

## **King's City: Leadership Curriculum**

### **Lesson 1: Overview of the Big-Picture Plan of the Bible: The Gospel**

#### **A. Introduction: The Purpose of This Class (10 minutes)**

The purpose of this class is to train our ministry team leaders and home group leaders in:

- understanding our church's beliefs, mission, and vision and
- developing Christian leadership and ministry skills

So:

- Part One of this class will establish a theological and biblical foundation for our ministry—why we do what we do at King's City Church.
- Part Two will apply that biblical foundation to our own lives by practicing missional living in our community. This section will be introduced in our last class before we break for the summer so you will be able to practice what you have learned over the break.
- Part Three will focus on spiritual leadership and how to develop our skills for ministry, both in the church and in our community.

Before we begin, we'd like to hear from you. As you feel comfortable, please share:

- What has been your experience, if any, with leadership positions in churches before?
- What questions or concerns do you have about church leadership?
- How do you feel God leading you to serve at King's City?
- How do you feel God leading you to serve in our community?
- What do you hope to learn from this class? In what areas would you like to grow?

#### **B. Teaching (20 minutes):**

##### **1. Overview of Theological Foundation**

Before we can begin to talk about serving our churches and our communities in Christian leadership, we have to establish what it is that we believe, both:

(1) to know what we will teach our people and

(2) to understand why we do what we do at King's City Church.

We will explore the biblical foundation for why we do what we do over the course of four lessons:

1. In this lesson, we'll look at God's big-picture rescue plan of the whole Bible.
2. In the second lesson, we'll look at where we are in that big-picture plan.
3. In lesson three, we'll see what that means for how we relate to one another inside the church.
4. And in lesson four, we'll see what that means for how we relate to the world outside the church.

Then we'll look to apply all of that to our personal lives and our ministry at King's City Church.

It may seem like we're going slowly through the theology behind the ministry. You may wish you could just jump right into the more practical stuff. But we really want to make sure we get a good theological foundation before we start talking about the "how to" of ministry. Because, as anyone who has ever done any kind of construction work could tell you, you've got to make sure your foundation is solid before you start laying anything on top of it.

### **Opening Questions:**

- How would you describe the big-picture story of the Bible in a paragraph or less?
- How would you explain the gospel in just a few sentences?

## **2. Summary of the Big-Picture Plan of the Bible: The Gospel**

At King's City, we believe that the Bible contains one overarching big-picture story of God's plan to save the world from sin and evil. Not just human beings, but all of creation:

1. Creation: God created the world good (Genesis 1–2).
2. Fall: Sin marred that good creation—all of creation, not just humanity (Genesis 3).
3. Redemption: In Christ, we have been redeemed from sin (Galatians 3:13; Colossians 1:14; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18–19). Those of us who come to know Jesus have been made new creations in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17), but the world we live in is still broken (Romans 8:19–21).
4. Consummation: One day, when Christ comes again, the whole world will be made a new creation and everything will be perfect—no suffering, pain, crying, sickness, or evil (Revelation 21).

## **3. How the Biblical Story Fits into the Rescue Plan**

- Creation – the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1–2
- Fall – Genesis 3
  - After Genesis 3, the rest of the Old Testament is the story of God's covenant relationship with Israel, pointing ahead to our redemption in Christ.
  - In this story, God created a physical picture of redemption and the kingdom. He physically redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. He created a physical kingdom in the promised land. All of this is a "type," or foreshadowing, of the spiritual redemption in Jesus in the new covenant (Hebrews 9–10).
- Redemption – Christ's Death and Resurrection in the Gospels
  - YOU ARE HERE: This is story of the church, the "new Israel," starting in Acts and continuing through all of church history, all leading to Christ's second coming and the consummation of the kingdom.
  - In this story, through the church, God created a picture of what the future consummated kingdom will be like.
- Consummation – Revelation 21–22

## **4. Bookends: Creation and New Creation**

When we read Genesis 1–2 and Revelation 21–22 together, it is easy to see the parallels between the original creation and the new creation. There is so much intentional Eden imagery in Revelation to show that this new creation is the story of God redeeming the whole earth from the damage done in the fall, not just restoring the old creation but making it new.

“I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

In Genesis 2:8–17, God planted a garden with all kinds of trees:

- In the middle were two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- A river flowed from Eden, which watered the garden.
- Human beings lived there in the presence of God, in harmony.

In Revelation 21–22, God showed John:

- “A new heaven and a new earth” (21:1) – parallel language to Genesis 1:1
- “There was no longer any sea” (21:1) – a symbolic way to say there is no longer any evil
- Human beings dwelling with God in peace (21:3–4)
- “The river of the water of life,” flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1–2)
- On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding fruit every month, and the leaves for the healing of the nations (22:2)

In the new creation, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is gone; there is only the tree of life. Because God will have destroyed evil forever (Revelation 20:14; 21:1) in the new creation, there is no longer the option of choosing good or evil; there is only good.

If we look back at the fall in Genesis 3, we see that God banished Adam and Eve from the garden so they couldn’t eat from the tree of life and live forever in their fallen, broken state (Genesis 3:22–24). But in Revelation, because people have been redeemed and made new in Christ, they can have full access to the tree of life and live forever in their perfected state (1 Corinthians 15).

Revelation 22:3 continues, “No longer will there be anything accursed.” This is a direct reference to Genesis 3. The curse of the fall is gone.

Then, Revelation 22:5 says, “There will be no more night.” The original creation in Genesis 1 had the recurring refrain of evening and morning, the first day, the second day, and so on. Day and night, sun, moon, and stars. But in the new creation, there is no more night, nor any sun, moon, or stars. “They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light.”

This is not just bringing back the old creation; this is a new creation.

## **5. The Fall**

In Genesis 3, the serpent opened by challenging God’s Word to Adam and Eve. He told them that God had lied to them. The tree wasn’t bad for them; it was good for them. God just didn’t want them to become like Him. This is the basic root of all sin, not trusting that what God says is best for us is really what is best for us. Listening to another voice and/or our own fleshly desires instead. The God who created us knows us better than we know ourselves and loves us beyond all measure.

The fall tainted every part of God's good creation:

1. Humanity's relationship with each other – "They realized they were naked" (v. 7) and "Your desire will be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you" (v. 16). Instead of a marriage of intimacy, vulnerability, mutual trust and respect, unity, and selfless love, there would be power struggle, dominance, shame, blaming each other, fighting against each other, and hiding from each other.
2. The earth itself – "Cursed is the ground ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you." (v. 17–18). Instead of everything being fruitful and working together in harmony, the world would have thorns and thistles and hurricanes, drought, tsunamis, and so on.
3. Humanity's work – "painful toil ... sweat of your brow ..." (v. 17–19). Work would now be difficult and not always fruitful.
4. The human body – Childbearing would be painful (v. 16) and people's bodies would get weaker and weaker until death (v. 19).
5. Humanity's relationship with God – "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid" (v. 10). Instead of healthy fear of God (trust in and reverence for Him) and intimacy with Him, people would now be afraid of God, doubt Him, and run away from Him.

The good news of the gospel is that every one of these things is redeemed in Christ. In the consummation we see:

1. We will live in right relationships with one another (Revelation 21:27; 22:14–15).
2. The earth will be fruitful in every season (Revelation 22:1–2).
3. Our work will be serving God (Revelation 22:3).
4. Our bodies will be made perfect (1 Corinthians 15), no more sickness, death, or pain (Revelation 21:3–4).
5. Our intimacy with God is restored, even living in closer proximity to His presence (Revelation 21:3–4; 22:3–5).

#### The Gospel in the Fall:

Even as God was sharing with Adam and Eve the curses of the fall—while He was speaking to the serpent, before He even said anything to Eve and Adam—God promised a future Savior.

*"I will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).*

The "seed," or offspring, in this verse is singular, pointing to one coming "son of Eve" who would crush the head of the serpent—the enemy, Satan. Scholars agree that this points ahead to Christ. Satan would strike his heel (He would be crucified), but Jesus would crush his head (ultimately destroy him). Scholars call this the "proto-evangelion" or "first gospel." The first time the gospel was preached was before God even pronounced the curses of the fall. Jesus was not an afterthought or a "Plan B." He was God's plan from the beginning.

6. **Redemption:** The redemption was the first coming of Christ. The consummation will happen at His second coming, which means we are living in the time in between redemption and consummation.

The kingdom of God is already here (Matthew 12:28; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; 17:21), but not yet here in all its fullness (Matthew 13:31–33; John 14:1–4; 18:36; Philippians 2:9–11; 3:20–21):

- (Already) Jesus reigns in the hearts, lives, families, and communities of His church (Ephesians 1:22).
- (Not Yet) But the rest of the world is still under the reign of sin and the enemy (2 Corinthians 4:4).

One day, every knee will bow before Christ as king (Philippians 2:1–11), but we aren't there yet.

This means that we are citizens of God's kingdom living in a foreign land, in enemy territory (John 15:18–25; Philippians 3:20–21;). But our enemies are not flesh and blood (other people); they are the spiritual powers of wickedness in the world (Ephesians 6:10–18). The people of the world aren't the enemy, they're the victims. They're still under bondage to sin (Romans 6:16–19; Romans 8:1–8; 1 John 2:11). It's our mission to show them how to be rescued (Romans 10:8–15; Jude 1:23). This is our ministry, the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16–21).

But reconciliation is not only about individual people's souls being saved and brought into the kingdom of God. God's mission is to redeem all of creation (Romans 8:19–20). Jesus gave us this example in His ministry while He was on earth. He didn't just preach the good news of individual people's reconciliation to God; through His miracles He also showed us what God's future consummated kingdom will be like. Every time Jesus healed disease, cast out demons, reached out to the marginalized, and tore down human power structures, He showed us that God's kingdom will be a place where there will be no disease, no evil, no power struggles, and no one will be treated as less than. In all those things, Jesus was reconciling the world to the way God created it to be. Our mission is both to speak the good news of the gospel and do the kingdom work of reconciling the world to God. To heal all the damage sin has done—spiritually, physically, psychologically, and socially.

We'll get into more detail in coming weeks, but for now we just wanted to focus on understanding how the whole story of the Bible fits into God's rescue plan.

## **7. Conclusion**

If we look back at that chart of how the biblical story fits into the rescue plan, we see that the Old Testament story of Israel fits in between the Fall and Redemption in the same way that the New Testament story of the Church fits in between the Redemption and the Consummation:

- Creation: Genesis 1-2
- Fall: Genesis 3
  - The rest of the Old Testament, the story of Israel
- Redemption: The Gospels: Jesus's death and resurrection
  - The rest of the New Testament and the Church age, the story of the Church
- The Consummation: Revelation 21-22

Everything in the Old Testament is a physical "type," or shadow, of the spiritual reality which was to come in Jesus. The physical Kingdom of Israel was a foreshadowing of the spiritual kingdom of God. The physical Conquest in the Old Testament was a foreshadowing the spiritual warfare of the kingdom of God versus the powers of wickedness in the heavenly places. The physical Temple in Jerusalem was a foreshadowing of how we as the Church are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

And everything in the New Testament and what we are experiencing now in the church age is a spiritual shadow of the full reality to come in the consummation. This means our individual lives, our Christian families, and our church communities should be a reflection or foreshadowing of the future reality of the consummated kingdom of God. When people look at us, they should see a glimpse of heaven.

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12).*

In Christ, we have been made new creations, but we have not yet been made perfect as we will be made in the consummation.

*“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).*

Our journey on this earth is about getting closer and closer to the goal of becoming more like Jesus. Sanctification.

- Redemption says we are justified in Christ. From the very moment we accept the gospel, we can stand before God on judgment day, justified by the righteousness of Christ by God’s grace through faith alone, not by works (Ephesians 2:8–10). That’s justification.
- But the consummation tells us our life’s journey walking with Jesus is about becoming more and more like Him. That’s sanctification.

We have been made new creations in Christ—justification. That’s a one-time thing. The old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). And yet “our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). That’s the lifelong process of sanctification.

God is still working on us. Growing His fruit in us more and more each day as we walk by His Spirit and abide in Him, remain in Him, like a branch stays connected to the vine that gives it life so it can bear much fruit (John 15:1–11; Galatians 5:22–25).

Just like the kingdom is already here but not yet it all its fullness, so we are already made new but not yet made perfect. Both of those things are the work of God in us, not our own works. Note that the verbs used are passive verbs—*made new* and *made perfect*. Justification is something God does for us by His grace, not something we do by our own works. But so is sanctification. To sanctify means “to be made holy.” God is the one making us holy. Our only contribution to that “work” is staying connected to Him and submitting to His will, positioning ourselves so that He can work on us. Staying on the Potter’s wheel and saying, “Here I am, mold me and use me for your glory and your purposes.” Making our lives a living sacrifice for Him (Romans 12:1–2).

#### **Discussion Questions (20 minutes):**

In light of the nature of the kingdom of God as “already, not yet” and our living in between the Redemption and the Consummation, discuss the following questions about our personal sanctification, the world, and our mission as the Church in the world.

