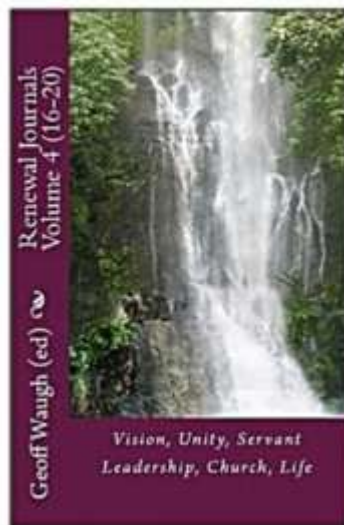
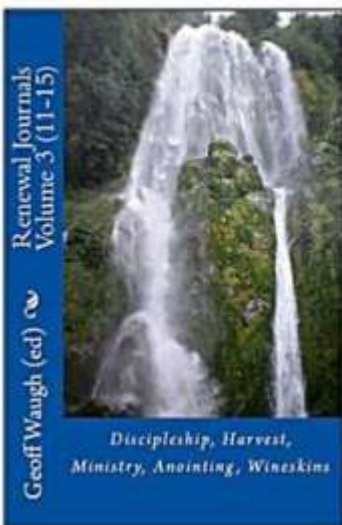
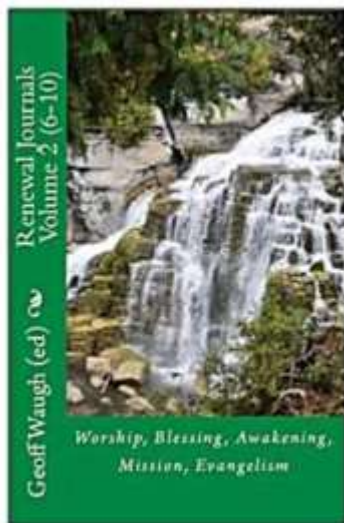
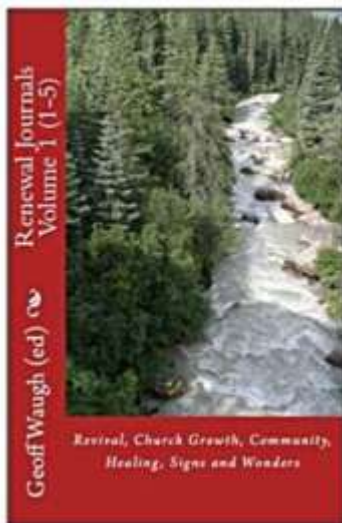
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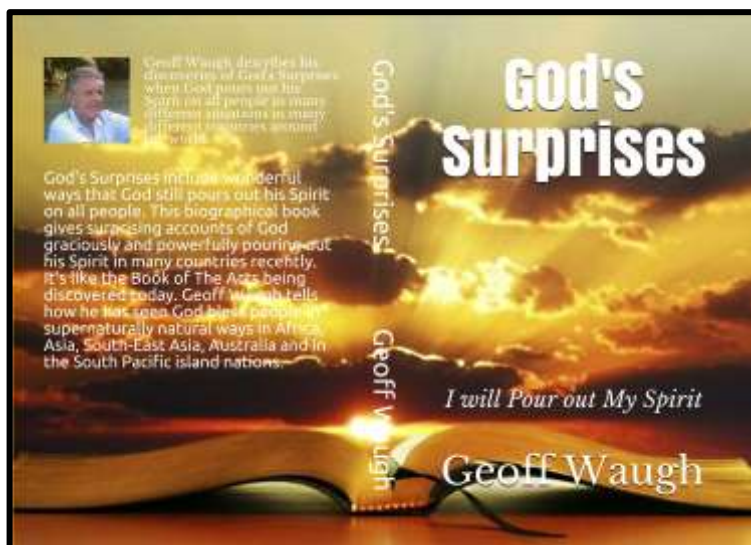
