

Kingdom Come

A Wildwood Bible Study

Arranged over 11 weeks for individuals or groups

An 11 Week Study of

Kingdom Come

“From that time on, Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.’”

-Matthew 4: 17

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Week #1

Intro to Week #1

When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He announces that people are to “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 4:17). Jesus is not the only one to talk about the Kingdom . . . echoes of its existence permeate the Old Testament prophetic books. The idea of the Kingdom is clearly biblical, but what does it mean?

To say it plainly, the Kingdom is the reign of Christ over the earth. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Eventually, every knee will bow before Him, and even today, millions of people have given their lives to Him, including many of you! In this way, the Kingdom is both “now” and “not yet.” By this, we mean that right now, many are living with Jesus as their King, but Jesus is not yet ruling the planet from an earthly throne (which we will see in the future as prophesized in Revelation 20-21).

What does it mean, though, to live as members of Christ’s Kingdom? What is the Kingdom and what are its implications for our lives? As we begin our study this week, we will survey some of the key ideas necessary to understanding the Kingdom.

Day #1

1. Take a moment to pray and ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes to give you the understanding of His Word that only He can give. Believe that He will answer this prayer and will teach you things through His Word today.
2. Read Mark 1:14-18.
3. This event occurs early in Jesus' public ministry. In fact, both Mark and Matthew (Matthew 4:12-17) record it immediately after His baptism and His temptation in the desert. Why do you think Jesus used these particular words both to 'launch' His public ministry and as the basis for the message He preached for the remainder of His time on earth?
4. What is the good news that the people are to believe?
5. What do you think the Kingdom of Heaven is? What do you think Jesus means when He says that it is near?
6. The Kingdom of Heaven simply means "the reign of Christ over the earth." Do you see evidence of Christ's reign on the earth today?

7. Do you think the Kingdom of Heaven (Christ's rule over the earth) is already fully implemented?

8. There is a sense in which the Kingdom is "now" because Jesus has already introduced His values and standards to us, and those who know Him are already attempting to live them out on this earth and to follow Him as their Ruler and King. However, the Kingdom is also "not yet" because Christ has not yet implemented His rule over the earth completely. This will happen when Jesus returns to the earth and reigns physically over the whole earth for one thousand years, as recorded in Revelation 20-21. Though we see glimpses of the Kingdom of Heaven now, at that time the Kingdom will finally be fully revealed. In this study we will examine the implications of the Kingdom both now and in the future.

9. Before Jesus even told His audience to 'believe the good news,' He said they should repent. What do you think He meant when He told the people to repent?

Note: The word repentance, in a technical sense, means a "changing of mind." This changing of mind may be accompanied by emotional anguish or sorrow, but the emotion is not the repentance; repentance literally means to change one's mind. For the Christian, it means to turn from his or her own way of thinking/believing/acting to follow God's way of thinking/believing/acting.

10. Why do you think it is necessary for a person to repent? What does this tell you about the difference between the values/world view/morality that Jesus' audience was used to and those of the Kingdom of Heaven?

11. Is there a difference between your values/world view/morality and those of God's Kingdom? What are the differences?

12. What would it mean for you to repent? What would that look like in your life?

13. Spend some time talking to the Lord about areas of your life that are not aligned with 'Kingdom values.' Tell the Lord you want to turn from your 'natural' ways, and ask Him to change you.

Day #2

1. Before you begin, take some time to ask the Lord to teach you His truths through His Word today.
2. Read Matthew 4:18-22.
3. Soon after Jesus announces that the Kingdom of Heaven is near, He tells Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John all to follow Him, and they all do so immediately! How does He have the authority to tell people to repent and to follow Him? How can we trust that Jesus is the legitimate King of the Kingdom He is talking about?
4. Read Matthew 1:17.
5. Verse seventeen is a summary of the lineage of Christ that was recorded in the previous sixteen verses. Why do you think the ancestry of Christ is important?
6. Why did Matthew find it significant to include Abraham and David in this summary?

Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, 17:3-8)

David (II Samuel 7:16, Isaiah 9:6-7)

7. Do you believe that Jesus is the rightful King of the Kingdom? If so, are you really following the King? Are there any areas in your life in which you need to repent and begin following Jesus? What would that look like for you? If you don't believe Jesus is the rightful heir to God's throne, why not? What is preventing you from believing that Jesus Christ is the King of God's Kingdom?

8. The third item in verse seventeen's summary is the Babylonian exile. This was a time when God's people continued to rebel and to sin against the Lord, in spite of the many warnings He gave them and the many chances He gave them to repent. He allowed them to be conquered by the nation of Babylon, and many of them were taken into exile, though a remnant of God's people remained in Israel (II Chronicles 36:15-21).
9. Read Lamentations 3:13-18.
10. What do you think the people of God were tempted to believe about God's promises during this time?

11. Have there been times in your life when you have felt that God's promises could not or would not come true in your life?

12. Why do you think it is significant for Matthew to remind his readers of this part of Israel's history? What did Jesus' birth, even after the time of national exile and despair, show about God's faithfulness to His people?

13. Read Psalm 77.

Day #3

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Luke 17:20-21
3. In this passage, we find the Pharisees questioning Jesus about when the Kingdom of God would come. Both Christ and John the Baptist had been declaring that the Kingdom is “near”, and Jesus had taught His disciples to pray for the coming of it, so the Pharisees asked Jesus when it would come. What do you think were their expectations about the Kingdom that the Messiah would rule over?
4. Christ’s response to the Pharisees’ shows that their ideas about the Messiah’s Kingdom were off the mark. The expectations of the Jewish leadership was for a visible kingdom set up at a certain time in a certain place, where the Jewish nation would be set above all nations. What things does Christ tell them about His Kingdom?
5. The final words of Luke 17:21 are the translation of the Greek word *entos*, which means “within you”. This can either imply “within the midst of you” or “within your soul”. In what ways might the first interpretation be fitting? In what ways is the latter true?

6. Read Matthew 16:13-20.

7. In this passage we find Jesus asking his disciples who people thought He was.
 - a. What were some of their answers?

 - b. Who did Peter declare Jesus to be?

 - c. How did Peter come to know this?

8. Still today there are many opinions about who Christ was.
 - a. In our generation, what are some of the answers we might hear when asking who Jesus was?

 - b. Who do you say He is?

 - c. How did you come to understand this?

9. In this passage, we also find Christ making a connection between His Kingdom and His Church. First, Christ says that the “gates of Hades/Hell” shall not conquer it. What do you think the “gates of Hell” represent? What does that say about the Church?

10. Christ also declares that He will give to His church “the keys of the Kingdom”, which have a connection to things bound/loosed on earth. What do you think this means?

[Hint: the verbs for “will be bound/loosed” are in the past perfect passive in Greek. That is, it shows a present state of affairs (from the writer’s perspective), based upon an action in past time. Some translate this “will have been bound/loosed” to better express this in English. Also, bind/loose in the common speech of the Jews at that time signified to

prohibit and permit; to teach or declare a thing to be unlawful was to *bind*; to be lawful, was to *loose*.”]

11. Read Matthew 11:11.

12. Here Christ declares John the Baptist to be the greatest among those “born of women”, yet Christ also says that the least in His Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist. What advantages do members of Christ’s Kingdom have over all those who came before Jesus?