1. Our personal lives and sanctification: Since we have been made new creations, but not yet made perfect...
  - How has your inner life (your desires, your values, your thinking, your dreams, your purpose, your relationships) changed since being made a new creation in Christ?
  - How has your outer life changed as a result of this inner change?
  - In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit grow His fruit in your life?
  - How does this theological understanding of the “in between time” we’re living in help us understand why we still struggle with sin? Why we still struggle with sickness, both physical and mental? Why we still have brokenness in relationships, even between Christians? Why we even still struggle to feel close to God at times?
  - How can we give people hope in the midst of this brokenness?
  - Since we are not yet perfect and we still make mistakes, how can our lives still point to Jesus and the Gospel of the kingdom, even in our brokenness and imperfections?
2. Our world: Since we are living in between the Redemption and the Consummation, we have been made new creations, but our world is still broken...
  - How does this theological understanding of the Fall explain natural disasters? Other evil things happening in our world, like people abusing one another?
  - How would you explain to an unbeliever why a loving God would allow natural disasters or allow people to abuse one another?
  - What does this tell us about the nature of God and the nature of humankind?
3. Our mission in the world: As ambassadors of God’s kingdom living in a fallen world, our mission is to bring the message of reconciliation to the world, both in our words and our actions...
  - How does this make the mission of the Church about more than just preaching the Gospel for individual people to get saved?
  - What kind of tangible work can we be involved in that would bring reconciliation to the world? to human relationships? To human structures and systems? To communities? To both physical and mental health? To other areas of brokenness in our world?
  - When we do tangible reconciliation work in the world around us, what does that tell the world about Jesus and His rescue plan to save the world?
  - How does this theological understanding connect to our belief at King’s City Church in connecting our faith and work? How does this connect to our focus on missional living?

### **Prayer (10 minutes)**

Pray for the Spirit to give us all wisdom, discernment, and a greater understanding of the big-picture story of the Bible, how God has moved in human history, and how He is moving in the world today.

Pray for our church, for the Spirit to guide all our teaching, preaching, and study groups at King's City Church. Pray for Him to give all of us at King's City Church a passion for sharing the gospel and impacting our city for His kingdom.

Pray for yourself, for God to use this class to give you a fresh vision for your own life's calling and how God wants to use you in ministry, both inside the church and out in the world.

## King's City Church: Leadership Curriculum

### Lesson 2: The Gospel of the Kingdom: The In-between

#### A. Introduction: Review (<5 minutes)

In the last lesson, we looked at the overall big picture of the Bible theologically as God's rescue plan to save the world:

- Creation – the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1–2
- Fall – Genesis 3
  - o After Genesis 3, the rest of the Old Testament is the story of God's covenant relationship with Israel, pointing ahead to our redemption in Christ.
  - o In this story, God created a physical picture of redemption and the kingdom. He physically redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. He created a physical kingdom in the promised land. All of this is a "type," or foreshadowing, of the spiritual redemption in Jesus in the new covenant (Hebrews 9–10).
- Redemption – Christ's Death and Resurrection in the Gospels
  - o YOU ARE HERE: This is story of the church, the "new Israel," starting in Acts and continuing through all of church history, all leading to Christ's second coming and the consummation of the kingdom.
  - o In this story, through the church, God created a picture of what the future consummated kingdom will be like.
- Consummation – Revelation 21–22

We ended with discussing our place in this plan. We are living in the time between redemption and consummation. As believers, we have individually been made new creations, but creation has not yet been made new. The world around us is still broken.

That makes us ambassadors of the kingdom of God living in a foreign land, in hostile territory. The world is still in bondage to sin (Romans 6:16–19; 8:1–8) and the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10–18). We are in a spiritual battle, but our enemy is not other people. Other people are the victims of the spiritual powers of evil that we are trying to rescue from "the snares of the devil" (Romans 10:8–15; 2 Timothy 2:26; Jude 1:23).

As ambassadors of God's kingdom living in a fallen world, we bring a message of peace from our king. Our mission is to bring the message of reconciliation to the world, both by our words and our actions.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for*

*Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:17–20).*

The message of reconciliation is not just for human beings. God’s rescue plan isn’t only about saving individual human souls; it’s about redeeming all of creation and making all things new (Romans 8:19–20; Revelation 21–22). So our mission isn’t only about saving souls; it’s about reconciling every broken thing in our world—disease, oppression, sickness, pain, suffering—to the way God created it to be and the way it will be in the consummated kingdom.

That is what we will see in Jesus’s ministry in this lesson, as an example to us.

### **B. Opening Discussion: Misconceptions of Jesus (5–10 minutes)**

Rather than actually looking at the way Jesus is described in the Bible, many people have a lot of preconceived notions about Jesus based on movies, books, songs, what they have heard from other people, or how they have seen Christians act. And it’s not just unbelievers. Even some Christians have misconceptions about Jesus because they have listened to what the world says about Him rather than what Scripture says about Him. Or because they have only listened to what a speaker or author or TikTok “theologian” says about Him instead of studying God’s Word for themselves. Sometimes even well-meaning pastors may preach a different version of Jesus than is found in Scripture because of what they have been taught or heard from sources other than the Bible itself.

- Describe some of the misconceptions you think unbelievers have about Jesus.
- Describe some of the misconceptions you think some Christians have about Jesus.
- What conflicting images of Jesus have you seen or heard in our culture?
- Describe the Jesus you see when you read the Gospels.

If you aren’t sure how to answer these because you haven’t looked closely at the Bible for yourself, that’s totally fine! That’s why we’re here, doing this now. Even those of us who have been studying the Bible for decades still have questions and misunderstandings and more to learn.

Probably the biggest way we misunderstand Jesus is in making Him look like us. Without even meaning to, we superimpose our own culture’s values, thoughts, ideas, politics, etc. onto Him. So we make Jesus in our image instead of growing into His image. This is how American churches got a visual image of a white Jesus with blue eyes and light brown hair even though He was a Middle Eastern Jew with dark skin, hair, and eyes. We made Jesus in our image instead of looking at who He actually was. But that’s only visually. It’s even more dangerous when we do the same thing politically, morally, ethically, etc.

- Discuss the following quotes about the American church’s tendency to make Jesus in our image:

“This is actually what has happened in popular evangelicalism. Our ‘Jesus’ is actually a reflection of ourselves. This is the constant danger when we don’t simply open the Scriptures and listen to their testimony about Jesus: we make a Jesus in our own image, usually domesticated.” —Sinclair Ferguson<sup>i</sup>

“We are starting to redefine Christianity. We are giving in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with. A nice, middle-class, American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn’t mind materialism and who would never call us to give away

everything we have. A Jesus who would not expect us to forsake our closest relationships so that he receives all of our affection. A Jesus who is fine with nominal devotion that does not infringe on our comforts, because, after all, he loves us just the way we are. A Jesus who wants us to be balanced, who wants us to avoid dangerous extremes, and who, for that matter, wants us to avoid danger altogether. A Jesus who brings us comfort and prosperity as we live out our Christian spin on the American dream. But do you and I realize what we are doing at this point? We are molding Jesus into our image. He is beginning to look a lot like us, because, after all, that is whom we are most comfortable with. And the danger now is that when we gather in our church buildings to sing and lift up our hands in worship, we may not actually be worshiping the Jesus of the Bible. Instead we may be worshiping ourselves.” —David Platt, *Radical*<sup>ii</sup>

“You can safely assume you’ve created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.” —Ann Lamott, *Bird by Bird*<sup>iii</sup>

Recommended for further study: Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*

- How is our culture guilty of making Jesus in our image?
- How do these quotes challenge you personally?
- How can we know who the real Jesus is?

### **C. Teaching: Jesus and the Kingdom of God (20 Minutes)**

#### **1. The Mission of Jesus: Luke 4:43**

*“[Jesus] said to them, ‘I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose’ (Luke 4:43).*

Jesus was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Not just of individual salvation but of the kingdom of God. If we look back up a few verses in Luke 4, we see Jesus at the synagogue in Nazareth after having been tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Jesus was the guest speaker in the synagogue that day and He read from the prophet Isaiah:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19, quoting Isaiah 61:1–2.)*

Then He rolled up the scroll and sat down. In Jesus’s day, preachers stood up to read from the Torah, then sat down to preach.

*“And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:21).*

Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah Isaiah had prophesied about—“this Scripture has been fulfilled.” He was saying He was the one the Lord anointed to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God. But look specifically at what Isaiah said this good news was about—good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and the oppressed, sight to the blind, and the year of the Lord’s favor.

The message wasn't about praying the prayer of salvation to get your ticket into heaven. It was about making all things right. Not just fixing our individual broken relationships with God but fixing all the brokenness in our world—sickness and disease and broken human systems that cause poverty and oppression. Jesus said this was His mission and then He showed it was His mission by the things He did in His ministry.

## **2. Jesus's Actions Showed Us the Kingdom**

In everything Jesus said and did, He showed us a picture of what the consummated kingdom of God will be like—a place with no more sickness, death, pain, suffering, natural disasters, evil, oppression, broken systems, or any evil at all. In all these things, Jesus showed He had ultimate power over every broken thing in this world and that His mission was to heal all that is broken:

- a) **Power over Disease** – *Mark 6:56: "Wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well" (Mark 6:56).*
  - Jesus had such power over sickness that He didn't even have to touch people. They could just touch the fringe of His prayer shawl, or He could just say the word and they would be healed.
  - In their culture, many believed that sickness was a result of sin in people's lives, but Jesus rejected that view (John 9:3). Illness is not the result of our individual sins but of the fall in general and the brokenness of all creation, like natural disasters.
- b) **Power over Death** – *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. ... Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:25, 43).*
  - Jesus was intentionally slow to arrive so that Lazarus would die and be in the tomb for four days, his body would start to decay, and no one could doubt the miracle Jesus had done.
  - Jesus showed deep compassion and empathy for those who mourned Lazarus by crying with them even though He knew He was about to raise him. He also showed deep anger at the death and brokenness that is the result of sin in our world.
  - All Jesus had to do was say the word Lazarus was raised.
- c) **Power over Natural Disasters** – *"The men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?'" (Matthew 8:27).*
  - God created the world good, with everything in perfect working order. Natural disasters are the result of the fall and the brokenness it caused in our world, just like disease and death.
  - Jesus sleeping through the storm showed that natural disasters didn't worry Him. Again, all He had to do was rebuke the storm and it stopped. This reminds us of how God spoke the universe into existence. God's Word is infinitely powerful.
- d) **Power Over Lack** – *"They all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over" (Matthew 14:20, feeding the 5000).; "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her" (Luke 7:13, raising the widow's son).*

- One of the results of the fall was that work would become harder. It would be harder to grow food. But Jesus showed through the feeding of the 5,000 that He could provide whatever we need and abundantly more.
- A widow who had no sons would have no remaining means of provision at all. If her only son died, she would be completely destitute. It is significant that the story tells us he was her only son and that Jesus had compassion on her, not just emotionally but also for her economic struggle. In restoring her only son, Jesus also restored her means of provision.
- This miracle and other ways Jesus reached out to the poor show us that in His kingdom, all people will be provided for. Even in the Old Testament law, God made so many provisions for the poor that if they had followed His law, God said there would have been no poor among them (Deuteronomy 15:4). But they never followed it and oppressed the poor instead.

e) **Power Over Demons** – *“He ... cast out many demons”(Mark 1:34); “If it was by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20).*

- The demons knew exactly who Jesus was and they were afraid of Him (Mark 5:1–17). We don’t need to fear demons because “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).
- Casting out demons is a direct theological sign of the kingdom of God because this is part of the supernatural battle between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. Satan and his demons are the enemy kingdom.
- Yet the Bible never paints the devil and his demons as an equal enemy, good and evil as equal but opposite sides. It always shows God as sovereign over all and Jesus as infinitely more powerful than evil. It’s not even a contest, and He has already won the victory.

f) **Rejection of Human Systems of Oppression, Inequality, and Injustice** – by welcoming and eating with sinners (Luke 15:1–2), calling a tax collector to be His disciple (Mark 2:13–17), speaking to Samaritans and Canaanites with respect (Matthew 15:21–28; John 4), treating women as legitimate disciples (Luke 8:1–3; John 4:1–26; 20:1–18), valuing children and even using them as an example of discipleship (Luke 18:15–17), and honoring prostitutes and sinners who had faith (Matthew 21:31; Luke 7:36–50; John 8:1–11). All these people fell into categories of those who were oppressed and marginalized by human systems of oppression, inequality, and injustice. In their culture, lepers and other chronically ill people were cast out not only to keep disease from spreading but also because their sickness was believed to be a result of sin. Children and women had no rights; they were considered property like slaves. Gentiles were considered dogs and Samaritans half-breeds. Tax collectors were traitors for Rome and were ostracized with prostitutes and other sinners. Jesus flat out rejected these categories and showed loving care for all people, demonstrating their value and worth simply as human beings.

g) **Rejection of Oppressive Religious Leaders** – *“[The scribes and Pharisees] tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders ... But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ” (Matthew 23:4, 8–10).*

- In the Old Testament, God described Israel's leaders as bad shepherds who abused His flock. Jesus said the same thing about the religious leaders of His day. They were not representatives of God and His kingdom. They were another human institution that oppressed the vulnerable.
- This doesn't mean that all religion is bad. The New Testament encourages church leaders to be good shepherds of their flocks because the true church is the human representation of the kingdom of God on earth (2 Corinthians 5:17–20; 1 Peter 5:1–4).

### **3. Jesus's Teaching: The Upside-down Kingdom of God: Matthew 5–7**

A lot of Jesus's teaching shows us how the kingdom of God is "upside down" from the world:

- Those who are first in the world will be last in the kingdom of God (Matthew 20:16).
- Jesus called His disciples to serve others rather than seek power for themselves (Matthew 20:24–28).
- It is very difficult, but not impossible, for the rich to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:23–24).
- It's not the powerful but those who take the lowly position of a child who will enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3–4).
- Tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles with faith in Jesus will enter the kingdom while "good Jews" who don't have faith will not (Matthew 8:10–12; 21:28–32).
- The kingdom will not be brought about by revolution against Rome but by Jesus laying down His life and being executed by Rome (Matthew 26:51–56).
- Jesus painted Himself as an upside-down king when He came into Jerusalem on a donkey (Matthew 21:1–11). Instead of parading through the streets as a victor like the Roman military heroes did in the traditional "triumphs," He entered Jerusalem to go to the cross and sacrifice Himself.
- Jesus did not come to be served as king, but to serve others and give His life as a ransom for us (Matthew 20:28).