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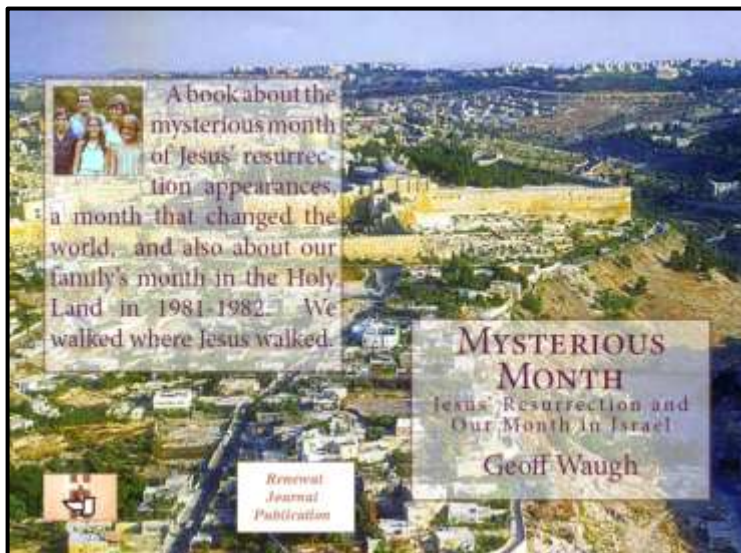
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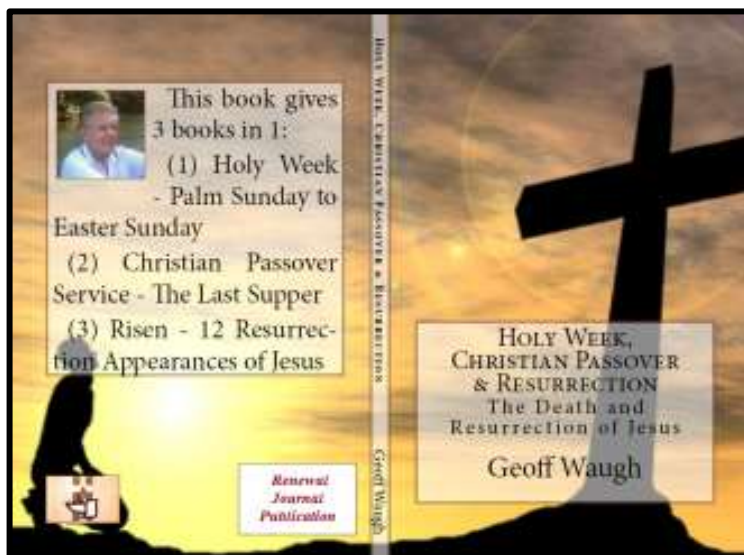