13. How are you, today, experiencing these advantages? In what ways might you more fully partake in these advantages?

Day #4

1. Pray and ask God to “give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,” (Ephesians 1:17), so that you might understand His Kingdom better as a result of today’s study.
2. Read Matthew 5:20.
3. How righteous must we be to enter Christ’s kingdom?
4. Read Matthew 19:16-30.
5. According to this passage, is it possible for us to enter the kingdom on our own? Who can enter the kingdom?
6. Read John 3:1-21.
7. What must we do to enter the kingdom of God? What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?
8. According to verse 16-18, how do we receive eternal life?
9. Have you experienced the rebirth necessary to enter the kingdom of God?
10. If so, what does this rebirth do for your identity? (See John 3:18.)
11. Read Matthew 18:1-4.
12. In what sense does Jesus desire us to become childlike?

13. Jesus desires for us to be dependent creatures, filled with faith in Him and His promises. Faith can be defined as acting based on what we know to be true, not on what we may feel to be true. Pray that Christ would fill you with childlike faith in Him and his promises.

Day #5

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 22:15-22.
3. In the scene you just read, Jesus is approached by two groups of people, the Herodians and the Pharisees. These two groups hated each other. The Herodians followed the lead of Herod the Great and wanted to syncretize their Jewish Culture into a new way of life that looked similar to their Roman invaders. The Pharisees were purists—they wanted to keep their Jewish culture pure and hated the influx of anything Roman into their culture. Though these two groups had many points of disagreement, they did agree on one thing: they did not like Jesus. Therefore, these two groups joined forces to try to trick Jesus into saying something that would get Him in trouble. What was the question these two groups asked Jesus in these verses?
4. Cultural Background: If Jesus were to answer and say that it was alright to pay taxes to Caesar, the Jewish people (including the Pharisees) would have labeled Him a traitor to Israel. If Jesus were to answer and say that they should not pay taxes, then the Herodians and ruling authorities would have labeled Him a traitor to Rome. Either way, it appeared He was trapped. How did Jesus answer their question?
5. In Jesus’ answer, He asserts two spheres of authority under which a human lives. What are those two spheres that Jesus mentions?

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #2

Intro to Week #2

In Jesus' teaching throughout His earthly ministry, He talked often about the Kingdom. However, as He talked about the Kingdom, He did so in somewhat of a cryptic form. Jesus told dozens of parables that began with the phrase, "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." These parables are stories with a central moral that were told with the intent of making known the Kingdom of God to those who "had ears to hear." As you read these parables this week, may God open your spiritual ears to hear these "secrets" of the Kingdom!

Day #1

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 13:10-17; 34-35.
3. Quickly scan the larger immediate context of the verses you just read. What happens before and after this explanation of why Jesus is teaching in parables? (See Matthew 13:1-10 and 13:18-23.)
4. Given this context, now look at Matthew 13:10-17 and 34-35 again. Why do you think Jesus chooses to teach and talk about the Kingdom in parables?
5. According to this passage, it is people’s calloused hearts (13:15) that keep people from understanding the truth Christ was revealing in the parables. What do you think Jesus meant when He said that their hearts were calloused? Have you ever had a time when your heart was calloused toward the things of God?

6. Throughout these verses, Jesus talks about the truths of the Kingdom that He is revealing via parables as “secrets.” Jesus has chosen to reveal this truth to His people . . . a set of truths so valuable that many who lived before the time of Christ longed to hear it (13:17), and truth that promises to bless those who embrace it (13:16). For the remainder of this week, we will be looking at many of the parables that reveal this blessed truth that people long for. Take just a moment to write out a prayer of expectation and appreciation to God who chooses to reveal to us this important message.

Day #2

1. Before you begin, pray and ask God's Holy Spirit to help you understand His word as you read it.
2. Read Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46.
3. From reading verses 31-32, what is apparent about a mustard seed?
4. Since the kingdom of heaven is like it, what are some observations we can assume about the Kingdom?
5. How have you personally observed the realization of this parable?
6. From verse 33, when yeast enters a batch of dough, it physically changes the composition of the dough causing it to rise and expand. Given this, what characteristics can we ascribe to the kingdom of heaven?

11. What might we infer about how some people encounter the kingdom of heaven?

Day #3

1. Pray that God would speak to you through His word today and that your ears would be open to what He has to say.
2. Read Matthew 13:1-9.
3. What are the four places where the seed is sown, and what is the result of each?
4. It seems that this parable is used by Jesus to describe various types of people, and how they respond to the spiritual truth that is “sown” in their lives. Take a moment and consider each of the four types of soils described by Jesus as a metaphor of the condition of people’s hearts today. What would be modern day equivalents (spiritually speaking) to the four types of soil in the parable? Write them below.
5. Read Matthew 13:18-23.
6. In these verses (13:18-23), Jesus explains the meaning of the parable of the sower. Review your answers to question #4 after reading Jesus’ explanation. If you have gained any insight from His explanation, revise your answers below.

7. Which situation most closely relates to how you are living right now? To say it another way, how are you receiving the spiritual seeds of God's Word in your life right now? Are you open to God, being choked out by the concerns of the world, running from Him . . . ?

Day #4

1. Remember that only God can allow you to understand His great truths; you can't do it on your own. Confess that to Him and ask Him to enlighten His Word for you today.
2. Read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, and 47-52.

Note: "Son of Man" is Jesus' most common title for Himself, used 81 times in the Gospels and never used by anyone but Jesus. In Daniel 7:13-14 the Son of Man is pictured as a heavenly figure who in the end times is entrusted by God with authority, glory and sovereign power, one whose kingdom will never be destroyed (NIV study notes).

3. What do both the parable of the wheat and weeds and the parable of the net tell us about what will happen at the end of the age? Who will be affected?
4. Do you think this judgment is fair? Why or why not?
5. What do you think determines if someone is wheat or a weed, a good fish or a bad fish?

10. Who do you know that is currently a 'weed,' but that someday may be 'wheat'? Take a moment and thank the Lord for His patience, and ask Him to show Himself to the friend you just thought of so that he or she might come to repentance.

11. What do you think the old and new treasures referred to in verse 52 are?

Old:

New:

12. Do you treat God's truths like they are a valuable treasure? What would that look like in your life?

Day #5

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 20:1-16
3. In this parable, a landowner hires day laborers from the marketplace to come and work in his vineyard. Some are hired early, at the beginning of the work-day, and some are hired late, just before the work-day ended. At the end of the day, all are given the same pay. Those hired early are indignant; they felt they deserved more than those hired to work only one hour. They had labored all day, and through the heat of the sun. What are your feelings as you consider their position? Do you think they deserved more? Why or why not?
4. If it seems to us that those who were hired first had a right to be upset, upon what idea is that conviction based? Why do they deserve more?
5. What does the landowner’s behavior tell us about his basis for paying those he chooses? Is it based on how much they work? Is it based on when they were chosen? Is it based on how much they endured?

Verses six and seven seem to indicate that work was hard to come by, and the men were eager to be chosen to work, even without a pre-arranged pay amount. This seems reminiscent of Depression era America, as men were desperate for any job to feed their

11. This verse also reveals something about the nature of envy: it is an “evil eye” (verse 15, NKJ) that is displeased to see others blessed. Do you ever find yourself envious of someone that God has “unfairly” blessed? Since “every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jas 1:17), we know that it was God’s pleasure to bless them. As believers with God’s Spirit within us, what would He have us feel towards them in accordance with our new nature?

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #3

Intro to Week #3

One image that is consistent concerning the Kingdom is that in the Kingdom, needs are met by the compassionate King. Jesus is one who came to bind up the wounds of the hurting, and bring food to the hungry! This week, we will look at the compassionate King of the Kingdom as we see the heart of the One whom we serve.