But the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) shows us very succinctly and clearly how upside down the kingdom of God is from the world:

- The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–10) list those who are blessed in the kingdom of God—the poor, those who mourn, the meek, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted, etc.
- We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16) because we are different from the world around us, and our differences point to the character of the Father.
- The standard of morality in the kingdom of God is higher than the standards of the world. We already knew that from comparing the laws of the Old Covenant to the law of the pagan nations around them. But Jesus raised the standard even higher than the "letter of the law" in the old-covenant physical kingdom of God. Not just murder, but not even hating someone (the heart behind murder). Not just adultery, but lust (the heart behind it), and so on. (Matthew 5:17–42). Though the

standards of the new covenant explicitly listed here are higher, Jesus wasn't really changing the Law, He was revealing the heart behind it and saying, just as God did in the old covenant, that it's the heart that really matters, not just keeping the letter of the law.

- Love in the kingdom of God is not just loving those who love you and are kind to you like the world does but also loving your enemies the way God does (Matthew 5:43–38).

#### **D. Application: Thy Kingdom Come (25–30 minutes)**

##### **1. Opening Discussion: Debriefing the Study**

- How did this study help you better understand Jesus's mission while He was here on earth?
- Did you learn anything new about Jesus or change any of your misconceptions or previous views of Jesus after looking at these Scripture passages?
- How does looking closely at the way Jesus fulfilled His mission affect the way you think about your mission in life as a disciple of Jesus?
- What difference does it make to know that Jesus not only preached individual salvation but also gave us glimpses of the kingdom of God through His actions?
- What does it tell you about God that Jesus brought healing in all areas of human life and creation through His ministry?
- What difference does it make to know that the kingdom of God is "upside down" from the way the world works?
- What does it tell you about Jesus that His kingdom is an "upside-down" kingdom?
- After studying Jesus's proclamation of the kingdom, how would you describe the kingdom of God in your own words?
- Look back at all the categories where Jesus showed power to heal the brokenness in the world: disease, death, natural disasters, economic lack, demons (spiritual evil), oppressive religious leaders, and human systems of oppression, inequality, and injustice. If we think about the gospel of the kingdom as a movement to heal all these areas, how does that affect the way we think about our mission as the church?

##### **2. The Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6:9–10**

We are living in the time between the redemption and the consummation, which means the kingdom is already here but not yet in its fullness (Matthew 12:28; Luke 17:20–21). We are new creations living in a world that is still broken.

- We are citizens of heaven sojourning here on earth (Philippians 3:20). But we aren't just passing through. We aren't supposed to hide in our holy huddles waiting for the consummation to come. We are meant to seek the welfare (*shalom*—wholeness, peace, prosperity) of the world around us while we are here (Jeremiah 29:4–7).
- We are ambassadors of the kingdom of God bringing a message of peace and reconciliation from our kingdom of light to the kingdom of darkness (2 Corinthians 5:17–20). Our mission is not only to tell people about the gospel but to be the light of the world shining in the darkness, pointing people to the Father by the way we live (Matthew 5:14–16).

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9–10). This does not mean we pray for Jesus to come back and bring His kingdom to earth and then sit around waiting for Him to do it. Jesus invites His disciples to participate in bringing His kingdom to earth by doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

### **3. Sending Out the Disciples: Matthew 10:1-15; Luke 10:1–12**

In Luke 10:1–12, Jesus appointed, empowered, and sent out seventy-two of His disciples into "every town and place." Not just the Twelve, but six times that many! He not only gave them the message to preach, He also gave them the power to heal the sick. And He said to them:

*"Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9).*

Jesus was empowering and commissioning His disciples to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth. Their calling was not to sit around and wait for Him to come back but to bring the kingdom of God near to the people of "every town and place," by both proclaiming the gospel and healing the sick—through both their words and their actions.

In Matthew 10:1–15, Jesus appointed, empowered, and sent out the Twelve to preach the gospel that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." As they proclaimed the message, they were commanded to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons."

Jesus commissioned His disciples to do the same thing He had done, to preach the kingdom of God with both their words and their actions. As disciples of Jesus Christ, our mission on this earth is not only to preach the gospel of the kingdom of heaven but to also work to make the earth look more like the kingdom of heaven.

The purpose of the kingdom of God is to heal all the results of sin—spiritual, psychological, physical, and social. Therefore, our mission is to intentionally use our gifts and resources to heal the brokenness in our world in every way that we can. That means working to end hunger, healing the sick, reconciling marriages, bringing healing to those suffering from addiction, and lifting the poor out of poverty. It means working to dismantle systems of oppression and injustice in our world. It even means casting out demons and fighting the "power and principalities of this present darkness" in every way we can.

### **4.**

### **Closing Discussion: Application**

- After all these application points, how do you think the Lord is leading you individually to participate in bringing His kingdom to the earth? (It's okay if you don't have a full answer right away. Just share what the Lord is brewing in you right now.)
- Again, look back at all the categories of brokenness Jesus fought during His ministry. How can you join God in bring healing to our world in these areas through your work, family, and free time?
  - disease:
  - death:
  - natural disasters:
  - economic lack:
  - demons and spiritual evil:
  - oppressive religious leaders:
  - human systems of oppression, inequality and injustice:
- What other areas of brokenness do you see in the world that God may want to use you to bring healing by the power of His Holy Spirit?

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<sup>i</sup> Chris Larson, "An Interview with Sinclair Ferguson," *Ligonier Ministries*, Mar 10, 2008.

<sup>ii</sup> David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (Multnomah Books: Colorado Springs, CO, 2010).

<sup>iii</sup> Ann Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group: New York, NY, 1995).

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## King's City Church: Leadership Curriculum

### Lesson 3: The Gospel and Community: The Counterculture

#### A. Introduction: Review (<5 minutes)

#### Lesson 1: The Big-Picture Plan of the Bible: The Gospel

In the first lesson, we looked at the overall big picture of the Bible as God's rescue plan to save the world: Creation → Fall → Redemption → Consummation. We ended with discussing our place in this plan. We live in the time between redemption and consummation. As believers, we have individually been made new creations, but creation has not yet been made new. The world around us is still broken.

This makes us ambassadors of the kingdom of God living in a foreign land, in hostile territory. The world is still in bondage to sin (Romans 6:16–19; 8:1–8) and the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:10–18). We are in a spiritual battle, but our enemy is not other people. Other people are the victims of the spiritual powers of evil whom we are trying to rescue from “the snares of the devil” (Romans 10:8–15; 2 Timothy 2:26; Jude 1:23).

As ambassadors of God's kingdom living in a fallen world, we bring a message of peace from our king, the message of reconciliation to the world, both by our words and our actions. But God's rescue plan isn't only about saving individual human souls; it's about redeeming all of creation and making all things new (Romans 8:19–20; Revelation 21–22). Our mission isn't just about saving souls; it's about reconciling every broken thing in our world—disease, oppression, sickness, pain, suffering—to the way God created it to be and the way it will be in the consummated kingdom.

#### **Lesson 2: The Gospel of the Kingdom: The In-Between**

In the second lesson, we looked at the ministry of Jesus while He was living as human being on this planet and what this tells us about our mission and ministry in the world. Jesus was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. Not just of individual salvation. Not just fixing our individual broken relationships with God but fixing all the brokenness in our world—sickness and disease and broken human systems that cause poverty and oppression. Jesus *said* this was His mission and then He *showed* it was His mission by the things He did in His ministry—healing disease, raising the dead, calming natural disasters, feeding the hungry, casting out demons, and overturning human systems of oppression, inequality, and injustice. All the things He did gives us a glimpse of what God's final kingdom will be like—a place where there is no evil, no suffering, no pain, no injustice.

Jesus taught a kingdom of God that is “upside down” from the world—the first will be last and the last will be first, serving others rather than seeking power over them, the meek are blessed, etc. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray for God's kingdom to come to earth as it is in heaven, but we are also supposed to live in a way that reflects His kingdom on earth. We are citizens of heaven sojourning here on earth (Philippians 3:20), but we aren't just passing through. We aren't supposed to hide in our holy huddles waiting for the

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consummation to come. We are meant to seek the welfare (*shalom*—wholeness, peace, prosperity) of the world around us while we are here (Jeremiah 29:4–7).

### **B. Opening Discussion: (5–10 minutes)**

- Describe different communities in which you have been involved, both church communities and other communities like neighborhoods, schools, sports groups, volunteer organizations, etc. What things in those communities were healthy and strong (i.e. bringing food when a neighbor is sick)? What things were unhealthy or even toxic (i.e. gossip)?
- Where have you seen healthy communities outside the church?
- What is it about those communities that makes them appealing for people to join?

People can belong to a lot of different communities. Besides your neighborhood or your church, your child's school or sports teams may have their own community. You may be part of a volunteer organization like Kiwanis or Rotary Club. You may be a member of a country club, golf club, or pool. You may be part of a community who shares the same hobbies like a gardening club, running club, or bridge club. Or you may get a sense of community from a place you frequent like your local coffee shop, gym, or restaurant.

There are even business models that focus heavily on the idea of creating community among their clients or members because they know, beyond any product or service, what people are really longing for is community. Starbucks became so popular because they not only focused on making coffee but also on becoming a “third place” where people could hang out together, besides work and home. In all its advertising, Crossfit says, “This is not a gym, it's a community.” Their website says, “We build strong local communities that drive unparalleled progress and a deep sense of belonging.” These successful companies advertise this way because they know what people today really long for, what many of them are missing, is a sense of community. A sense of belonging.

A deep sense of belonging is what a healthy church provides. The message of the gospel is not only being able to have fellowship with God through the reconciliation found in Christ but also fellowship with other believers. The two go hand in hand. Love God and love others are two sides of the same coin. John tells us you cannot say you love God and not love His people.

Churches are only really being the church when they are living in a loving community with all members having equal value as part of the body of Christ and being celebrated for the unique gifts they bring to the body, all working together to fulfill His mission in the world. When our churches operate as a healthy body, we create the kind of community people want to be a part of. The kind of community that gives people a deep sense of belonging, purpose, connection to each other, and connection to God.

As great as Crossfit or Kiwanis or other organizations may be, only the church can provide this kind of community by the power and unity of the Holy Spirit. But when churches aren't operating as healthy bodies and strong communities, places like Crossfit step in to fill the void of community and try to meet that need for people through other means, like exercise and human connection, instead of the Holy Spirit.

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- Describe your own need for belonging. How have you felt this need throughout your life? Where and how have you had that need met?
  - How can people benefit from a strong community? What impact can it make on their lives?
  - How can we as a church do better at providing a healthy community with a strong sense of belonging that people want to join?

### **C. Teaching: The Gospel and Community: The Counterculture (20 minutes)**

#### **a. The Counterculture**

This section is called “The Counterculture” because when we are following Jesus, our Christian communities will look different from the world because the ways of Jesus are countercultural. This doesn’t just mean countercultural in the way we look at sexuality or the sanctity of marriage, but in all things—the way we approach sex, money, power, career, unity, truth-telling, service, relationships, pleasure, justice, compassion, everything. In life-giving ways, not ways that tear others down.

Where the world tells us to “look out for number one,” Jesus told us to put others first. Where the world tells us to hoard wealth for ourselves, Jesus told us to give it away. Where the world tells us to make connections with those of influence and power, Jesus told us to look out for the “least of these.” Where the world tells us to pursue pleasure, Jesus told us to pursue godliness.

When we are living in a truly Christ-like way, our communities will be countercultural in a way people will find refreshing. As we shine the light of Christ into the dark world, our communities will become a “city on a hill,” a refuge from the storms of the world around us (Matthew 5:14–16). A safe place where everyone is loved, provided for, and valued as a part of the unified body.

#### **b. The Ekklesia**

The English word “church” comes from a Greek word that means “the Lord’s,” as in “the Lord’s Supper,” “the Lord’s day,” “the Lord’s house,” as in, the church is the people who belong to the Lord. However, when we see the word “church” in Scripture, it is an English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “assembly.” The church is the assembly of the people. We are the church. Not the building or the institution, but *us*.

But in the New Testament, *ekklesia* came to mean the people of the assembly whether they were assembled or not. This means we are not only the church when we meet on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights; we are the church wherever we are, all the time. On Monday mornings in our cubicles, on Saturday mornings at our kids’ soccer games. At the Thanksgiving table with our crazy, mixed-up extended family. In the hospital room when we visit our dying friend. Everywhere, all the time. Because God’s Spirit dwells in us. Not in a sanctuary, a temple, or a building, but in our bodies. Not inside walls, but in our hearts. When we go out into the world, we bring the Spirit with us. We bring the “church” with us everywhere we go.

#### **c. The Early Church: Acts 2:42–47 and 4:32–35**

Acts 2:42–27 and 4:32–35 give us beautiful, idealistic descriptions of the church as a picture of the kingdom of God on earth, a place where no one is in need, everyone gets along, everyone selflessly helps one another and works united as one body for the good of the whole community and the world:

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- They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking bread together. In their culture eating together was something that united people as community. By sharing meals, people who had more could share with those who had less so no one went hungry.
  - Miracles were being performed; everyone was in awe.
  - Everyone shared their possessions and even sold what they had to give to those in need so that there were no poor among them.
  - They met together every day and ate in one another's homes. This was a true community, one big family.
  - The Lord added to their number every day.
  - They were all completely united, "of one heart and one mind."

This was a miraculous ideal community that was only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. At this point in the church's history, the Holy Spirit had just been poured out over them at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) and then again after Peter and John were arrested (Acts 4:31). Each of these events took place just before a description of this idyllic church community. But it started out as a basically perfect picture of what the kingdom of God is like and what the final kingdom will be like—no suffering, no pain, no poverty, no inequality, no division, everyone living as one in fellowship with one another and with the triune God.