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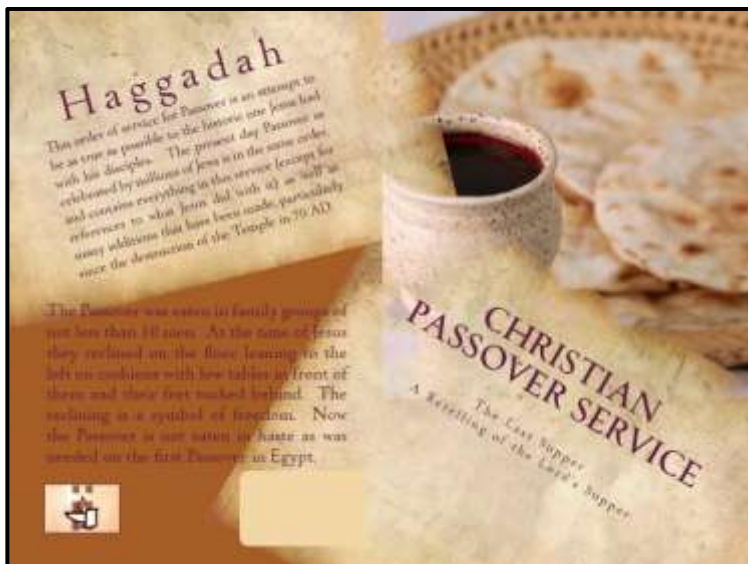
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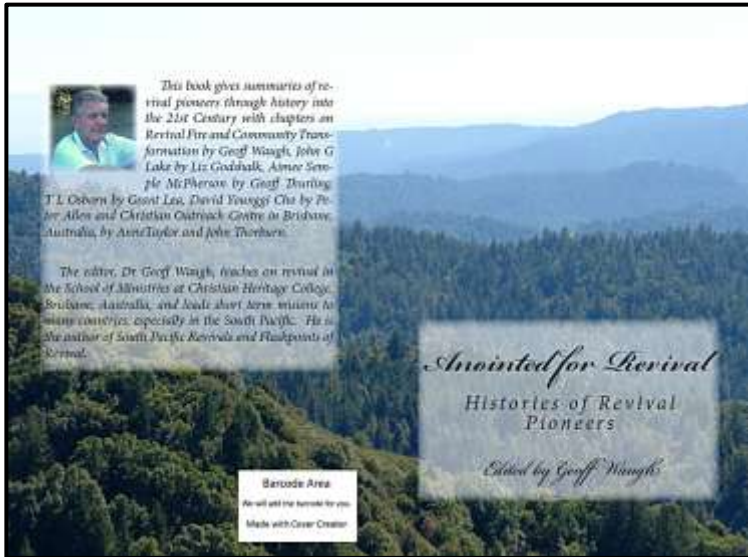
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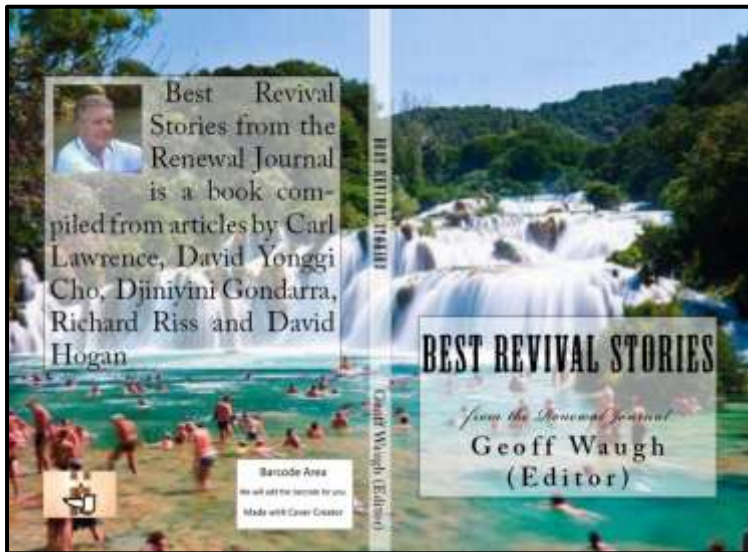