Day #1

1. Pray that the Holy Spirit would guide your study of God's Word today and that Jesus would reveal Himself to you, causing you to know Him more.
2. Read Matthew 4:23-25.
3. What are the four verbs in verse 23? What does this say about Jesus (and His relationship with people)?
4. Jesus' fame spread and great crowds followed Him everywhere He went. In your life, what has Christ done for you that would cause you to also follow Him? Take a moment and write down your thoughts below after reflecting upon your life.
5. Read Mark 1:29-34 and Luke 4:38-44.
6. How does Christ display His power in these passages? What is your response to this?
7. Why do you think Jesus spent much of His ministry healing people and rebuking demons?

Day #2

1. Ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes so that He can teach you what He wants you to learn and apply today.
2. Read Matthew 8:14-17.
3. What does this passage say about why Jesus showed compassion on the people?

4. Note: The quotation in Matthew 8:17 is from Isaiah 53:4. That section of the book of Isaiah is talking about what the Israelites could expect as characteristics of the Messiah, or Anointed One, whom God had promised to send to be their Savior and Deliverer.
5. Read Hebrews 1:1-3.
6. What does Hebrews 1:3 tell us about the identity of Jesus (in relation to God the Father)?

7. With this truth in mind, what does that tell you about God the Father's concern for our lives (given what we have seen about Jesus' concern for our lives)?

8. The following verses are just a few that tell us that our God is a compassionate God:

Psalm 103:8-14

II Corinthians 1:3-4

14. Why is a shepherd important? What is his role with the sheep?
15. Read John 10:14-18 and 27-30.
16. What does it mean to you that Jesus is the Good Shepherd? Take a moment and list out the characteristics of Jesus the Good Shepherd that are significant to you.
17. What do you think it looks like when a sheep follows a shepherd?
18. What would it look like for you to really follow your Good Shepherd?

Day #3

1. Before reading the passage, ask God to give you wisdom in this study. Believe that He will give it to you! “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5
2. Read Luke 4:14-30.
3. Imagine the scene described beginning in verse sixteen. Jesus arrives at the synagogue, unrolls a scroll of scripture and begins reading from Isaiah, chapter 61. After He finishes, He tells them that “This Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Later we find out that those that heard Him were filled with wrath. Why do you think they were so angry?
4. Read verses 18-19 again. Below, rewrite in your own words what Jesus has been anointed to do.
5. Think of someone you know who has not placed their faith in Jesus Christ. What do you think they think of when they think of Jesus? Why might this passage surprise them?
6. What can we learn about Jesus from this passage?

7. According to Jesus, the church is the Body of Christ. We are His followers and get to participate in His purposes. Knowing that a part of the purpose of Jesus in the world is what is described in verses 18-19, consider how Jesus might want to show compassion to others through you in your world today. Pray about this, then write down any thoughts that come into your mind about how you could show compassion to others.

Day #4

1. Take a moment to pray before beginning your study of God's Word today.
2. Read Matthew 9:1-8 and 18-34.
3. List below the healings you see Jesus do in these passages, then make any observations that stand out to you about each one.

4. Why do you think Jesus performed each of these miracles?

5. When we are suffering it is often helpful to think of Christ's attitude of care, concern, and compassion on those who were hurting. This attitude has not changed. Even though Christ is not walking the earth and healing people with the touch of His hand, He is still right with us, exhibiting His compassion toward us. Do you believe this (not just intellectually)?

6. What does it mean for you to realize that Jesus feels compassion for you? Write out below a prayer to God, thanking Him for the compassion He has towards you in the midst of your struggle in this life.

Week #4

Intro to Week #4

When Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He did not retire from caring for His people. No, the King of Compassion continued to care for His people through the agency of His people, the Body of Christ on this earth. The Early Church ministered to people in much the same way that Jesus did while He was on the earth. As you read and study these verses this week, consider how God might be prompting YOU (as Kingdom citizens) to be used of God to minister to the needs of a hurting world.

Day #1

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”

Last week we saw the compassion of Christ’s Kingdom lived out by Jesus during His time on earth. In day five, we observed a turning point: Christ begins to display His compassion through others, namely His disciples. This week we see how this pattern of Christ’s compassion being lived out through His followers continues after Jesus’ ascension.

2. Read Acts 3:1-10
3. What do we learn about the lame man in verse two?
4. How might his situation be representative of the spiritual position of all before they hear the name of Christ?
5. What do Peter and John do when they come across the lame man? (Look specifically at their action in 3:4.)
6. Is this our first reaction to seeing the needy and the desperate (look at them and attempt to meet their need), or do we tend to look away? Perhaps this is one way that we may be attentive to God’s compassionate Spirit within us—to look unflinchingly at the needy and listen for His leading.

Day #2

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Acts 6:1-7.
3. This passage records some of the issues that the early church in Jerusalem faced as more people began to embrace Jesus as Savior. What were the disciples facing according to this passage?
4. According to 6:2, in solving this issue, the apostles did not want to lose focus on what priority?
5. Though the apostles themselves would not be the ones to do the work, taking care of the needs of the widows was a significant enough task to appoint leaders to make sure the widows were being taken care of. What kinds of people were chosen to administer this task?
6. Though the primary task of the church was helping to meet people’s spiritual needs, the physical needs of the people were not to be neglected as well, and the leadership

structure of the early church shifted early on to accommodate for the increasing demands. In what ways do you see the leadership in your church working to make sure the needs of the less fortunate are taken care of in your community?

7. In Acts 6, two kinds of leaders are identified: those who administer the teaching of the word and prayer, and those tasked with taking care of physical needs. Both sets of leaders are necessary, and both sets of leaders are deeply spiritual and mature people. Think for a moment about the life God has called you to live. Do you feel as though God has equipped you more for teaching types of ministry or service types of ministry? Why do you feel that way? (If you are not sure, try asking a few of your friends this week what they think.)

Day #3

1. Take a moment and pray before you begin your study of God's Word today.
2. Read Galatians 2:1-10.
3. What is Paul recounting in this passage?
4. The momentous decision for the early church to get behind the work God was doing through Paul and others to the Gentiles was accompanied by what one command?
5. Judging from Paul's response in verse 10, was helping the poor a priority to the Christians of the early church?
6. Would you say Christians in the United States place a high priority on helping the poor and needy? What about in the rest of the world?
7. Brainstorm a few ways in which the church you are a part of might reach out to meet the needs of the less fortunate in your community.

Day #4

1. Pray that God would open your heart and your mind to understand His word and that through it you would become more like Jesus.
2. Read James 1:16-2:26.
3. How does James describe pure and undefiled religion? How does he describe worthless religion?
4. In what ways do you need to trust God to live a life defined by pure and undefiled religion?
5. What seems to be the relationship between faith and works, as James describes it in 2:14-26? As a person of faith in Christ, how should your life look different?
6. Read James 2:26 again. It seems that faith without works, like the body without the spirit, is merely a container for religion. The body is dead if the spirit no longer dwells within it. Faith is dead if there are no works that proclaim faith. Pray that the Lord will increase your faith in Him and reveal to you the works that He has prepared beforehand for you to do that you might live out your faith by walking in them. Ask for sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

7. Read Matthew 25:31-46.
8. Who do the sheep and the goats represent? In what ways were their lives different?
9. Sum up the message that Jesus is proclaiming in this passage in one or two sentences.
10. What changes do you need to make in your life to become more like the sheep that Jesus is describing?