In the very next chapter, sin began to creep into this community that had started out so strong. The first two sins that crept into the church were sins against the community. First, a couple withheld sharing all their possessions with the rest of the community and lied about it (Acts 5). Then, those who were supposed to share food with the widows, one of the most vulnerable groups of their community, started to make divisions between the Hellenistic widows and the Hebraic widows (Acts 6).

But when the church first started out, it was a beautiful picture of the kingdom of God. They were united in prayer, filled with the Holy Spirit, and completely dependent on Him. When the Holy Spirit is guiding a church and everyone submits themselves to the Spirit, it will be such a beautiful picture of the kingdom that it will draw other people in to want to join. People will look at the way we love and care for one another in community and say, "I want to be loved that way!" The church is the kingdom of God on earth, His people living by His ways as a light to the rest of the world. Not a physical kingdom in a single location but a spiritual kingdom made up of believers living in all the nations of the world. Each of our individual churches is like an outpost of His kingdom, and our role is to be His ambassadors.

#### **d. The Body of Christ: 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12**

1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 describe the church as the body of Christ, one body with many different members who all work together to do His work in the world. The church isn't just an organization but a body that has life. The Spirit gives us a unique life and soul. The head is Christ, not a human being. He is the leader, the authority, the one we follow. And the Spirit is the heart, the soul, the conscience of the body. We are just the body parts. Though we all have different roles, every role is equally important. The body of Christ has no hierarchy. We are a priesthood of all believers. We are a royal people, all of us. In a strong church, members appreciate their own functions *and* the functions of others. No one person thinks of themselves as any better or any worse than the other. And they all work together to accomplish the mission.

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We all have to work together, or the body doesn't work. Statistics tell us that in too many churches only 20% of the people do most of the work. A heart functioning at only 20% would be considered to be in heart failure! If our church bodies are only operating at 20% capacity, no wonder the kingdom isn't growing the way it did in the book of Acts! In the early church, there were leaders, of course, but also everyone in the church worked together as a body. They all were equal and unified. They lived in community and contributed what they could. And the church exploded. Imagine what our churches would be like if we *all* worked together at full capacity, if we went from 20% to 100%!

We are Christ's body, His hands and feet. We should be doing *His* work in the world. He is the head, the command center; we simply carry out His plans and His commands. That means asking ourselves what Jesus would be doing if He were here in the flesh. What would He care about? What things in this world would break His heart? What would He be working to fix?

**e. Love One Another: John 13:34–35 and 1 John 4:7–12**

Jesus told His disciples that His "new" command for them, the one command that encompasses all other commands, was to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34). We put "new" in quotes because it's not really a new command; it's the same thing Scripture has been telling us from the beginning. All of God's commands boil down to love, loving God and loving others.

The Bible says we are God's household, His family, His children (1 John 3:1). We are all brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Timothy 5:1–2). Jesus said His real family were not his blood relatives but all those who do the will of the Father (Matthew 12:48–50). A strong family loves one another, takes care of one another, shares with one another, spends time together, worships and prays together, is vulnerable with one another, trusts one another, and serves one another.

And when things go wrong—which they will do in *any* relationship—they don't sweep it under the rug and pretend everything is okay. But they also don't give up on one another. They work through conflict and come out stronger in the end. Just as it is common for biological families to be dysfunctional, it is also common for church families to be dysfunctional. But if we let the Holy Spirit be our guide, if we submit to Christ as our head, we will be a strong family who weathers the hard times together and comes out stronger in the end.

The Bible contains more than fifty "one another" verses about how we are to treat others in Christian community (most of the ones below are repeated numerous times). When we look at these verses as a group, we get a great picture of what it looks like to love another in a unified community as one body, one family in Christ:

- "Love one another just as I have loved you" (John 13:34).
- "Outdo one another in showing honor" (Romans 12:10).
- "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16).
- "Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you" (Romans 15:7).
- "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9).
- "Have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7).
- "Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16).
- "Be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50).
- "Be kind to one another" (Ephesians 4:32).

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- “Forgive one another” (Ephesians 4:32).
  - “Bear with one another” (Ephesians 4:2).
  - “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).
  - “Comfort one another” (2 Corinthians 13:11).
  - “Care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25).
  - “Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16).
  - “Pray for one another” (James 5:16).
  - “Encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
  - “Build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
  - “Teach and admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16).
  - “Sing with one another” (Ephesians 5:19).
  - “Stir up one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).
  - “Do good to one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
  - “Serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).
  - “Wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14).
  - “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another” (1 Peter 5:5).
  - “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).
  - “Speak the truth to one another” (Ephesians 4:25).
  - “Do not speak evil against one another” (James 4:11).
  - “Do not pass judgment on one another any longer” (Romans 14:13).
  - “Do not provoke one another” (Galatians 5:26).
  - “Do not envy one another” (Galatians 5:26).

If we are doing all these things for another, we will be a healthy, unified church. If we are staying in prayer for one another, then even when we have conflict, we will have the humility and spiritual focus to work through it. If we are always focused on building one another up instead of tearing one another down, and stirring up one another to love and good deeds, we won’t have as much conflict. If we serve one another and submit to one another, our hearts will constantly be looking for how we can help the other person, not gain something for ourselves. All of these “do nots” will help us curb conflict before it even begins—not speaking against one another, provoking one another, judging one another, envying one another. A community that “one anothers” this way will create that beautiful picture of the kingdom of God that the first church did after Pentecost.

#### **D. Application: Love as a Witness (25–30 Minutes)**

##### **a. Opening Discussion: Debriefing the Study**

- How did this study help you better understand the purpose of Christian community?
- How did it help you understand what Christian communities are supposed to be like?
- Compare/contrast our church community to the description of the early church. Be honest. What kind of picture are we portraying to the world of what the kingdom of God is like?
- In what ways do you struggle to work with other believers as the body of Christ?
- Why is it hard to work toward and maintain unity in the “big C” church?

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- How is it hard to work toward and maintain unity in our church? What practical steps can we take to stay unified even when we have conflicts or disagreements?
  - Describe conflicts you have experienced in church in the past. What caused the conflict? How did you work through it? What was the result of the conflict?
  - How have you seen church leadership handle conflict in the church body? What healthy examples have you seen? What unhealthy examples have you seen and what damage did they cause?
  - How can we do a better job of valuing every person's gifts and contributions equally?
  - How can we maximize our effectiveness so we are operating at 100% capacity as the body?
  - Describe ways you have seen the church loving one another in an unusual, supernatural way. Give specific examples of times you have seen unusual *agape* love.
  - Describe times you have personally been attracted to the love of Jesus you have seen in a particular individual, friendship, small group, non-profit ministry, or church community. How did seeing that kind of love make you want to draw closer to Jesus?
  - Look back at the "one another" verses listed above. How can a community that lives that way affect the people *inside* the community? How could it impact the world around them?
  - Which of those things (love, forgive, live in peace, etc.) do you find most difficult to do?
  - What practical steps can you take to grow your spiritual maturity in loving the way Jesus loves?

#### **b. Attracting People to Our Community**

If we have received the love and grace of Jesus in our lives, then that love and grace should overflow from us out into the world. This isn't just something we "ought to" do; it is part of our new nature as a new creation in Jesus, His masterpiece, created for good works (Ephesians 2:10). Now that we are a new creation, loving others should be a natural thing for us because it's a natural thing for Jesus. It is simply who He is. Therefore, as His followers, who have been made new creations in Him and are being transformed into His image more each day (2 Corinthians 3:18; 5:17), it is who we are too. Jesus said the world will know we are His people by this amazing, godly, selfless *agape* love we have for one another and our deep unity that isn't natural for human beings but can only come from the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

*"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another"* (John 13:34–35).

Though all believers should be a witness for Jesus individually, an even greater witness can be how we love one another within the church as the body of Christ. When people look at the way we love one another, they should know we belong to Jesus.

The church should be radically different from the world in the way we love one another. Instead of each person trying to hoard resources for themselves, we should be sharing all we have as one big family. Instead of being divisive, we should be so unified despite our differences that people are amazed and ask, "How can those people get along so well? How can they love each other so well?" It should be so different from what they see in the world that it looks like a "counterculture," an alternate society, an alternative way to live that is so attractive they want to be a part of it, just like people did with the first church. Acts says the first church *"enjoy[ed] the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"* (Acts 2:42–47).

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Remember how we said people are looking for community, for a sense of belonging? When we live together in a healthy Christian community, we become the place everyone around us is looking for. This is the “attractional” part of the mission of the church, attracting people to “come in” to our church communities. The missional part is the “going out,” which we’ll talk about in the next lesson. Some churches feel they have to choose either an attractional or a missional model for ministry, but at King’s City, we believe attractional/missional is not an “either/or” thing but a “both/and.”

When we live in a way that embodies the way of Jesus in Christian community, we give the world around us a picture of the kingdom of God—people from all different nations, tribes, tongues, experiences, and backgrounds who are united in a supernatural love and exist to glorify God with their lives and serve the world around them.

- In what ways does your individual life look countercultural?
- In what ways does the American church look countercultural?
- In what ways does the American church look just like the world instead of like Jesus?
- How can we be countercultural in a way that is attractive to unbelievers, not in a way that turns them off to Christianity or seems hostile or judgmental?
- What does it tell us about Jesus that loving other people the way He loves us is “countercultural,” that is, opposite from the way the world loves?
- How is Jesus calling you personally to help build community in our church?

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**King's City Church: Leadership Curriculum**  
**Lesson 4: The Gospel and the City: Missional Living**

**E. Introduction: Review (<5 minutes)**

**Lesson 1: The Big-Picture Plan of the Bible: The Gospel**

In the first lesson, we looked at the overall big picture of the Bible as God's rescue plan to save the world: Creation → Fall → Redemption → Consummation. We live in the time between redemption and consummation. As believers, we have individually been made new creations, but creation has not yet been made new. The world around us is still broken. This makes us ambassadors of the kingdom of God living in a foreign land, in hostile territory. We bring a message of peace from our king, the message of reconciliation to the world, both by our words and our actions. Our mission isn't just about saving souls; it's about reconciling every broken thing in our world—disease, oppression, sickness, pain, suffering—to the way God created it to be and the way it will be in the consummated kingdom.

**Lesson 2: The Gospel of The Kingdom: The In-Between**

In the second lesson, we looked at the ministry of Jesus while He was living as a human being on this planet and what this tells us about our mission and ministry in the world. Jesus was sent to preach the good news of the kingdom of God, not just of individual salvation. Not just fixing our individual broken relationships with God but fixing all the brokenness in our world—sickness and disease and broken human systems that cause poverty and oppression. Jesus *said* this was His mission and then He *showed* it was His mission by the things He did in His ministry—healing disease, raising the dead, calming natural disasters, feeding the hungry, casting out demons, and overturning human systems of oppression, inequality, and injustice. All the things He did created a picture of what God's final kingdom will be like—a place where there is no evil, no suffering, no pain, no injustice.

**Lesson 3: The Gospel and the Community: Counterculture**

In the third lesson, we looked at church as a community that is countercultural to the world. Not just in the way we look at sexuality or the sanctity of marriage, but in all things—the way we approach sex, money, power, career, unity, truth-telling, service, relationships, pleasure, justice, compassion, everything—in life-giving ways, not ways that tear others down. When we are living in a truly Christlike way, our communities will be countercultural in a way that people will find refreshing. As we shine the light of Christ into the dark world, our communities will become a "city on a hill," a refuge from the storms of the world around us (Matthew 5:14–16). A safe place where everyone is loved, provided for, and valued as a part of the unified body.

**F. Opening Discussion: Living on Mission (5–10 minutes)**

- How have you seen people outside of the church talking about finding purpose in their lives? Where do they find their purpose?
- What would you say is the mission of your life? Your calling? Your purpose?
- What would you say is the mission of the church?

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- How are your personal mission and the mission of the church related?

In our modern American culture, most young people don't want "just a job" anymore; they want to work at something they care about, something that matters. They want their work to have purpose. The business world is producing books like *Find Your Why* and *The Purpose Revolution*. Research says more than anything else—more than job flexibility, cool perks at work, even more than higher pay—millennials and Gen Zers want to feel like their work matters, like it means something.<sup>iii</sup> People are looking for purpose in their work because God designed us to live with purpose, not just float through life pursuing pleasure, wealth, or success for their own sakes. Even unbelievers feel the need for purpose, even if their idea of "purpose-driven" is something different than God's mission.

As the body of Christ, we all have the same purpose, the same mission in life. No matter what your job is, your *life's mission* is to make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). The details of how that mission plays out in each of our lives may look very different because we are different parts of the body with different skills, talents, gifts, resources, and life situations. And the specifics of our part in the mission may change over the course of our lives as our circumstances or life stages change.

God's will for our lives can be something that looks "big" to the world, like becoming a missionary, starting a non-profit, running for office, or writing a book. But we can also do big things for God's kingdom right where we are, no matter where we are. Because anything we do for God's kingdom is a "big thing." What the world may see as small things are big things when we do them for Jesus, because our mission as Christians isn't defined by *what* we do with our lives but *how* we do it—for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). Just like there are no unimportant parts in the body of Christ, there are no small parts in God's mission.

Living on mission for Jesus isn't about doing something big or flashy for God. It's about orienting whatever your life's work is to the bigger-picture purpose to which all believers are called—building the kingdom of God. And your life's work doesn't just mean your career. It means whatever you are doing with your life, everything you are doing with your life. Career, parenting, relationships, hobbies—all of it is part of your life's work, so it's all part of the mission.