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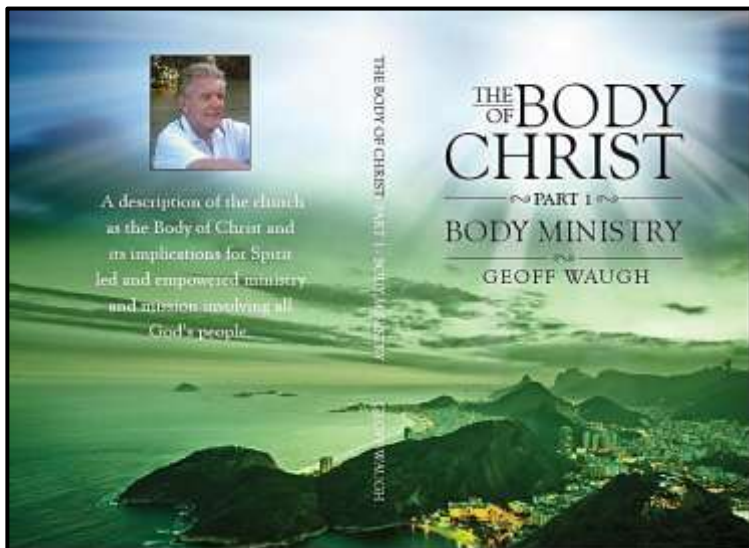
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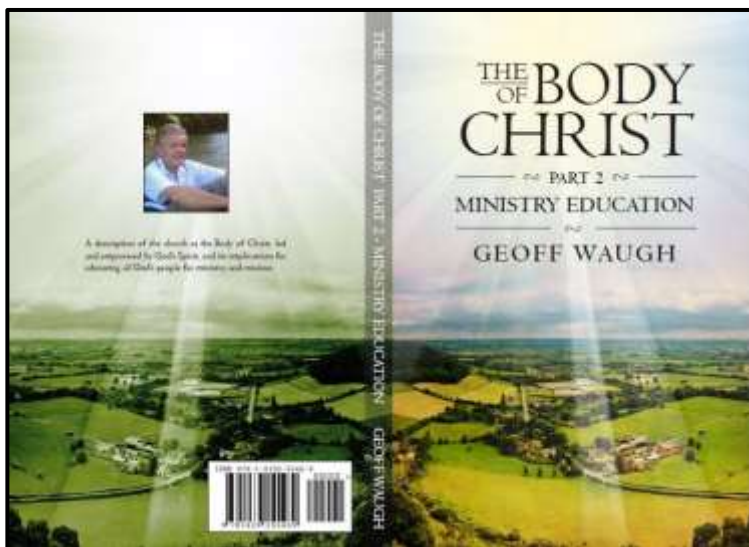
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