Day #5

1. Take a moment to ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes and let you learn from His Word today.
2. Read Philemon 1-25.
3. List out the things you see in this letter about the following people:

Philemon

Onesimus
4. Reread verses 8 to 10.
5. What is it that Philemon (and the other recipients of Paul's letter) 'ought to do'?
6. Paul seems to imply that it's a given that Philemon should respond this way, that it's definitely the right thing to do. Why is it the right thing to do?
7. Paul says, though, that he doesn't want to order Philemon to do what he ought to do, but he wants to appeal to him on the basis of love. What do you think he means by this? How do you think love is related to this situation?

11. Ask the Lord how He wants to use you to show His compassion to the person He just brought to your mind.

Week #5

Intro to Weeks #5-9

Jesus did more than just heal people while He was on the earth. Jesus also taught many great truths that helped bring clarity to the way God wants us to live, and who God has called us to be. In this way, Jesus clarified for His people the “Kingdom Ethic.” Over the next few weeks, we will unpack a key sermon that Jesus taught . . . the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7. Jesus says that the Kingdom agenda is different from the agenda of the world. As we look at this magnificent sermon over the next few weeks, may we see our values and ethic come inline with the King of our Kingdom!

Day #1:

As you begin your study of the Word this week, take a moment to stop and pray. Ask God to guide you in your study of His Word.

1. Read Matthew 5:1-12
2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section.
(NOTE: Making an outline is a wonderful way to immerse yourself in Scripture. It forces you to think through the content and organization of the text. In addition, it becomes a valuable resource for later review. If you have never done this before, you may find this hard to do the first time around. However, it will become easier over time. Persevere! You’ll be glad you did.)
3. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery” from this passage and then write those questions in the space below. Pray that God would lead you to answers to these questions as you study this passage this week.
4. What observations do you have of this passage? To say it another way, what stands out to you most about what you read for this week?

Day #2

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 5:1-7:29.
3. This passage records the famous “Sermon on the Mount” (so named for the fact that Jesus was teaching this message on the side of a mountain). Based on your observations yesterday and today, what do you think this sermon is basically about? What title would you give to this sermon? What are its “big ideas”?
4. According to Matthew 5:1-2 and 7:28-29, who are the listeners to this sermon?
5. In what ways do you think Jesus taught “with authority” in this sermon (as those who first heard the sermon perceived.)?

Day #3

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read Matthew Matthew 5:1-12, focusing on verses 3-5.
3. The Beatitudes give us a glimpse of Kingdom Life—what our lives as Christians will look like in eternity when we are united with Christ in heaven. However, it's clear there will be glimpses of the appearance of the Kingdom. For example, Christ's ministry of healing in Matthew 4:23 illustrates there will be no sickness in the Kingdom, ultimately. Christ performed a miracle and we got a glimpse of the Kingdom of Heaven. Looking at verses 5:3-5, we note the continued use of the word, "blessed" which simply means, "happy, fortunate, or blissful". How have you experienced blessing in your life? What forms did it take? Was it always receiving something or did it involve not receiving something? How did this reveal something of the Kingdom to you?
4. Verse 3 contains the phrase "poor in spirit". What do you think is meant by the phrase "poor in spirit"? In what way is it a good thing for the Christian to be poor in spirit?

8. How might this observation about the Kingdom in question #3 help us understand why some people are not realizing the promises of the Beatitudes? (E.g. the gentle are not inheriting the earth, the merciful aren't all receiving mercy, etc.)

Day #4

1. Pray and ask the Lord to soften your heart before Him today. Ask Him to make you teachable, that you would hear what He desires for you, and that you would respond in obedience to what He asks you to do. Pray that God would change you and make you more like Christ.
2. Read Matthew 5:6-8.
3. In accordance with the first view mentioned in question 7 of day 1 of this week, what character values does God seek from us in these verses? How will He bless us for living out each of these statements?

4. How do you currently hunger and thirst for righteousness? How do you show mercy? And how are you pure in heart? Pray and ask God to show you how he might want to change you in areas where you don't desire righteousness, show mercy or act with a pure heart. Record some ideas of things that might need to change here. Try and think of specific situations where you are struggling and God is calling you to live out these verses in obedience.

5. Read Micah 6:6-8.
6. These verses exemplify what God desires from us, and what is not as important to Him. The physical act of making a sacrifice is not what pleases Him, but He is primarily concerned with obedience that extends out into daily life. According to this passage, what are the specific things that He most desires from us?

7. Spend some time praying that God would change your heart and your desire to live in obedience to Him. Ask Him to show you how and where you can do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. Pray that He would cause you to hunger and thirst for righteousness, show mercy to others, and act with a pure heart. You can record your prayers and thoughts here if you desire to do so.

8. As you finish today's study, meditate on 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24:
"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

Day #5

1. Take a moment to pray before you begin your study of God's Word today.
2. Read Matthew 5:1-7:29.
3. Rewrite Matthew 5:9-12 in language we might use today.

4. Do you consider yourself a peacemaker? Why or why not?

5. Have you ever been given a hard time because you chose to live a righteous life or be associated with Christ? Is it comforting to know blessing is the result? Is it comforting to know you are in good company with other believers who were persecuted before you?

6. Though most Americans have never been beaten for their faith or fired for their belief in Jesus Christ, many today in America still face some lesser forms of persecution. What ways have you seen Christians (including yourself) persecuted today for their/your faith in Christ?

7. Though we experience religious freedom in the United States, persecution of the church is more widespread today than at any point in human history. Take some time to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. (Check out www.persecution.com to aid you in your time of prayer.)

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

6. At the beginning of Jesus' sermon He shatters what His listeners picture as righteousness. The people had long looked to the Scribes and Pharisees as spiritual leaders. Christ dismantles that idea as He puts forth a new standard of righteousness as He focuses below the outward appearance and on the heart. As you work through this week's study, keep in mind Christ is showing all people their inability to be perfect before a holy God, and therefore their need for a Savior. As we know from the rest of the New Testament, Jesus' death on the cross made full payment for all our sins (including those enumerated by Jesus in this week's verses), so that we all could be forgiven and enter the Kingdom. As you read these verses this week, pray and trust that God will reveal to you His truth that will point you toward His grace.

Day #2

1. Spend some time in prayer before beginning your study of God's Word.
2. Read Matthew 5:17-20, 48.
3. In 5:20, Jesus indicates that righteousness is necessary for one to enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Take a moment below and write out what you think righteousness means.

4. Jesus seems to indicate, also, that the kind of righteousness that is necessary to enter into the Kingdom of heaven is greater than the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Though the Pharisees are portrayed in a very bad light throughout the New Testament (because of their hypocrisy), the original audience to the Sermon on the Mount would have regarded the Scribes and the Pharisees as the most religious/devout people of their day. Who would you say is a current day set of people who most people would consider to be “holy” and “devout”?

5. What Jesus is saying is that if your righteousness does not exceed the most religious of your day, you have no chance of entering the Kingdom of heaven. This sounds like there is not much hope for any of us to enter the Kingdom of heaven. However, in this passage, there is also One who has fulfilled all of what the Law and Prophets had to say. Who is that?

6. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. This passage indicates that there is One who was perfect and never sinned, Jesus Christ. According to this passage what benefit does the righteous life of Christ have for those who believe?

7. Have you ever stopped to contemplate the impossibility of the Christian life? The things God has called mankind to are impossible for us to fulfill 100% of the time, therefore, we are in great need. The great news, however, is that there is One who is perfect, who lived a perfect life and fulfilled all of the Law and prophecies of the Old Testament, who never sinned, and now has offered to give us His righteousness in exchange for our sin! Take just a moment to consider this gift, and then write a prayer of thanksgiving below, thanking God for His provision and declaring our need for this provision in order for us to live the life He desires us to live.