- If you reoriented your life to focus on living out the mission of the church, how would it change your life? What would it look like for you to live your life for the mission of the church?
- What unique gifts, talents, resources, and passions do you bring to the body of Christ? How can you use those things for the big picture mission of building the kingdom of God?
- In what ways can you do "big things" for God in your ordinary, everyday life?

## **G. Teaching: The Gospel and the City: Missional Living (30 minutes)**

### **a. Garden to City: Creation to Consummation: Revelation 21:1–4 and 10–14**

When we look back at our big-picture story of salvation, we see that the first part (Creation) takes place in the first two chapters of the Bible (Genesis 1–2) and the last part (Consummation) takes place in the last two chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21–22), creating bookends to the story of the Bible. When we read about the new creation, we see many similarities but also significant differences that lead us to the theological point that the Consummation isn't just a restoration of the original pre-fall creation; this is God making something new (Revelation 21:5).

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The original creation was a garden, but the new creation is a city. We tend to think of gardens as more natural places and cities as being man-made. The Holy City is completely made by God, not man, but by using the imagery of a city for the final kingdom, God acknowledges the history of human civilization that has occurred since the garden and how humans have participated with Him in building His kingdom. This is why the names of the tribes of Israel were written on the gates and the names of the apostles on the twelve foundations. This is God acknowledging that His people helped Him build His kingdom (Revelation 21:12–14), showing us that our life’s work matters. God doesn’t *need* us to build His kingdom; He can do it completely by Himself. But He has invited us to participate with Him in building His kingdom: “*For we are co-workers in God’s service*” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Scripture says both—that Jesus will build His church Himself (Matthew 16:18) *and* that we are coworkers with God in building His church. Each of our lives is like a building block in the kingdom of God. We are living stones of His temple (1 Peter 2:5). Christ is the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). The apostles laid the foundation on Christ and each of us lays our own block on top to build a solid building. God has assigned “each his task,” but we “have one purpose”—building the “temple” of God, the church, which is the kingdom of God here on earth during the church age, between the Redemption and the Consummation (1 Corinthians 3:5–11, 16–17):

- In the Consummation, God will make all things new, and He will bring His kingdom in its fullness.
- Until then, Jesus is building His church, the kingdom of God on earth, through us.

We all have the same overall mission, to build the kingdom. Yet for each of us, the “stone” we lay on “God’s building” may look completely different, depending on our own gifts, resources, and calling.

- The imagery of the church as the body of Christ shows us many different parts all working together to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world.
- The imagery of us as living stones shows us that each of us contributes to building the kingdom of God with our *whole* lives.

Our whole lives are an offering to the Lord, a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). It’s not just a few hours on Sunday, it’s every hour of every day. It’s not just the service projects, prayers, evangelism, Bible studies, and other “spiritual things” we do, it’s *everything* we do. It’s a whole lifestyle. It’s how we live, talk, think, act, and treat people in everything we do and everywhere we go.

#### **b. The Mission: Matthew 28:19–20 and Acts 1:8**

In the last lesson on the counterculture, we talked about our church communities as a city on a hill that shines as a light of God’s love, drawing people into our churches. Church leaders sometimes debate about whether their churches should be “attractional” (like a city on a hill that draws people *into* their church) or “missional” (like apostles who *go out* into the world on mission). The biblical answer isn’t either/or, it’s both/and. The early church was both a community of believers who drew people in by the light of their love (attractional) *and* a community who went out into the world to share the gospel with unbelievers and make disciples of all nations (missional).

#### **i. To Make Disciples: Matthew 28:19–20**

The mission Jesus gave His disciples is found at the end of Matthew and beginning of Acts because the Gospels are the story of Jesus’s mission on earth, and Acts is the story of how the church continued His

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mission in the world. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples to teach them more about the kingdom of God because that was their mission—to build the kingdom of God on earth (Acts 1:1–3). Jesus knew He was going back to heaven to be with the Father and sending His Spirit to them, and He commissioned them to carry on His mission to the world:

*“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20).*

This is called the Great Commission because we believe it wasn’t just a commission to those few original disciples. It’s meant for all disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere in all generations. When we read it in English, it looks like the command is to “go” and “make disciples.” But in the original Greek, the only imperative verb (command) is “make disciples.” The word “go” is a participle, meaning “as you go” or “wherever you go.” This tells us we don’t have to go somewhere different to make disciples. We can fulfill God’s mission wherever we are, as we go through our daily lives.

Instead of thinking about “mission work” as something missionaries go do in other countries, the Great Commission shows us that every member of the church is a missionary in their own daily lives, every minute of every day in every situation. Being a missionary isn’t a job, it’s our *identity* as Christians. Church leaders have recently started calling this “missional living” or “living on mission,” but it’s not a new concept. It’s been the mission of the church since the beginning:

- The word “apostle” means “one who is sent on a mission.” Our God is a sending God: He sent Jesus into the world to save the world (John 3:17), and Jesus told His disciples that just as God had sent Him into the world, so He was sending them into the world (John 20:21).
- When Paul told the Corinthians that believers have been made new creations in Christ, he said that makes us ambassadors for God’s kingdom to the rest of the world. Ambassadors are those sent from one kingdom to another to bring the good news of peace from their king (2 Corinthians 5:17–20).

It’s not just an assignment we’ve been given, it’s our identity as Christians. Every Christian is an apostle. Every Christian is an ambassador. Every Christian is a witness. Every Christian is a disciple-maker. The Great Commission isn’t just for missionaries or pastors, it’s for every disciple. It isn’t a program or a project, it’s a way of living—living on mission for the kingdom of God.

### **c. How to Fulfill the Mission: Acts 1:8**

In Acts, Jesus told the disciples *how* to fulfill the mission of making disciples: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).*

#### **a. through the power of the Holy Spirit**

When we read the book of Acts, it is clear that everything the disciples did was accomplished by the power of the Spirit. They were completely led by the Spirit. When the Spirit said go, they went. When the Spirit said stop, they stopped. The Spirit empowered them to do mighty things, and the Spirit was involved in their day-to-day lives. You could even call this book the Acts of the Holy Spirit instead of the Acts of the Apostles because it was really the Holy Spirit working through them. When we live on mission for the kingdom, we need to let the Spirit lead us like the disciples did.

#### **b. by being His witnesses**

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When witnesses testify in court, they just tell their story—what they personally have seen and heard. They don't have to tell the whole story of the whole situation; they don't even know that. They just tell their story of what they know to be true. The same is true for us as witnesses for Christ. It's okay if we don't have all the answers. We don't have to have a degree in apologetics or biblical studies to be His witnesses. We simply need to tell what we've seen and heard, what Jesus has done in our lives. The more we study the Bible, the more we will know about the whole big-picture story of how God has worked in the world. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will have to say about how He has changed us, not just in that moment of salvation but every day through His Holy Spirit. But even from the very first moment we believe, we all have a story to tell.

**c. *everywhere we go***

Jesus told His disciples they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem (their city), in Judea (their nation) and Samaria (their enemies), and to the ends of the earth. Through the remainder of the book of Acts we see them doing just that, following that geographical path—Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), Judea and Samaria (Acts 8–12), and the ends of the earth (Acts 13–28). Some of the apostles stayed in Jerusalem and some traveled to other places. Not everyone went on missionary journeys. In the same way, we can be His witnesses right here or to the ends of the earth, wherever God calls us. The goal is to make disciples “of all nations,” or more literally “of all people groups.” God wants *everyone* to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). He shows no partiality to certain nations, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic statuses, or any other group. All are welcome in His kingdom.

Every single person in God's kingdom is called to this same mission, to make disciples of all kinds of people. No matter where we live, what we do as a career, whether we're introverts or extroverts, Bible scholars, or new to the faith. The only question is, what will it look like in your life, in your corner of the world, in your family, among your friends, in your workplace, in your spheres of influence?

Jesus calls *every* believer to *live on mission* in their neighborhood, workplace, school, grocery store, soccer game—everywhere they go. Every one of us already has a mission field where we already are. We don't have to develop a new network; we already have all kinds of people around us who need Jesus. We simply have to identify our spheres of influence and intentionally think and pray through how we can reach those people for Christ, how we can be His witnesses each and every day, everywhere we go.

In your daily routine, you naturally have the opportunity to share the gospel every day with people who are far from God. You are the light in a dark world; you take Jesus with you. Just like we send missionaries to Cambodia or Liberia or Turkey, *you* are our missionaries to Houston. Every single Sunday we send *you* out from this place into the world to take Jesus with you into your workplaces, neighborhoods, and everywhere you go.

**d. *Seek the Shalom of the City: Jeremiah 29:1–14***

In the Old Testament, when God's people were taken into exile in Babylon, they felt lost and confused. They had lost their land, their temple, their freedom. They were exiles living in a pagan land ruled over by a pagan king. They had always been taught that being God's people meant being set apart from the world; they didn't know what it meant to be God's faithful people in a pagan nation. The false prophets among them said this exile was only temporary, they just needed to sit tight and God would rescue them soon. But the true prophet, Jeremiah, who was still in Jerusalem, sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon

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telling them the exile would last seventy years, which meant that generation would die in exile and their kids or grandkids would be the ones to return to their own land. Jeremiah told them to go ahead and settle in Babylon:

*“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease” (Jeremiah 29:5–6).*

They would have to learn what it looked like to live as citizens of God’s kingdom in another land. That’s what the stories in the exilic books of Daniel and Esther are about. Their stories align with what Jeremiah told the people to do here, which may have sounded surprising to them at the time. Jeremiah told them to go ahead and settle down, but he did not tell them to stay separate from the Babylonians, as they might have imagined. They had been used to the idea of being “set apart” for God as meaning physically set apart in their own land. But Jeremiah told them to:

*“Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).*

God did not expect them to create a “holy huddle” inside Babylon and just keep their heads down until the exile was over. He wanted them to be set apart not physically but spiritually—to be “in the world, but not of the world.” God wanted them to seek the “peace and prosperity” of Babylon. In Hebrew, it is “seek the *shalom* of the city.” *Shalom* is translated “peace,” but it means much more than our English idea of peace; it’s wholeness, welfare, human flourishing. These were their enemies, the people who had conquered them and taken them into exile, yet they were supposed to work for their flourishing. This is how they would find their own flourishing.

As Christians, we are all living as “exiles” in the “foreign land” of the world. We are citizens of God’s kingdom living among His enemies, the kingdom of darkness. But instead of our churches creating holy huddles to stay set apart from the world, we are called to go into the world and be ambassadors for His kingdom, to bring the light to the kingdom of darkness. But that doesn’t just mean sharing the gospel message with people; it also means bringing human flourishing to the world around us.

**This is the gospel of the city.** It doesn’t have to mean a “city,” as in an urban area. For those who live in rural or suburban areas, those places are their “Babylon.” But at King’s City Church, we do live in an urban area, so for us the “city” we are to seek *shalom* for is a literal city. Houston is the place God has planted our church; it is our mission field.

#### **e. Incarnational Ministry: John 1:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:19–23**

The greatest model of living on mission is Jesus Himself. Jesus didn’t sit in heaven waiting for people to come to Him. He came down to our world and met people where they were, in the middle of their mess (John 1:14). Once He was in the world, He didn’t live segregated in a “holy huddle” with only the “good religious people” around Him, waiting for people to come to Him for teaching, healing, or salvation. He did gather a group to live with in community, but He also did not hesitate to go out into the world to meet people where they were, even when the “good religious people” criticized Him for befriending sinners (Luke 15:2).

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This is because His attitude wasn't only missional, it was incarnational. Theologically, we use the term "incarnation" to describe how Jesus became a human being, God incarnate. He became one of us to meet us where we are. But it wasn't only His birth that was incarnational. Jesus also lived incarnationally in His day-to-day life. He lived among His people, meeting people where they were, and building authentic relationships with them. He lived on mission, but He didn't treat people like projects. He truly loved them as they were and shared the gospel with them as a message of hope, to save them and bring them into a better life with Him in His kingdom.

Paul described the same style of incarnational ministry in Corinthians. Just like the religious leaders criticized Jesus for befriending sinners, people criticized Paul for living like a Gentile when he shared the gospel among the Gentiles. He described his ministry as becoming "like a Jew" to win the Jews and "like a Gentile" to win the Gentiles. He "became all things to all people" so he might win some of them to the gospel. He wasn't changing himself to fit in. He was describing the process of meeting people where they are and connecting with them to show them how Christ can change their lives.

For missionaries going to a foreign country, this would mean learning their language, eating their food, dressing the way they do—truly immersing themselves in the culture so they "become one of them" the way Jesus became one of us. But those of us who live as missionaries in our daily lives here in the States can live incarnationally among the people we're trying to reach for the gospel too. That could mean learning to "speak the language" of your non-Christian friends instead of using "Christianese." It could mean learning a new sport or eating new foods or going to new places to connect with those you're trying to reach. It could even mean going to the tent cities where our homeless neighbors live to meet them where they are instead of expecting them to come to our church. There are myriad other ways we can go into the world to meet people where they are and build authentic relationships with the hope of leading them to Jesus. Incarnational ministry is living among the people we are trying to save instead of being separated out in a "holy huddle" in our church communities. Treating those we are reaching out to like real people, not projects. Meeting them where they are, building authentic relationships, and making real connections that lead to real conversations about how Jesus can change their lives.

## **H. Application: Your Mission Field (15–20 Minutes)**

### **a. Opening Discussion: Debriefing the Study**

- How did this study help you better understand the theology behind missional living? How did it help you understand why we feel called to bless the city of Houston and seek its flourishing? How did it help you better understand your role in the world and your purpose in life?
- Reflect on the idea that your mission is more than just your career, it's seeing *everything* you do as your "life's work." How does this affect your understanding of what it means to integrate faith and work? How does it help you understand what it means to live on mission for the kingdom?
- What fears do you have about sharing your faith with others? What holds you back from being His witness everywhere you go in all situations?
- Give some examples of how the way you live can bear witness to the gospel without even having to say a word, as an individual and as a family?
- How can you be Christ's witness in your neighborhood? Your city? To the ends of the earth?