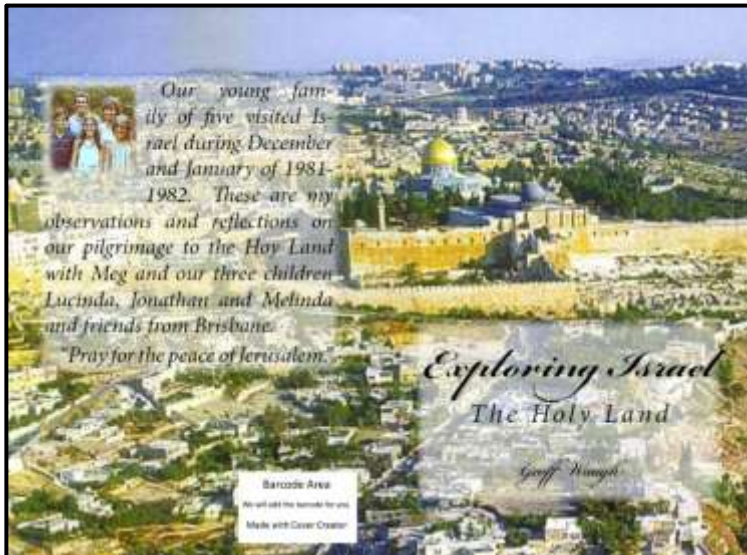
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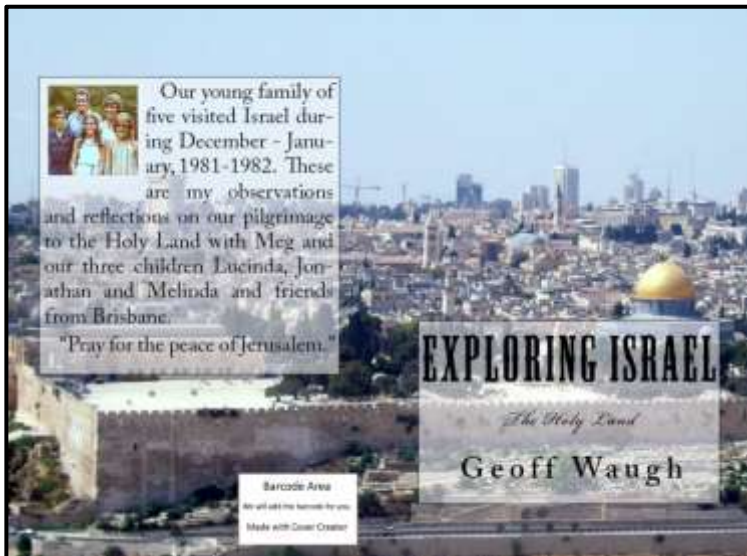


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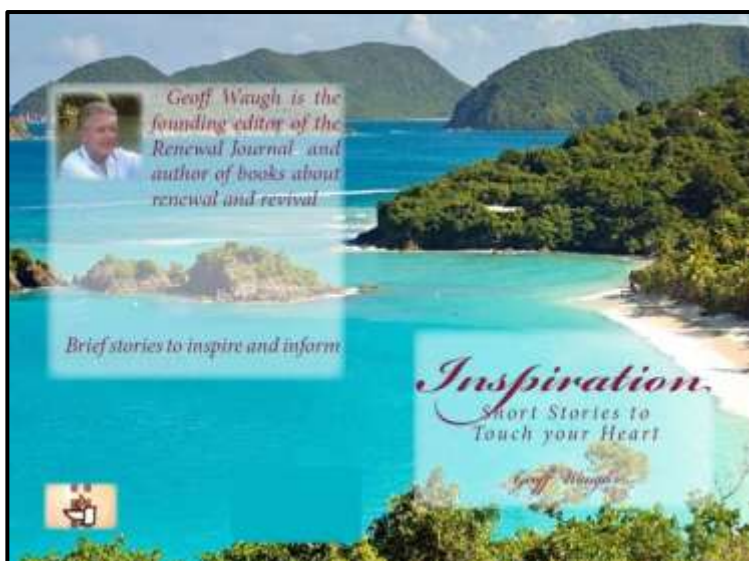