Day #3

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 5:21-30.
3. Yesterday we saw that Christ “did not come to abolish the Law and Prophets, but to fulfill.” Now Christ moves forward in His sermon to a series of references to Old Testament laws: murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love. Today we will be looking at the first two laws that Christ expounds upon: murder and adultery. What does Christ seem to be saying about the peoples’ understanding of these laws? What does Christ clarify about them?
4. In His teaching about murder, Jesus condemns not only the physical act of murder, but also the pride and hatred in the heart that leads to the physical act. In verse 23, Christ gives an example of a quarrel between brothers. What is the circumstance described in verse 23?

12. Now let us think through how we might choose to remove these situations from our lives, but before you begin, let us clarify something. In Jesus' teaching, we cannot deny that an eye or a hand is a useful and good thing, but for particular people, they are being used by the enemy as avenues for temptation. In the same way, we do not pretend that the mall or the internet or bridal magazines are *evil* things. We are not trying to set up a new law or create a long list of "forbidden" things. Let our guidance be found in Ephesians 5:15, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." Our purpose here is not to find out whether watching romantic comedies is wrong for all, but instead whether it is wise for one particular person.

With this in mind, think through your areas of vulnerability. How might you "cut off" these situations from your life?

Day #4

1. Pray and ask God to teach you from His Word today more fully what Kingdom life is like. Pray that you would read and understand and that the Holy Spirit would encourage you with truth and give you passion to live the way Jesus asks us to.
2. Read Matthew 5:31-37.
3. What are the two main ideas of this section? With each situation, how is what Jesus said different from how the people have heard it said?
4. Read Mark 10:2-12. What was the Lord's original intent for marriage? What did Moses allow and for what reason? In his authority, what does Jesus proclaim?
5. What are your initial impressions on Jesus' statements about oaths? Is this a cultural issue? Some examples in our own culture that this passage would apply to might be: crossing your fingers as a child behind your back when you don't mean what you say, pinky swearing, swearing on your mother's grave, etc. These examples are childish pranks. What other examples can you think of that might be more relevant to your adult life? What is the central point of this passage?
6. At the time, there was a system of importance of oaths. If people really meant what they said, they would make a certain oath, but if they didn't really mean what they

were saying, they would make a different oath. The rabbis decided which oaths were binding and which weren't. It seems that Jesus isn't necessarily saying that all oaths are wrong (i.e. to swear on the Bible in court isn't necessarily sin), but that integrity is important. Being a person of character means being true to your word. Is this something you struggle with? In what ways? Pray that God would change you to become a person of greater integrity with your words.

7. Read verse 36 again. One suggestion is that this verse is exemplifying God's sovereignty and our lack of control over even our own aging process. What other meanings might this verse have?

Day #5

1. Pray and ask God to “give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him,” (Ephesians 1:17), so that you might understand His kingdom better as a result of today’s study.
2. Read Matthew 5:38-42
3. According to Jesus, how should we repay those who harm us?

4. Read verse 40. The cloak described in here was a particular outer article of clothing that the person had a right to retain. What material possessions in your life do you feel you have “rights” to? How do you react when someone asks to borrow them?

5. Read Matthew 5:43-47.
6. When Jesus says to turn the other cheek, and to love your enemies as yourself, He is not telling us to be stoic or passive in the face of hatred, but to actively meet hatred with love! (Read also I Corinthians 13:4-12 for a fuller definition of love.) Given this passage, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, does he mean we should be filled with warm fuzzy affection towards them or something more? How should we behave towards those who wrong us?

Week #7

Day #1:

As you begin your study of the Word this week, take a moment to stop and pray. Ask God to guide you in your study of His Word.

1. Read Matthew 6:1-34
2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section.
3. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery” from this passage and then write those questions in the space below. Pray that God would lead you to answers to these questions as you study this passage this week.
4. What observations do you have of this passage? To say it another way, what stands out to you most about what you read for this week?

Day #2

1. Read Matthew 6:1-34
2. BACKGROUND NOTE ON MATTHEW 6:

In chapter 6, Christ discusses three practices of piety that were common amongst the Pharisees or religious leaders within Judaism: almsgiving or tithing, prayer, and fasting.

The first practice of piety that we view is almsgiving or tithing and we see that in verses 1-4. In verse 4, Christ mentions, "that your giving will be in secret". Christ made this statement in the context of a longstanding Jewish tradition where within the Temple there was a "chamber of secrets" into which the devout would place their gifts in secret so that the poor could receive support in secret. So, the dynamic would be such that those gave in secret and others received in secret. The giver would give for pure motives (seen only by them and the LORD) and the receiver would receive apart from stares and potential embarrassment of others.

The second practice of piety that we see is that of prayer. Specifically, in verses 9-13 we see the popular Lord's Prayer serving as a model for prayer. We see the importance of expressing adoration to God beginning with adoration in verse 9, then acknowledging subjection to His will in verse 10, and finally asking petitions of Him in verses 11-13. Here Christ is defining true prayer in light of the practices of the Pharisees and their tendencies toward outward expressions without inward authenticity.

We see Christ address this same issue in the passages on fasting in verses 16-18. It was common practice for Pharisees to not wash or trim their hair and even sometimes put ashes on their heads to show everyone their religious devotion. The problem obviously being that they were putting on a show for people and Christ pointed this out and showed people a more preferable behavior while fasting – one that shows true authenticity and pure motives.

In all this, it's important to see the thread running through these passages: God is not impressed with self-promoting religious activity done from impure motives. They gave in public, prayed in public and fasted in public all to showcase their religious devotion and exalt themselves. However, Scripture shows us we should give, pray, and fast to an audience of One, God Himself. Please note, Christ is not condemning outward expressions of our faith like praying in public and sharing our faith. Rather, he is saying we should do it in such a way that brings honor to God and not just to ourselves.

7. Have you been guilty of “sounding a horn in the streets”? How can you live your life in such a way that you do not lose your eternal rewards to gain rewards from humans?

Day #4

1. Take a moment to ask the Lord to open your spiritual eyes and let you learn from His Word today.
2. Read Matthew 6:5-15.
3. What group of people does Jesus tell His followers not to be like when praying? Why does He say this, and what does He mean?

4. Think about your own prayer life. When you pray do you just repeat certain phrases over and over again without thinking about what they mean? Is your prayer life filled with any “filler”? Write below any phrases that you tend to repeat mindlessly in prayer.

5. According to this passage, does the length of a prayer add any value to what we are trying to communicate to God? What does Jesus tell us about the relationship between the length of our prayers and the probability that God will hear or answer us?

6. Do you think it’s significant that Jesus calls the God of the whole universe not just His Father, but our Father as well? He even says we should address Him as “Father”

10. Do you think it's significant that Jesus' model prayer places asking for things about God and His Kingdom before asking about our own needs? How should this impact your prayer life?

11. What are we expressing to God when we ask Him to do the things in verses 9 and 10?

12. Some of us may be more accustomed to talking to God only about the things we need or want for ourselves, but the first three petitions make it clear that the things of God's Kingdom should take priority for us. However, Jesus shows us that we should ask God for the things we need also—physical needs and spiritual needs we have until His Kingdom comes. We shouldn't feel that we're 'bothering God' with requests that aren't 'spiritual enough.'

13. What do you think Jesus means when He says that we should ask for the following things?

Give us our daily bread –

Forgive us our debts/sins –

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one –

Note: Verse 14 expands the idea of asking God to forgive our sins. It may seem a bit disturbing if we think that it means that God's forgiveness of us, and therefore the security of our eternal life with Him, is tied to how well we forgive other people. A possible explanation is that our overall forgiveness is not affected at all, but the fellowship we have in our daily relationship with God is adversely affected when we hold onto sin (refuse to forgive someone) rather than confessing and repenting.