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- If you had to share your testimony of what Jesus is doing *right now* in your life (not how you came to know Jesus originally), what would you say?
  - How can you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in your life? How can you know where He is leading you to go?
  - In what ways would you like to learn more about how to share your faith or live on mission for the kingdom at all times? How can you learn?
  - Think of at least three people in your life who are far from God. Reflect on ways you can connect with them, learn to “speak their language,” and meet them where they are. How can you reach out to them with the love of Jesus this week?
  - Do you feel *compelled* to tell other people about how Jesus has changed your life? Why or why not?
  - How might imagining your role as an ambassador for the kingdom of God change the way you think about your day-to-day life? Your big-picture life choices?
  - Think about other good news you share with people—like “You have to try this great new restaurant. We loved it!” Or “That movie was so good. You should totally go see it!” Why is it easier to share those kinds of things than to share the good news of the gospel? If it really is the best news ever, if it really has changed our lives, why don’t we want to share it with everyone all the time? How might we change that?
  - Reflect on places in your community that might be considered “messy.” How might God be calling you to go into those places with the light of Christ and truly incarnational love?
  - Think about the places you typically go in your day-to-day life and the people you interact with there. How can you live missionally in those places “as you go”?

#### **b. Your Spheres of Influence (Worksheet)**

The city of Houston is our church’s mission field, but each of us has our own personal “mission fields” created by where we live, work, and play in our everyday lives. In addition to your workplace, you may spend a lot of time at the gym or with your kids’ travel baseball team or at a local coffee shop. In each of those places, there are people with whom you interact who do not know God. Those are your spheres of influence. Using the attached worksheet, “My Spheres of Influence,” label each circle as one place you regularly go. Then write down the names of the people with whom you interact in each of these spheres. Some people may be in more than one sphere, hence the overlaps. These are the people you will be focusing your B.L.E.S.S. practices on over the next two months until we meet again in the fall semester.

#### **I. SUMMER HOMEWORK: The B.L.E.S.S. Method**

The B.L.E.S.S. Method is a practical way to practice incarnational ministry and missional living with people in your spheres of influence. The use of “bless” for the acronym is intentional because when God first called Abraham, He said He was blessing him so that he could be a blessing to the world (Genesis 12:3). This is our mission—to bless the world, to seek the *shalom* of the city.

In the book, *The Missional Entrepreneur*, Mark Russell references a study of two different mission strategies used in Thailand. One group went with the goal to convert as many people to Christianity as possible, the classic goal for missionaries over the centuries. The other group went with the goal to simply bless as many people as possible. When this group of missionaries described their role, they would say, “I’m just here to bless whoever comes my way,” or “I just want to be a blessing to the people in my community.”<sup>iii</sup> The irony of the findings of this study is that those who set out to bless the

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community around them actually saw *fifty times* as many people come to faith in Jesus than the group who set out to convert people to faith in Jesus.

If we frame our mission with the goal of converting people, we start out by seeing people as projects from the beginning. People tend to sense that immediately, and they usually don't feel loved by it. The relationship doesn't feel authentic to them. But when we start with the goal of blessing people, we are motivated by love and service. We focus on loving people and let the Holy Spirit do the work of converting. He's the only one who can do the converting anyway (1 Corinthians 3:5–7).

- **BEGIN WITH PRAYER.** Like Jesus did, like the disciples did at Pentecost, and like every major spiritual movement of the church did throughout church history, we must start with prayer. Because we want to be led by the Holy Spirit, not our own ideas.
- **LISTEN.** Before we speak, we must listen. Like Jesus did, really listen to where people are coming from—what their needs, worries, hopes, and dreams are. This is how we can meet people where they are, make them feel heard, and find out what they need.
- **EAT.** This is where we really build relationships with people. From the beginning of time, across every culture, people have come together over food and drink to connect, to celebrate special occasions, even to mourn. This is why there are so many stories in the Gospels of Jesus eating with people. It doesn't have to be anything fancy; it could be as simple as grabbing a coffee together, as elaborate as a dinner party, or anything in between. The goal is just to connect and build relationships.
- **SERVE.** Serving others is intentionally listed before sharing our testimony, because serving is how we share the gospel with our actions, and actions speak louder than words. If we want people to know how much God loves them, the best way is to show them. When people see the selfless love of Jesus that is so different from what the world gives, they will ask why we are so different. It's also intentional that it comes after listening and eating, because it is in those steps of relationship building that we learn how we can best serve people instead of assuming we know what they need.
- **SHARE YOUR STORY.** It is only in this final step, after we have done the hard work of praying for the Spirit's leading, listening, building real relationships, and serving, that we share our story, because it is only after all of that that we have "earned the right to be heard." People don't care what you know until they know you care. It's at this point that you can start sharing spiritual things naturally in conversation and share your story of how Jesus has changed your life. Not in a "bait and switch" kind of way, so people feel like you only became friends with them to witness to them, but because you authentically care about them.

Over the next two months until we meet again, we want you to follow this method in whatever way the Holy Spirit leads you with whichever people He is leading you.

- **Begin with prayer** – Ask God to identify a few people in your spheres of influence with whom He wants you to build relationships.
- **Start out by intentionally and authentically listening** to those people, seeking to understand.
- **Invite them to eat with you** – It doesn't have to be in your home; it could be just meeting for coffee or lunch. But involve food because eating together builds relationship. Continue to listen and seek understanding during this stage. Particularly listen for ways you can serve them.
- **Serve** – Continue to pray and listen for ways you can serve this person. How can you show them God's love in action?

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- IF THE LORD LEADS YOU, AFTER all these other steps, share your story with them. Just your simple testimony of what you have seen and heard. How Jesus has changed your life. No pressure or deep theology (unless they ask!), just share your story.

If you don't get all the way through to the end, at least try to get to the "serve" step in at least one relationship. Reflect on how God is leading you through the whole process.

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## PART TWO: THEOLOGY IN PRACTICE

### Lesson 5: Leading Like Jesus

#### A. Opening Discussion: Debrief Summer Missional Living

Discuss your experience with intentional missional living in your spheres of influence over the summer.

- How did you decide which people to reach out to in your spheres of influence?
- How did you connect with them? Give specific examples or stories.
- How did you implement the B.L.E.S.S. method? What did you find easy, simple, or natural about it? What did you find difficult, awkward, or uncomfortable?
- Where did you see God work in you and through you through this practice?
- What did you learn from focusing on intentional missional living for the summer?
- How will it change the way you live going forward?

#### B. Introduction to Spiritual Leadership (<10 minutes)

- What is spiritual leadership? What does it mean to lead someone spiritually?
- What makes leadership in the context of the church different from leadership in other arenas?

In this class, we will talk about leadership in the church context, but the principles can translate to any arena in the world. “What would Jesus do?” is still the question every Christian should ask, no matter where we are or what we’re doing, whether in the church or in the world. Whether we are in an official position of leadership in the church or not, we are all spiritual leaders because God calls us His ambassadors to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). At the same time, leadership in the church is different because our mission is different. All Christians have the same overall goal of building God’s kingdom, whether we are in a boardroom or a sanctuary. But the work of a church is different than the work of a business, even a “Christian business.” Chick-fil-A may consider themselves a “Christian business” in that they operate by Christian principles, but their primary goal is still to offer a product/service in exchange for money. The goal of a church is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18–20). Spiritual leadership can happen individually from person to person in any context, but spiritual leadership in a church context is its own thing with its own structure and practices.

When looking at *spiritual* leadership, we may need to set aside some of our traditional thinking on what makes a good leader. Spiritual leadership is leadership by *spiritual* people using *spiritual* methods to accomplish God’s mission in the world. Spiritual leadership:

- can only be exercised by people who are filled with the Holy Spirit.
- must be modeled after Jesus’s own form of leadership.
- leads people to God the Father.

Note the three persons of the Trinity in this definition. That is no coincidence. Spiritual leadership is leadership by the Spirit, modeled after the Son, which leads people to the Father.

##### 1. Led by the Spirit

We can talk about many other characteristics when it comes to spiritual leadership, but first and foremost, spiritual leadership cannot happen without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (John 15:5). In the first church in Acts, the apostles were completely led by the Spirit. If the Spirit told them to go somewhere, they went. If the Spirit told them not to go somewhere, they didn’t. *Everything* about those first leaders was Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided. Even when they chose the deacons, who handled the logistical aspects of church life like serving meals rather than teaching, the apostles didn’t look for people who were known for their cooking, administrative, or other physical skills but insisted on choosing leaders “known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Then they prayed and laid hands on them to ordain them for this ministry (Acts 6:6). They served tables, but they also performed signs and wonders and shared the gospel too. Whether you are preaching, teaching, organizing church potlucks, or leading mission trips, spiritual leadership is leadership *by the Spirit*.

This means the spiritual leader’s primary task is to stay connected to the Holy Spirit. Which means lots of time spent in prayer, personal Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines, listening for the Spirit’s guidance. Everything else a spiritual leader does flows out of their connection to the Holy Spirit.

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## 2. Modeled after Jesus

As He is our model in *all* things, so Jesus is our model for leadership. Jesus described His style of leadership as servant leadership (Matthew 20:24–28; John 13:14–15). The essence of spiritual leadership is *serving people*. As Christians, we aren't put in leadership positions for the power, honor, glory, authority, money, or any kind of personal gain. We are in leadership positions to *serve* our people, to care for them like a good shepherd cares for his sheep.

Scripture uses this shepherd-sheep metaphor for leadership throughout both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament prophets criticized the leaders of Israel who were “bad shepherds” of the people, and God called Himself the good shepherd who did care for them (Ezekiel 34). Jesus wept over His people, who were “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). He called Himself the good shepherd who cared for the sheep and even laid His life down for them (John 10). The New Testament describes church leaders as shepherds of their flocks (1 Peter 5:2). The word “pastor” comes from the Latin word for shepherd.

## 3. Leads People to God

Throughout Israel's history, when the people had a godly leader, they stayed loyal to God. When they had a bad leader or no leader at all, they turned away from Him—from the very beginning. When their godly servant-leader, Moses, was away on top of the mountain, the people started worshipping other gods (Exodus 32). But when Joshua recommitted his family to the covenant, the people followed suit (Joshua 24). The book of Judges shows a repeating cycle of leadership. When they had godly leadership that kept them following God's law, things went well, but when they didn't, “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judges 21:25). In the monarchy, the same pattern emerged. When a king was faithful to God, the nation followed suit. When the king worshipped other gods, the people did too. In the Old Testament, a king's faithfulness to God was the standard by which he was measured as “good” or “evil.” The people followed their leaders, either toward God or away from Him. It was only with a godly leader that the people followed God. With a bad leader or no leader at all, the people did whatever is right in their own eyes. It took a godly leader to bring them back to the Lord.

When Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd, He said others came “to steal and kill and destroy,” but He came to bring abundant life (John 10:10). This is the difference between a bad spiritual leader and a good one: a good leader brings life; a bad leader brings death. A good leader brings peace; a bad leader destroys it. A bad leader uses the people for his own personal gain; a good leader serves the sheep. A bad leader encourages the people to follow him; a good leader points people to God.

- Describe your experience with spiritual leaders in your past, both personal spiritual mentors as well as church leaders, small group leaders, etc. How did those people help you grow in your faith?
- What things would you like to emulate about these leaders and why?
- What things have you seen in church leadership that seem unhealthy? How can you prevent those things from happening in your spiritual leadership?
- What is different about the way the leaders of the world lead versus the way Jesus led? Give some specific modern examples.

## C. Teaching: Servant Leadership (40 minutes)

### 1. Upside Down from the World

- What qualities make a good leader and why?
- How does humility make a good leader? How does it impact those you lead?

*“Worldly conceptions of greatness and leadership cannot be carried over to His spiritual kingdom. In that kingdom there is a complete reversal of earth's values.” —J. Oswald Sanders<sup>iii</sup>*

When the disciples fought over who was the greatest among them, Jesus told them that the Gentile leaders lord their authority over their people, but His disciples should be different. In His kingdom, the greatest is the one who serves the people (Matthew 20:25–26). The world's definition of leadership is having authority over people. Jesus's definition is serving people.

The values of the kingdom of God are upside-down from the world. The world tells us to be ambitious, pursue our passions, be aggressive, and climb the ladder of success even if we have to step on people to get there. But the Bible tells us life isn't about worldly success. Paul said not to do anything out of selfish ambition but to do

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everything out of humility the way Jesus did when He gave up His throne in heaven to become a human being and sacrifice Himself for us (Philippians 2:1–8). We are put on this earth to love and serve others. When the world tells us to look out for number one, Jesus said to look out for the poor, the marginalized, the abused, and the oppressed. When the world tells us to network with people who can help us get ahead, Jesus said to serve those who can't do anything for us in return. When the world tells us to put ourselves first, Jesus said the first shall be last. When the world tells us to climb the corporate ladder, Jesus said to kneel down and wash feet (John 13).

## 2. Motivation and Method

Robert Greenleaf, who coined the phrase “servant leader” in the business world in the 1970s, wrote: The servant leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions.