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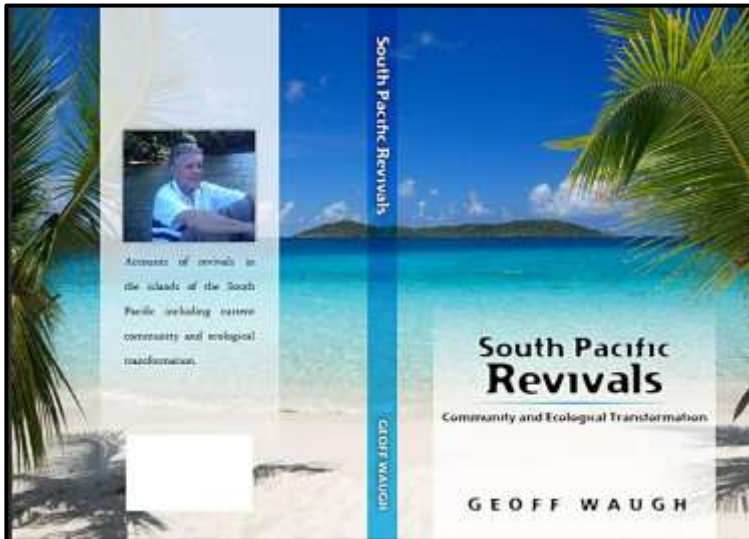
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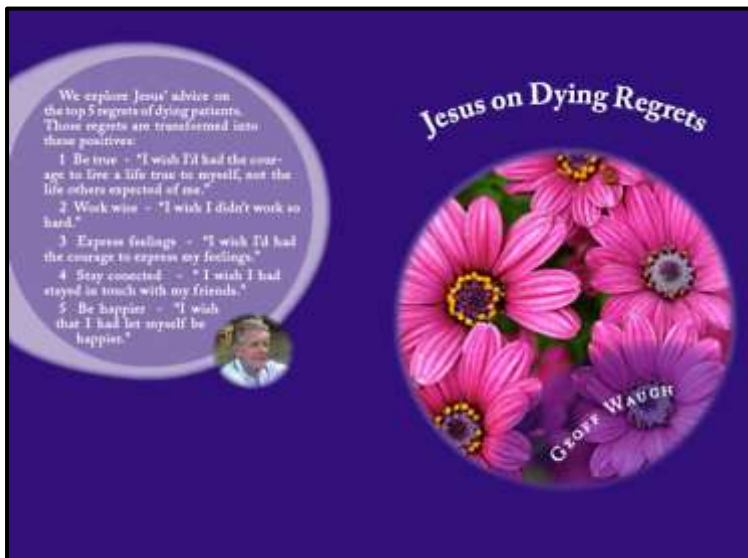
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