Day #5

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read Matthew 6:16-18.
3. This section continues Jesus' teaching about hypocrisy by focusing on another issue. Write below a definition of what you think it means to fast.

4. Fasting is a term that refers to the action of refusing to eat for a specified period of time in order to devote oneself more to prayer. Jesus, Himself, fasted for forty days prior to the origin of His earthly ministry. During those forty days, Jesus did not just refuse to eat, He spent extra and focused amounts of time in prayer. In Jesus' day, fasting was a common practice of the religious Jews (including the Pharisees).
5. Does this passage command believers in Jesus Christ to participate in regular times of fasting?

6. Though this passage does not require fasting for believers, some very specific commands are given for people to follow if they decided to fast. What are those commands?

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #8

Day #1:

As you begin your study of the Word this week, take a moment to stop and pray. Ask God to guide you in your study of His Word.

1. Read Matthew 6:19-34
2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section.
3. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery” from this passage and then write those questions in the space below. Pray that God would lead you to answers to these questions as you study this passage this week.
4. What observations do you have of this passage? To say it another way, what stands out to you most about what you read for this week?

Day #2

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. This week we will be studying Jesus' teaching on material possessions from the Sermon on the Mount. Yesterday you outlined verses 19-34, looking for overall themes and organization. Certainly there are many ways to divide this section up, but this week we break the passage down along a theme drawn from Proverbs 30:7-9. Read these verses now, and write your observations below.
3. From Proverbs we see that there are dangers associated with both excess wealth as well as with poverty. Do you think our society tells us the same? Or do we tend to view things through the "more is always better" lens? Is it possible to have too much? Reflect for a moment on this idea, and write out your thoughts below.

4. Drawing from this idea, we chose to look at Jesus' words in Matthew 6 with these ideas in mind. Verses 19-24 seem to deal with the dangers of too much wealth, while verses 24-34 seem to look at concerns about too little. Today we will focus on the first section. Read Matthew 6:19-24 again now.
5. What does Jesus say are the problems with treasures stored up on earth?
6. Give some examples from your own life of earthly things that you once held dear, but have now seen fall away.
7. What is our response to this realization? Buddhism's solution to the unreliability and corruptibility of earthly treasures is to rid ourselves of all desire, for that desire will in the end always be disappointed. What does Christ say?
8. Consider the following quote from C S Lewis' "The Weight of Glory":

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

It seems that Christ does not deny or condemn our desires, but instead confirms them and redirects them to their true end: Himself. This certainly sounds good, but how do we live out this truth? How does one know what one's true treasure is? When is it hardest for you to pursue Christ as your greatest treasure?

9. Read verse 24. Here Jesus makes it clear that He will accept no competitors for our deepest longings and affections; with full right (and our best interests in mind), He demands our undivided allegiance. Perhaps there are times when it seems that serving two loves is possible. Sometimes our pursuit of one does not seem to conflict with the other. When does it become clear that serving two masters is impossible?

10. What might that situation look like in your life? How do we respond to this situation by faith and not by works?

Day #3

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 6:25-34.
3. Yesterday, we looked at the problem of having too much. Today we will explore the problem of too little. According to Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34, what is the chief problem of having too little?
4. What is the solution that Jesus offers to cure the problem of “too little” in these verses? Is His answer satisfying to you? Why or why not?
5. Think of your own life for a moment. What causes you to worry the most? Things in the past, things in the present, or things in the future? Why do you think that is?
6. Read Psalm 139:1-24. How do these verses also encourage you to not worry about the things that you tend to worry about? Write that encouragement below.

7. Think about the next five years of your life. What things might take place in that time that cause you to be anxious or worried right now?

8. How do Psalm 139 and Matthew 6 help to encourage you to not be anxious or worry about those future things?

Day #4

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read Matthew 6:25-34, and write it out in the space below.

A NOTE ABOUT A DIFFICULT PASSAGE:

This verse falls on the heels of Christ warning us not to worry about our clothes, food, water, or anything. He points to nature and says that there is proof that God, who clothes the fields with lilies and provides food for the birds, will also take care of us. However, how do we square that with the reality on the planet that not all people have their basic needs met? There are some who starve to death or freeze to death from lack of food and clothing. Does this reality nullify Christ's promise in this verse? Let's consider one commentary before we go any further.

Verse 6:33 - "Here God promises to meet the needs of those who commit themselves to seeking the furtherance of His kingdom and righteousness. In view of this promise how can we explain the fact that some committed believers have perished for lack of food? There is a wider sphere of context in which this promise operates. We all live in a fallen world where the effects of sin pervade every aspect of life. Sometimes the godly, through no fault of their own, get caught up in the consequences of sin and perish. Jesus did not elaborate this dimension of life here but assumed it as something His hearers would have known and understood.

Source: Dr. Tom Constable's Notes on Matthew - <http://www.sonlight.com/constable/>

So, given this explanation, we can see more clearly that while God promises to give us the things we need to survive, that is still balanced against the fact that we live in a fallen world. We won't be given everything we need on this side of heaven. We will be given everything we need to fulfill God's purposes for our lives here on earth - then we will be taken home to heaven to be given all we could ever need for eternity.

One thing that is certainly clear is that worry has 1) Never changed the outcome of an event or 2) Never been a source of comfort for people. Given this, we see the wisdom in Christ's warning about worry. Christ said in verse 27, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?". Things on

this side of heaven are constantly breaking down, decomposing and being replaced - including humans! Besides, who would want to live and get perpetually older, weaker, and less mobile eventually to the point of being bedridden eternally on earth anyway? Death is our entrance to the Kingdom - a promising proposition and very freeing for a Christian. All of those promises will be realized fully in eternity.

3. What does it look like in your life to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness as Matthew 6:33 commands?

7. These passages are some of the most practical verses in the Bible. They include instructions from Paul to Christians living ordinary lives as part of their respective communities out in the world. There is much to apply from these instructions for us today. Living a good, upstanding life as a hard-working citizen of our country is a thing to be commended. Living a life of productivity that enables you to help those in need is a thing to be admired. Part of our spiritual responsibility includes going to work, getting a paycheck, paying our taxes, buying food for our family, and providing for the needs of those in our lives. Do you place a high value on living a good life while here on earth even though it seems ordinary, boring, or even “less spiritual” than other paths sometimes?

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #9

Day #1:

As you begin your study of the Word this week, take a moment to stop and pray. Ask God to guide you in your study of His Word.

1. Read Matthew 7:1-29
2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section.
3. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery” from this passage and then write those questions in the space below. Pray that God would lead you to answers to these questions as you study this passage this week.
4. What observations do you have of this passage? To say it another way, what stands out to you most about what you read for this week?

Day #2

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 7:1-6.
3. This section of the Sermon on the Mount is a very famous passage, and one that is celebrated by many with a 21st Century world view. Why do you think this passage is so famous and popular in today’s culture?
4. One reason why many people might love this passage is because their perception of Christians is one of a very judgmental group of people. This slams judgmental people and reminds us that everyone has sin in their life. At the same time, there are other New Testament passages which encourage Christians to keep each other accountable and to confront a brother or sister in Christ who is caught in sin. That said, in order for us to better understand this passage, what specific kind of behavior do you think Jesus was rebuking when He asked people to not judge one another? To say it another way, when is it ok to confront the sin you see in a friend’s life?
5. Read Galatians 6:1-5.