First, the **motivation** of the heart of a servant leader is different. But also the **method** of the servant leader is different. So then too is its **effect**:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived? A servant leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and the communities to which they belong. While traditional leadership generally involved the accumulation and exercise of power by one at the “top of the pyramid,” servant leadership is different. The servant-leader showers power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible.<sup>iii</sup>

Greenleaf may have coined the phrase, but the concept of servant-leadership is as old as Scripture. This is exactly how Jesus, our Suffering-Servant King, led His people. It is how God commanded His leaders to behave from the beginning. In His covenant law, God said the kings in His kingdom would be different from other nations. They wouldn't accumulate horses, wives, or wealth for themselves but would serve their people in humility, not considering themselves more important than anyone else (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). Servant leadership was even the model all the way back to Adam and Eve. They were given dominion over all creation but for the purpose of *serving* it (Genesis 2:15).

## 3. In the Business World

In more recent years, quite a bit of business research has found that the most effective leaders are not the dominant, take-control types but the servant leaders.<sup>iii</sup> Doug Guthrie, former dean of the George Washington University School of Business, wrote that American business schools teach students to be aggressive, distinguish themselves, and stand apart from the crowd, but the most needed quality in leadership is actually humility. Guthrie concluded that we have been teaching our kids the wrong way to succeed in life, and he admits the Bible had it right all along. “American culture does not prepare us for this approach to leadership, nor does academia. Humility has a deeply embedded place in religious history (as a central tenet of most faith teaching), but it is rarely referenced in American business teachings. And it is certainly not what we teach in American business schools.”<sup>iii</sup> In an article for *Inc.*, Jessica Stillman describes what humility means in more detail and how it makes you more effective in team building:

Humility is manifested in self-awareness, openness to feedback, appreciation of others, low self-focus, and pursuit of self-transcendence. Humble people willingly seek accurate self-knowledge and accept their imperfections while remaining fully aware of their talents and abilities. They appreciate others' positive worth, strengths, and contributions and thus have no need for entitlement or dominance over others ... CEOs who were humble were more likely to empower the top management team, which in turn enabled the management team to be better integrated. The empowering organizational climate then trickled down through the middle managers which increased their job performance, commitment and engagement with work.<sup>iii</sup>

An article from *Harvard Business Review* describes how Steve Jobs, as brilliant as he was, ultimately failed as a business leader because of his lack of humility:

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Jobs, for all of his virtues, clings to the Great Man Theory of Leadership—a CEO-centric model of executive power that is outmoded, unsustainable, and, for most of us mere mortals, ineffective in a world of non-stop change ... It wasn't all that long ago that most everyone in business assumed that if you were in charge, you needed to have all the answers ... That was the sign of true ambition—absolute confidence in your infallibility as a leader. Over time, though, it has become a warning sign of failure—whether from bad judgment, low morale from disillusioned troops, or sheer burnout. The best leaders I know don't want the job of thinking for everybody else. They understand that if they can tap the hidden genius inside the organization, and the collective genius outside the organization, they will create ideas that will be much more powerful than what even the smartest individual leader could ever come up with on his or her own. Nobody alone is as smart as everybody together.<sup>iii</sup>

#### **4. Self-Sacrificial Leadership**

Lots of business books and articles do not recommend sacrificial leadership.<sup>iii</sup> They say there is a difference between “servant leadership” and “sacrificial leadership,” and sacrificial is just going a bit too far. But when Jesus called Himself the good shepherd, He said He laid down His life for His sheep. He gave it all. He sacrificed everything for His people. There really isn't any gray area there. Jeffrey A. Matteson and Justin A. Irving, writing for the *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, wrote that:

Self-sacrificial leadership occurs when a leader forfeits one or more professional or personal advantages for the sake of followers, the organization, or a mission ... Several studies [have] found that self-sacrificing leaders were attributed charisma by followers and were perceived to be more influential, legitimate, and effective ... Followers of self-sacrificial leaders intended to reciprocate the self-sacrificing behaviors, were more committed to their organization, and performed at a higher level ... Self-sacrificial leadership [is defined] as the total/partial abandonment, and/or permanent/temporary postponement of personal interests, privileges, and welfare in the (a) division of labor, (b) distribution of rewards, and/or (c) exercise of power ... leader self-sacrifice includes the loss of status, credibility, and promotion ... leaders may sacrifice to demonstrate courage and conviction in the mission while serving as a role model, maintain personal beliefs and values, and exhibit commitment to the cause, or, simply, for the good of the company.<sup>iii</sup>

This does sound like Jesus. He did it all for the good of the “company”—the kingdom of God. His leadership style was follower focused. His self-sacrifice inspired His followers to also be self-sacrificial; most of His disciples died as martyrs themselves. They followed in His footsteps when it came to laying down their lives for their people and for their cause. He was charismatic, He gained influence, He was influential and effective, all through self-sacrifice. He literally died for the cause, for the mission, for the good of His people.

To be a shepherd like Jesus is to be a lay-down-my-life kind of leader. It has to be about God's kingdom, not about us. All we do must be done with that bigger purpose beyond ourselves in mind. Jesus was about His Father's business and nothing but His Father's business (Luke 2:41–52). He came to do God's work—what God told Him to do and only what God told Him to do (John 5:19). Though He had desires and feelings, He submitted them all to God's will (Mark 14:36).

Is everything I am doing focused on the kingdom of God? On serving others and serving God? When I relate to people out in the world, am I putting their needs ahead of my own? Am I even thinking about their needs? Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. Humility isn't looking down on yourself, it's about putting others' needs ahead of your own (Philippians 2:3).

#### **5. Shepherd Leadership**

First Peter closes by telling the elders how to lead as shepherds of God's flock like Jesus:

*“Watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ... Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time” 1 Peter 5:2–3, 6.*

Peter used the metaphor of shepherd leadership because it is found throughout the Bible as a model of how God cares for His people:

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- God is a good shepherd who tenderly cares for His people, protects them from harm, and provides for them (Psalms 23, 79:13, 80:1, 95:7, 119:176; Isaiah 40:11, 53:6–7; Luke 15:1–7).
  - There are false, evil shepherds who try to steal and abuse His flock, leading them not with love and humility but using them for their own gain (Jeremiah 23:1–8; Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11).
  - The sheep need a shepherd. They cannot be left on their own (Numbers 27:17; Zechariah 10:2).
  - The Son of David will be that one shepherd who reunites Israel (Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23).
  - Jesus is the good shepherd who tenderly cares for His sheep, guides them, protects them, lays down His life for them, and pursues the sheep who are lost. (John 10; Luke 15:1–7).

God expects His leaders to care for His people the way a good shepherd cares for his sheep. This was one of Jesus's last charges to His disciples before He ascended to the Father: "If you love me, *feed my sheep*" (John 21). All church leaders are to care for their people as a shepherd does for his sheep.

## 6. *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard & Phil Hodges<sup>iii</sup>

In *Lead like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges wrote that effective leadership begins not with implementing new leadership tactics but with developing your character and your heart as a leader. Many leaders fail because they're focused on leadership strategies or tactics rather than developing themselves as a leader. They use Jesus as the ultimate model for leadership and, like we have already said, describe Jesus's leadership style as servant leadership. Servant leadership is not about exercising authority over people but influencing people. The authors broaden the traditional definition of leadership to include anyone who seeks to influence other people:

*"Leadership is a process of influence. Anytime you seek to influence the thinking, behavior, or development of people in their personal or professional lives, you are taking on the role of a leader."*

—Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges

Jesus is our role model in all things, including leadership. But Jesus is also an effective role model for many of the situations leaders face today. He experienced communication in a multicultural environment; handled criticism, opposition, and rejection; trained and developed others; and delegated His tasks to them. Although Jesus was God, He humbled Himself and gave up His throne in heaven to come down and live among us. He did not feel ashamed to meet us at our level to understand the needs of people. In the same way, servant leaders should meet people where they are to effectively understand them and know how to serve and empower them. The authors divide leadership into four domains, two internal, two external: heart, head, hands, and habits.

### a. **The Heart: Why You Lead**

This is the most important of the four domains and the place to start. It's all about motive. Are you a servant leader or a self-serving leader? This comes down to E.G.O.:

- Are you **Edging God Out**? (caused by pride and fear)
- or are you **Exalting God Only**? (through humility and confidence)

### b. **The Head: What You Think**

This domain deals with your point of view, beliefs, and theories about leading, motivating, and influencing others. Jesus's point of view was clearly servant leadership (Mark 10:45). The authors nicely define two roles of a servant leader:

- A visionary role – setting the course and the destination
- An implementation role – doing things right with a focus on serving

Both roles are needed, and Jesus exemplified them both.

### c. **The Hands: What You Do**

This is where the rubber meets the road. Now that you have worked on developing your inside, your heart and your head, what's inside you shows up through your actions. The authors suggest that a servant leader becomes a performance coach for those he oversees:

- setting goals
- observing performance
- praising good behavior and redirecting inappropriate behavior

A leader goes through four stages of learning:

- Novice – just starting out

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- Apprentice – in training
  - Journeyman – capable of working independently
  - Master – highly skilled and able to teach others

#### **d. The Habits: How You Stay on Track**

The final section addresses the need to refresh and renew your daily commitments to remain a servant leader. Here too we can learn from Jesus and how He replenished His energy and servant perspective. Jesus embraced:

- Solitude, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines
- Knowing the will of God
- Fellowship with an intimate group of companions (or inner circle)

### **7. The Emotionally Healthy Leader**

#### **a. Spiritual Health and Emotional Health**

In his book, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, pastor Peter Scazzero pinpoints a major reason so many churches, mission organizations, and other Christian ministries find themselves with members and staff who are defensive, judgmental, proud, arrogant, stubborn, hypocritical, and compulsive:

“Christian spirituality without an integration of emotional health can be deadly—to yourself, your relationship with your God, and the people around you. ... Emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable. ... Emotional immaturity is when one allows deep, underlying layers of our lives to remain untouched by God.”<sup>iii</sup>

Much of the evangelical church focuses so much on the spiritual part of people’s lives that they neglect the emotional. But the Bible describes humans as integrated beings with a body, soul, mind, and spirit that interact and deeply impact one another. When we focus only on the spiritual, one of the lies we are prone to believe is that all “negative” emotions are bad, so they are to be avoided at all costs. For example, they might believe anger is unloving or that sadness indicates a lack of faith. But Jesus, who never sinned, experienced both intense anger and deep sadness in His time here on earth.

#### **b. Jesus’s “Negative” Emotions**

- When Jesus arrived at the temple at Passover and saw people selling sacrificial animals and exchanging money in the temple courts, He was so angry He made a whip and drove them out. He poured out their coins and turned over their tables (John 2:13–17).
- When Jesus looked out over Jerusalem, He was so moved with sadness that they had rejected God that He wept (Luke 19:41–44). When He was praying the night before His death, He said, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38).
- When Jesus saw Mary and her friends and family weeping over Lazarus, John wrote that Jesus “was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled” (John 11:33). In this case, He was sad *and* angry. That word for “deeply moved in spirit” literally means to snort with intense displeasure, indignation, and anger. Jesus didn’t just have emotions; He had *intense* emotions.

If Jesus experienced those emotions, the emotions themselves aren’t sinful. The Bible even talks about *God* experiencing emotions many of us consider “negative.” Besides joy and delight, He experienced anger when Israel disobeyed (2 Kings 17:17–18) and regret at having made mankind (Genesis 6:6–7). Sadness and anger aren’t bad in and of themselves. It is completely appropriate to be angry or sad at sin, death, disobedience, and brokenness. The Bible even tells us to *hate* what is evil and cling to what is good (Romans 12:9). God gave us these emotions for a reason—so we can know deep down in our gut that the world is not as it should be.

The real issue not having the emotions but what do we do with them. How we handle our emotions can cause normal, healthy emotions to cross over into sinfulness. Paul wrote in Ephesians, “In your anger do not sin.” This implies we will be angry at times and that there is a kind of anger that is not sinful (Ephesians 4:26). Instead of trying to suppress our emotions, we are called to harness our emotions for good—to love God and love others.

#### **c. Assessing Our Emotional Health**

The ironic thing about emotional health is that you can look super spiritual and even super “successful” on the outside but on the inside be operating from a place of emotional immaturity. A lot of times, it’s not something we are aware of until things explode. The author, Pete Scazzero, was in several prayer groups a week, studying God’s

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Word, fasting regularly. He was doing all the right stuff and his church grew in a lot of ways for seventeen years. But one day, everything started to unravel in both his ministry and his personal life, and he realized that although he seemed spiritually mature, he was emotionally immature. And he learned very quickly that “you cannot be truly spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature.” He had to dig deeper to explore what was going on underneath, in his heart.

**d. HOMEWORK: Personal Assessment**

**HOMEWORK:** [The Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Personal Assessment](#)<sup>iii</sup>

*Students will take this assessment at home on their own time. The assessment is a questionnaire, but below is a description of what each of the four levels of emotional health looks like in our lives:*

**Emotional infant.** I look for other people to take care of me emotionally and spiritually. I often have difficulty in describing and experiencing my feelings in healthy ways and rarely enter the emotional world of others. I am consistently driven by a need for instant gratification, often using others as objects to meet my needs. People sometimes perceive me as inconsiderate and insensitive. I am uncomfortable with silence or being alone. When trials, hardships, or difficulties come, I want to quit God and the Christian life. I sometimes experience God at church and when I am with other Christians but rarely when I am at work or home.

**Emotional child.** When life is going my way, I am content. However, as soon as disappointment or stress enters the picture, I quickly unravel inside. I often take things personally, interpreting disagreements or criticism as a personal offense. When I don't get my way, I often complain, throw an emotional tantrum, withdraw, manipulate, drag my feet, become sarcastic, or take revenge. I often end up living off the spirituality of other people because I am so overloaded and distracted. My prayer life is primarily talking to God, telling Him what to do and how to fix my problems. Prayer is a duty, not a delight.