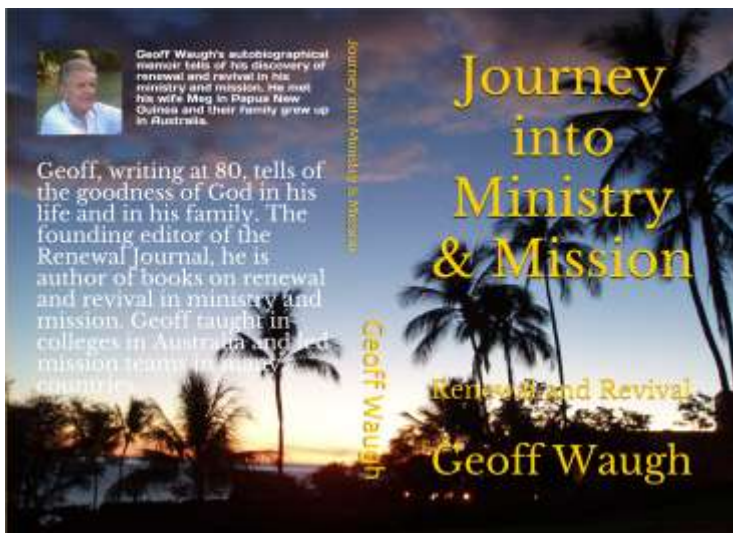
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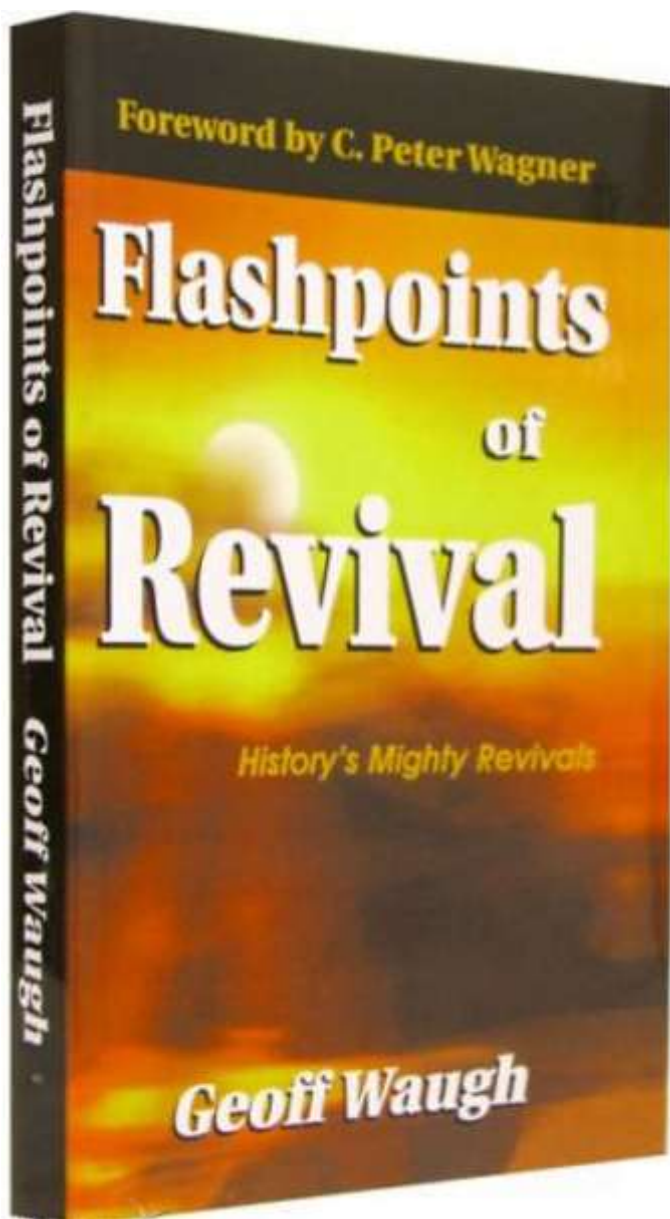
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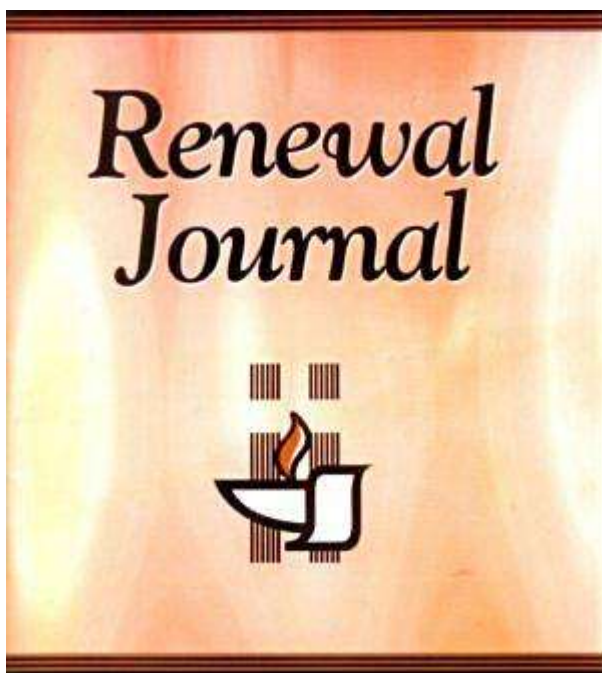