Day #3

1. Pause to thank God for his Word, which is “living and active”, even today!
(Hebrews 4:12) Invite God to use the passage today to reveal himself to you in a new way.
2. Read Matthew 7:7-11
3. According to Psalm 139:1-3, God already knows our thoughts, yet here it is clear that God wants us to ask Him anyway. Why do you think an all-knowing God wants you to ask and knock, if He already knows what you want?
4. What kind of things does God desire to give us if we will ask? What does this teach us about the God we serve?
5. Will God give us everything we ask for? (Hint: Psalm 37:4, James 4:2-3).

Day #4

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 7:13-23.
3. This particular passage in Scripture is full of contrasts. Many times contrasts give us great insight into the Kingdom and God's purposes. What contrasts do you observe in these passages?
4. The Narrow and Wide Gates (vv 13-14): What does this parable tell us about the Kingdom, ultimately?
5. For many reasons, religions and religious people are very effective at deceiving people who desire to know God. What does this effect have on the followers and the leaders with respect to the Kingdom, eventually?
6. How do verses 15-23 help us know when we are witnessing a false prophet?

Day #5

1. Take some time to pray before you begin your study of God's Word today.
2. Read Matthew 7:24-29.
3. Christ ends His great Sermon on the Mount with bold words. What are the two responses pictured from people who hear Christ's words? Is there a third response listed?
4. How does the crowd respond to Christ's words?
5. Who or what do you think the rock represents?
6. How do you respond to Christ's words? Do you believe that if you live by His Word you will truly be like a man who built his house on a rock and the house could not be destroyed?
7. What would such a life look like? List some general and specific thoughts.

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #10

Intro to Week #10

So far we have seen that there is a Kingdom, that the King of the Kingdom cares for His people, and that the Kingdom ethic is different from the ethic of the world. This week, we will focus on another key idea concerning the Kingdom and that is concerning the expansion of the Kingdom of Heaven over the souls of men and women. It is God's desire to see the people from every nation, tribe, and tongue worshipping Him in the Kingdom. This will be done as citizens of the Kingdom share His love with others. This week, we will survey a number of New Testament passages related to the expansion of the Kingdom over the souls of men and women.

Day #1

1. Take some time to pray before you begin your study of God's Word today.
2. Read Matthew 4:12-22
3. As we come to understand the deity of Christ - that He has two natures, both God and man - we see Him reflecting characteristics of His humanity. In verses 12-13, we note that Jesus left Nazareth because John the Baptist had been taken into custody. Luke 4:16-30 illuminates this and shows us that Christ left because they tried to kill Him. So Christ left Nazareth and settled into the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. As the Son of God, why do you suppose Christ didn't simply refuse to allow anyone to kill Him as he continued His ministry in Nazareth? To say it another way, why did He choose to flee?
4. In verses 15-16, we note that Christ's arrival into Zebulun and Naphtali fulfilled prophecy from Isaiah. It says that their land was in a great darkness, and it's understood that this is a spiritual darkness. What does a spiritual darkness look like? What are some characteristics of it? Have you ever felt spiritually dark?
5. Verse 16 mentions that a great light dawned on the land. What message did Christ bring to combat the spiritual darkness of the land? What were the requirements of the message in order to be released from the spiritual darkness?
6. How does that message that Christ preached break the stronghold of darkness? What happens to people when they accept Christ and allow His light to shine in them?

Day #2

1. Today we will look at our identity in the kingdom of God. Pray and ask God to “enlighten the eyes of your heart,” (Eph 1:18) so that not only your mind will be changed by today’s study, but also your heart. Pray that this would not be just an intellectual exercise, but a HEART changing experience.
2. Read Matthew 5:13-16
3. Who is Jesus addressing here? (vs 16)
4. How many commands do you see in this passage? There aren’t many. This passage doesn’t tell us what to do, but rather, who we are. According to this passage, who are we?
5. What do you think it means to be the salt of the earth?
6. What do you think it means to be the light of the world?

Day #3

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe."
2. Read Matthew 9:35-38
3. In verse 35, we find Christ and His disciples traveling around Galilee. What two things do we find Jesus doing as He travels?
4. Do you think there are counterparts to Jesus' activities that His Body in our age can be doing? What might that look like?
5. In verse 36, we get a description of Christ's feeling towards the people He came across. These people were harassed, distressed, and lost. They had many problems and didn't know who to go to for help. Their "shepherds" within the religious leadership of the day had failed them. They were spiritually destitute. Are there times in your life when you feel stressed, lost, or like a spiritual "loser"? At these times in your life, how do you imagine God's view of you? Do we tend to view Him as frustrated at our inability to "get or act together"? Take a moment to reflect on the truth of Christ's compassion towards us when we are most helpless.

9. To swing the sickle even when we see no wheat is one way to live by faith and not by sight. That is, when we share our faith with others believing that God is calling some in our sphere to repentance, we are acting in faith, according to His promises. Another thing we can do in response to the abundant harvest is revealed in verse 37. What instructions does Christ give His disciples here?

10. What might we learn of the nature of the spiritual harvest from this? What observations do you have about what Jesus tells His disciples to do?

Day #4

1. Take a moment to pray. Ask God to illuminate His Word for you today as Paul prays in Ephesians 1:17-19a as he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.”
2. Read Matthew 10:1-42
3. Look back to Matthew 9:35-38 to get a feel for the context of what happens in Matthew 10:1-42. What is the connection between Matthew 9:35-38 and Matthew 10:1-42?
4. Write observations below that you notice about Jesus’ charge to the disciples as they go out on their missionary journey.
5. Though there are several commands that were only specific to the disciples’ mission (go only to Israel), the overall idea of the mission is something that Christ has passed on to all who are believers in His name. He wants us to spread the good news of His coming to other people. The disciples had a specific group of people they were to take this message to. Do you think God has a specific group of people He wants you to share the good news of Jesus Christ and His kingdom with? (This group does

not have to be a people group on the other side of the ocean, it could be people you know right now in your social sphere of influence.)

6. What are some things that you might be able to do this week to share the good news of Christ with those around you?

Day #5

1. Pray and ask the Lord to teach you truth through His word today. Pray for understanding of what the Scripture says and for discernment to know how you should respond.
2. Read Matthew 28:16-20.
3. Who was the audience that Jesus was speaking to in this passage? What was the state of their hearts?
4. It is interesting to ponder the fact that the Great Commission, as this passage is known as, is not given only to the spiritually mighty, but also to those who were having doubts. Do you have a profile in your head of what a “Great Commission” Christian might look like? If so, how does that image jive with the description of the disciples in 16-17.
5. Jesus clearly lets the disciples know His authority in 28:18. Why do you think Jesus tells them of the scope of His authority before giving the Great Commission in verses 19-20?
6. In Matthew 28:19-20, there is only one command (a verb in the imperative) and that is to “make disciples.” There are three participles which modify this command which tell us the means by which disciples are made: by going, by baptizing, and by teaching to obey. In other words, the church (and all those who make up the church

– i.e. all believers in Jesus Christ) are given one primary task, to make disciples in this world. “Going” means that we all take an active role in the process (including, for some, a change of geography to take the message of Christ to other nations). “Baptizing” means we are seeking to help people become identified with Christ by accepting His death on the cross as payment for our sins. “Teaching to obey” is not just head knowledge, but helping people put into practice truth about Jesus and how He desires us to live in our everyday lives. In the space below, reflect upon how you will involve yourself in “going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching to obey.”

- **Going** (What actions does God want you to take . . . who does He want you to initiate a spiritual conversation with?)

- **Baptizing** (How might God use you to identify others with Jesus Christ? Might you need to be baptized? Encourage a friend to be baptized?)