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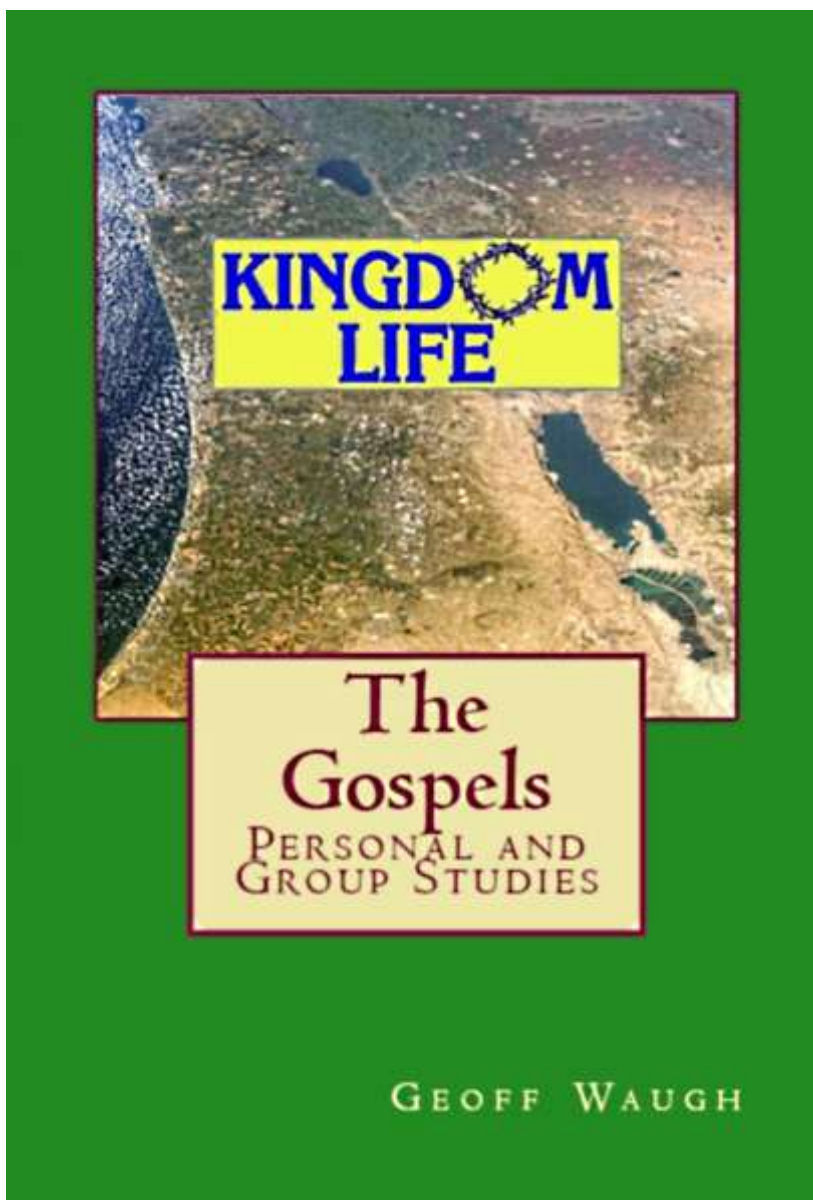
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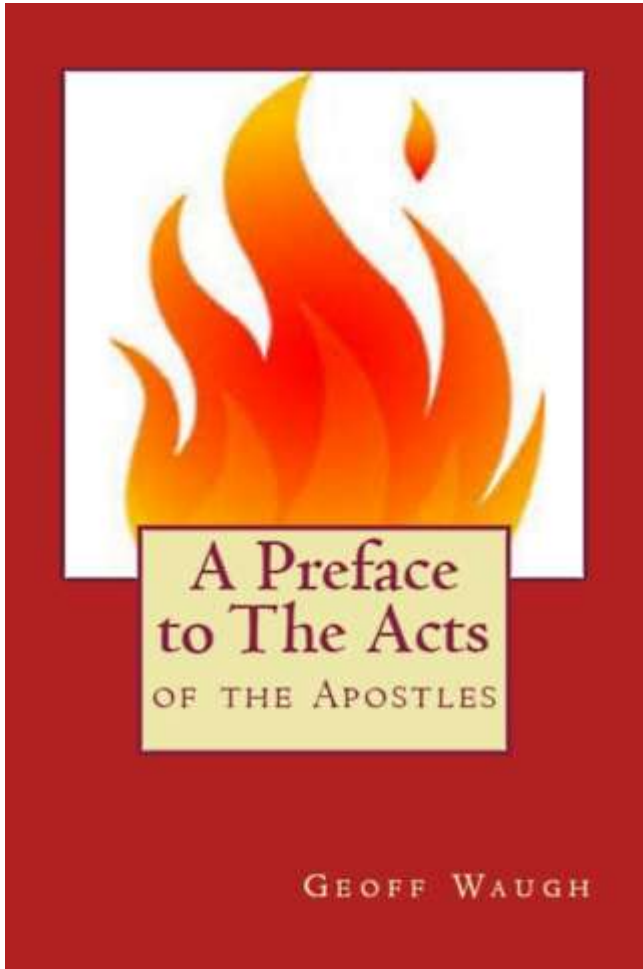
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