- **Teaching to Obey** (How is the example of your life helping people to obey God? How can you encourage those around you with God’s truth?)

7. What does Jesus remind His disciples of at the end of this passage? Why do you think He gave this reminder at the end of His Great Commission?

8. This passage is foundational for God's Kingdom. In some ways, it is a story about the expansion of the Kingdom through Jesus' disciples. It is the path He chose to

extend His love, grace and forgiveness to His children. What a humbling reality - that the God of the universe chooses us to draw people into His Kingdom! Pray that you will be responsive to this call, and that the Lord would speak to you clearly about where He wants you and what part He has prepared beforehand for you to play. Ask Him for the desire and the ability to be obedient to what He asks you to do.

Day #6:

1. Scan back through your study from this past week.
2. What did you learn about God this week that was either new or especially impacting for you?
3. Can you think of some personal applications from what you learned this week?

Prayer Requests

Week #11

Intro to Week #11

We will conclude our study of the Kingdom this week with a glimpse at the future glory of the millennial Kingdom. This is the 1,000 year period of time that will immediately follow the return of Christ to the earth. In this era, Jesus will rule from His throne in Jerusalem and there will be many, many benefits to the earth. All those who have placed their faith in Christ during this life will reign with Christ in this Kingdom. This Kingdom will precede the judgment of Satan and the ushering in of the New Heaven and the New Earth. This glorious picture is prophesized for us in Revelation 20-21. As you look at it this week, may your heart be encouraged with the glory that tomorrow brings, when the Kingdom is fully realized! Amen, Come Lord Jesus!

Day #2:

1. Read Revelation 20:1-7. Count how many times you see the words “one thousand”.
2. The millennial kingdom is a time in the future on this earth where Christ reigns from Jerusalem and the body of the redeemed believers, who are rewarded, reign with Him around the world.
3. Though the millennial kingdom is most clearly described in Revelation 20:1-7, there are many other references to it in the Bible. Read Isaiah 2:1-4, 11:6-10, 65:22-25, Luke 22:28-30, Romans 8:18-22, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 2 Timothy 2:12, and Revelation 5:10. What sticks out to you? What excites you? Does anything sadden you?
4. There are also parables about the millennial kingdom; choose one to read: Matthew 25:14-30 or Luke 19:11-26. How does life here on earth right now relate to our future in the millennial kingdom?
5. As believers we will get to experience the millennial kingdom, and it will be beyond our greatest hopes. As we see from the parables, our actions now have a direct effect on what level of responsibility we will have in the future during the millennial kingdom. (Note: We are responsible only for what talents, opportunities, gifts, etc He gives us. We are not all responsible to be a Billy Graham because we have not

been given his talents, gifts, and opportunities.) This cause and effect truth should motivate us to be responsible tenants of all the gifts, opportunities, life experiences, personality, relationships, etc. that God has given us. What do you think God has given you stewardship over now? How are you handling this responsibility?

6. We should also look forward to the earth once it is in submission to Christ and Satan is bound. This period of 1,000 years will be very similar (not exactly the same as) the Garden of Eden (Gen 1-2). Humanity will reign with responsibility over creation, animals will coexist peacefully together, there will be little violence, and sin will not be tolerated but judged immediately by Christ. In the same way Adam was given the creative task of naming animals we might also be given creative tasks. God created us with a mind, talents, abilities, likes and dislikes, etc. When our bodies and lives are no longer weighed down by sin but fully redeemed we will be who God truly created and meant us to be. What if someone is an artist in this life and paints sunsets and landscapes? He can only do so with pens, pencils, paints, and paper. In the millennial kingdom, however, with a redeemed body, this same artist may have even greater skill and the ability and use even greater resources. What about you? Take some time to dream a little about how God has made you and what glorious plans He might have for you in the future.

Day #3:

1. Read Revelation 20:7- 21:8.
2. During the time directly before, during, and after the millennial kingdom there will be several times of judgment. We will explore them in this order: Judgment of Satan (and his angels, the Beast, and the False Prophet), Judgment of unredeemed humanity, Judgment of believers, Judgment of the earth.
3. At the beginning of the millennial kingdom Satan was bound and the Beast and the False Prophet were thrown into the lake of fire. Why would God bind Satan and delay judgment on him instead of throwing him into hell with his companions?

4. Dr. Stanley Toussaint has some good observations. He believes God will allow Satan's release:
 - To show even without Satan humans will fail even in a perfect environment.
 - To prove the incurable wickedness of Satan.
 - To show the need of eternal punishment of wicked people.
 - To demonstrate the foreknowledge of God.
5. When Satan is released he rallies all the humans who still do not place their faith in Christ (though He is reigning on the earth they inhabit!!!). Satan will lead rebellious humanity to attack and war against the redeemed and Christ. But there is no battle. Satan is immediately thrown into hell and his punishment is final and just.
6. Immediately after this final rebellion, the unredeemed of humanity are judged. Read Luke 12:45-48, Romans 1:18-21, Revelation 20:11-15. What is the punishment for all who have rejected Christ? For how long are they punished? Do you think their judgment and punishment are just?

7. All humanity is judged by their deeds. We've seen that the deeds of those who rejected Christ are not enough to escape eternal punishment. But believers are given credit for the work of Christ and are judged on His merit rather than their own work and merit. Therefore, they are seen as righteous, holy, and worthy to be in God's presence forever. Read Psalm 103:10-12, Matthew 6:1-4, John 5:22-30, Luke 12:35-44, Romans 14:10-13, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, Ephesians 6:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 2 Timothy 4:8, Hebrews 8:12, and James 1:12. When believers are judged, the term used to describe the judgment is the same one used for the medals stand at the Olympics. It is not a judgment of our bad deeds. It is a celebration of our good works done in the power of the Holy Spirit with the motivation to please and glorify God. And for these works we are rewarded. For those with a few works it is a time of joy. For those with many works and many rewards it is a time of joy upon joy. Have you been afraid of future judgment in the past or worry about it now? How does knowing what we will be judged on motivate you to live in the present?

8. In Revelation 21:1-5 we see a new heaven and a new earth. The old is destroyed and all is made fresh. Read Genesis 3:17 (note the ground/earth is cursed by God) Isaiah 66:22-24, Matthew 24:35, and 2 Peter 3:7. The fact that God makes everything new is a cause for celebration. It is an exciting thought that someday there will no longer exist anything tainted by sin.

5. The new Jerusalem is a stunning place to behold. The city described in the middle section of Revelation 21 is a city of opulent décor and radiant beauty. What does it tell you about a city if its streets are paved with gold and the walls of the city are made with fine jewels? Why do you think it is important for us to see that?

6. The future for believers in Jesus Christ is very bright. Throughout Revelation 21, we see the new city described in detail and even measured for us. This lets us know that this is a real place, not just a mythical illusion. Knowing that believers have such a glorious future in the very real new heaven and new earth, how now shall we live? In other words, what changes will you make in your life today knowing the grand reality of your future?

Day #5

1. Read Revelation 20:1-22:5.
2. Focus in on Revelation 21:23. Can you imagine living without the sun? Think of all the things that the sun is necessary for, list them here.
3. There is no need for the sun in this place because “the glory of God has illumined it;” try to get a visual picture of what this looks like. Now that you have considered all the things that the sun does for our planet, what is the implication of God’s glory being the sustenance for life on the earth?
4. Spend some time prayerfully considering the Needs you have in your own life; be careful to distinguish needs from wants. Write some of those here.
5. How does God provide for the basic needs that you have right now?

Prayer Requests