**Emotional adolescent.** I don't like it when others question me. I often make quick judgments and interpretations of people's behavior. I withhold forgiveness from those who sin against me, avoiding them or cutting them off when they do something to hurt me. I subconsciously keep records on the love I give out. I have trouble really listening to another person's pain, disappointments, or needs without becoming preoccupied with myself. I sometimes find myself too busy to spend adequate time nourishing my spiritual life. I attend church and serve others but enjoy few delights in Christ. My Christian life is still primarily about doing, not being with Him. Prayer continues to be mostly me talking with little silence, solitude, or listening to God.

**Emotional adult.** I respect and love others without having to change them or becoming judgmental. I value people for who they are, not for what they can give me or how they behave. I take responsibility for my own thoughts, feelings, goals, and actions. I can state my own beliefs and values to those who disagree with me—without becoming adversarial. I am able to accurately self-assess my limits, strengths, and weaknesses. I am deeply convinced that I am absolutely loved by Christ and, as a result, do not look to others to tell me I'm okay. I am able to integrate doing for God and being with Him (Mary and Martha). My Christian life has moved beyond simply serving Christ to loving Him and enjoying communion with Him.

**D. APPLICATION: Group Discussion (20 minutes)**

**1. Questions about Servant Leadership**

- Think about Jesus being the Lord of the universe but coming down to earth to live as an obscure peasant and serve others, even people who would betray Him. What kind of heart and attitude does it take to do that? Where does that heart and attitude come from? How can we develop that?
- What did Jesus give up to come to earth? How did Christ show true humility in His life on earth?
- How does the Bible describe humility? Why is it important to have “humility of mind”? How can putting others' needs ahead of your own help you be a strong leader?
- Describe Christian leaders over the course of history who have given their lives in service to others. What made their leadership style different than a typical leader in the world? How did they impact the world around them?
- How can you serve others around you that you are not already doing? How can you look for opportunities to serve in your leadership position?
- What lowly jobs in your life and ministry do you need to be willing to kneel down and do? What difference would it make to the people you lead to see you doing the work of a servant?

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- Give some modern examples of how self-centered leaders can use their people instead of serving them (you don't have to name names, just describe the situation).
  - Describe any experiences you've had with domineering, dictatorial leaders inside or outside the church (without naming names). How did they affect their communities?
  - How can you develop the heart of a servant as a church leader? What specific disciplines and habits can you practice to build more humility in your life?
  - How would having a servant's heart affect your attitude, habits, and behavior?
  - How would your life be different if you *always* put others' needs ahead of your own?
  - In what ways do you make sacrifices for your people?
  - Describe what a self-sacrificial pastor looks like. What is their attitude and demeanor? What are their habits and disciplines? What does their weekly schedule look like? How do they relate to their staff and volunteers? How do they treat the people in their congregation? What are their values?
  - Specifically, in your leadership role right now, what would it look like for you to give your life for the people you serve?

## **2. Questions for "Lead Like Jesus"**

- Heart – Looking at your own leadership right now, in what ways do you show a heart that exalts God only? In what ways do you struggle with edging God out, either through pride or fear?
- Head – Describe your theories and beliefs about leading and motivating others. How do they compare to Jesus's leadership model in Scripture? What parts of your philosophies do you think need to be re-evaluated in light of Jesus's model?
- Hands – Think about your current leadership role in the church, whether as a volunteer or paid staff. How do you implement serving others by your actions and not just your philosophy? How do you live out servant leadership? In what ways do you struggle with servant leadership?
- Habits – How can you implement solitude and prayer in your regular schedule while serving in church leadership? How can you prioritize your inner life? How can you pursue and discover the will of God for your church or ministry? Why is fellowship with an inner circle so important? How can you find and build a strong inner circle while serving in church leadership?

## **3. Closing Activity**

- Ask the class to make a list of the five richest people in the world, the past five Super Bowl winners, the five most important people in Hollywood, and the top five most powerful government leaders.
- Next, have them write the names of five people who have made the most impact on their lives.
- Which list was easier to come up with? What does this tell you about what's really important?
- What made those five people so meaningful to you? How would you describe their character?

The people who make the most difference in our lives aren't the richest, the most famous, the most talented, or the most powerful. They're the people who have loved us, served us, and poured their lives into ours. How will you make an impact on the lives of the people in your life? How can you live in such a way that your name will end up on someone's "five most meaningful people in my life" list one day?

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## Lesson 6: Ministry Skills: Teaching God's Word

### A. Introduction to Ministry Leadership (5 minutes)

- Reflect on churches you've been involved in in the past. Whether their leadership boards were called elders, deacons, trustees, or something else, what kind of qualities did they look for in their leaders? Why?
- What qualities do you think are important in a ministry leader? Why?
- What kind of skills do you think a ministry leader should have and develop? Why?

When it comes to putting people in leadership, many modern churches tend to think like the business world. They often choose those who are successful in business or have particular skills. If they need an elder to oversee buildings and grounds, they may choose someone who has a background in construction. If they need an elder to oversee budgeting, they may choose someone in finance. For an elder to oversee personnel, they may choose a person who works in HR. But in Scripture, the qualifications for leadership are much more focused on character, like being temperate, self-controlled, hospitable, and gentle. The only skill mentioned is "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Because teaching God's Word is the work of the church.

Being "able to teach" doesn't necessarily mean being a charismatic or eloquent preacher, but it does mean ministry leaders must "[hold] firm the trustworthy word," instruct in "sound doctrine," and rebuke unbiblical ideas (Titus 1:9). The focus of the pastoral epistles is on teaching sound doctrine. Elders must not teach "different doctrine" but should model and teach doctrine with the power to save their hearers (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:16). They must rightly handle the word of truth, avoiding "godless chatter" that leads people "to become more and more ungodly" (2 Timothy 2:15–16). Their teaching should produce "repentance" and "a knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 2:25). Scripture focuses more on the content and result of teaching than it does on style or charisma. You may be able to captivate a crowd, but if your teaching isn't true and it doesn't produce holiness, it's not sound teaching. We don't teach God's Word just to fill people's brains with knowledge but to change their hearts and their lives.

- Even if you aren't the lead pastor who preaches regularly, God calls everyone in leadership to teach His Word in one way or another. Reflect on your own calling, gifting, personality, and role in our church and community. How has God called you to teach and preach His Word?
- Are there other ways you can preach and teach that you aren't currently doing?
- How can you better prepare yourself to be able to teach sound doctrine?
- How can we encourage and help one another to be better prepared to teach sound doctrine?

### B. Teaching: Ministry Skills (30 minutes)

#### 1. Preparation for Teaching

Before we teach the Bible, we need to study it for ourselves. When pastors, teachers, and theologians study a passage in preparation to preach a sermon, teach a Bible study, or write a book, they spend a whole lot more time studying the passage than most people realize. The finished sermon is just the tip of the iceberg, the visible part; the preparation is exponentially more. A ton of work must be done to understand what a Bible passage truly means before we can understand what it means for us today.

##### a. The Need to Interpret

*But, people argue, it's the Bible. It's God's Word. Doesn't that mean it should always be taken literally? The Bible doesn't need to be interpreted. We should just read it and do what it says, right?*

Reading the Bible can be compared to reading Shakespeare. How many people can pick up Shakespeare for the first time and immediately know exactly what he was saying? None of us! That's why we study it in classes and teachers have to explain what it means. Not because it's bad writing but because we have so much cultural and historical distance from the time, language, and culture of Shakespeare that it's not immediately understandable to us. And it's even written in English; the Bible has the added layer of being originally written in a different language. And much longer ago than Shakespeare was.

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The same is true for the Bible. We can't just take what it says at face value. Nobody actually takes the Bible completely "literally," even those who argue for it. If we took the Bible literally, we should all cut out our eyes and throw them away (Matthew 5:29). Some level of interpretation goes into everyone's reading of Scripture.

### **b. Interpretation before Application**

In some Bible studies and small groups, people just read a passage out loud and then share "what this passage means to me," on the fly. But a responsible study of the Bible will go through a process of studying the original context of the passage to discover what it meant to its original hearers before we can think about what it means to us.

- Exegesis: Figuring out what the Bible passage meant to the people who originally heard or read it.

*Only then can we move on to:*

- Hermeneutics: Figuring out what the Bible passage is saying to us today.

*Only then can we move on to:*

- Application: Applying that Bible passage to our lives.

The real work of a sermon or lesson or book is all the stuff underneath that no one sees—the time spent researching, praying, and wrestling with the original meaning of a text. It's a lot of work, and it's tempting to skip this part and just get to the life application, the part that feels relevant to our lives. But if you don't spend the time researching and wrestling with the text in the exegesis phase, you may draw wrong conclusions in your application.

### **c. Exegesis**

When we are studying what the text meant for its original hearers, we have to look at the context of the passage.

In every passage there are two levels of context:

- Historical Context: what is going on in that place and time with those people
  - Who was the author? (details about their life, style of writing, themes, concerns, etc.)
  - Who were they writing to and why?
  - Where did this take place? What are significant things to know about that place?
  - What was going on politically, socially, economically, spiritually at the time?
  - Where does the book fit in the overall salvation history of the Bible?
  - What significant cultural particulars are there to consider? (things like what a shepherd did, what city walls were like, what the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was like, etc.)
- Literary Context: what is going on in the passage itself
  - What genre of literature is it?
  - What is the structure/outline of the book, and where does this passage fit in it?
  - What was said before this passage, leading up to it?
  - What images, symbols, idioms, phrases, etc. were used?
  - How does this connect to the rest of Scripture? (themes, theology, etc.)
  - Meaning of Hebrew/Greek words
  - Grammar and sentence structure

All these questions can make a huge difference in our understanding of a passage. Even things that may seem simple and straightforward at first might take on a different meaning when we look at it in its context. A very common verse to be taken out of context is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through him who gives me strength," which is often used as personal encouragement that we can do anything we put our minds to or that Jesus can help us achieve whatever we want. But Paul wasn't talking about God helping him get what he wanted; he was talking about God helping him being content, whatever his circumstances, even suffering. This is a very different meaning!

You want to wrestle with as many of these questions on your own first as best you can, before you consult a commentary. Consulting a good commentary is the last step in the exegetical process, because commentaries are someone else's *interpretation*. Even if a commentator tries to be as objective as possible, they can make mistakes, and some are intentionally slanted in one direction or another based on the author's personal or doctrinal beliefs. Others try hard to offer all perspectives on a doctrinal issue and let the readers choose which make the most sense to them.

- Know Your Presuppositions: Each of us comes to Scripture with a different perspective, a different backstory, and different emotional baggage. It is impossible to read Scripture in a completely objective way. We can't get rid of our presuppositions, but it's important to be aware of the presuppositions and prejudices we bring to

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the text, to be honest with ourselves and consider them in our interpretation. Self-reflection should be a part of our interpretive process.

- **Discuss With Others:** This is also why it's important to discuss our interpretations with people who are different from us, to hear their perspective, which may be different from ours. If you listen only to people who agree with you, you live in an echo chamber and will become more narrow-minded. God's body is full of diverse people from all different backgrounds. Not just here in America either but also from other countries. And we have the opportunity to read writings from previous generations, where people had different experiences and perspectives too. We need to learn from believers who are different from us both in background and theology.
- **Beware of Eisegesis:** Exegesis is drawing out the original meaning of the text. Eisegesis is putting meaning into a text that was never there. An obvious example of eisegesis is when Jim Bakker said that the "locusts" in Revelation 9:7–11 were actually helicopters because they had breastplates of iron and the sound was like the thundering of many horses. This is taking something from our modern world and superimposing it onto the Bible.

#### d. Hermeneutics

Once we determine what the text meant to its original hearers, we are ready to move to the next step of the process, determining what it means for us today. In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart give us three basic rules of hermeneutics:<sup>iii</sup>

**1. A text cannot mean what it never meant.**

This is the eisegesis we discussed above. Don't put meaning into the text that the original author never would have meant, like putting helicopters in the Bible.

**2. Whenever we share common particulars with the original hearers, God's Word to them is the same as His Word to us.**

For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:1–6, Paul told the Corinthian believers that if they had a dispute with another Christian, they should take it before the church to judge between them, not the secular courts. This is something that can be directly applied to our context today.

**3. When we do not have comparable particulars, we must translate the application of the *principle* the passage teaches into a modern context of genuinely comparable situations.**

When the cultural context is different from our modern context, we don't just apply it directly. We have to develop a biblical *principle* from the text—the theological point of the passage—that we can then apply to our own situation today.

**The Principle:** This is the "big theological idea" of the text. If you were explaining this to a child, what would you say? Examine cultural differences to understand the eternal meaning behind the text.

For example, the law of gleaning, that you should leave some of your crop unpicked for the poor (Leviticus 19:9).

This law is specific to the way things were done in their cultural context, but the principle of the law—to provide for the poor—is universal. We apply the *principle* to our context, not necessarily the particular law. We don't just ignore this law because we aren't farmers who own a field of crops; every word of the Bible is relevant to all of us (2 Timothy 3:16). But we develop a *principle* from these laws that don't fit our context and apply the *principle* to our context.

**a) First, distinguish between the *central core message* of the Bible and what is dependent upon or *peripheral* to it.**

This is to protect the gospel from being turned into law through culture or religious custom and keep the gospel itself from changing to reflect every new cultural expression. What is the *universal, eternal truth* and what is just the *expression* of that truth in their culture or our culture? For example, in Romans 16:16, Paul said to "greet one another with a holy kiss." Does this verse mean all Christians should always kiss each other in greeting? If not, what broader principle behind this specific command is universal to all times and places?

Examine cultural differences to understand:

- What did a kiss signify in their culture? What does it signify today?
- What makes a kiss "holy"?

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- Why do we have to greet one another at all?
  - How could this verse be abused and misconstrued to actually do evil?
  - What other questions might we need to ask of the text?

In this verse, we have a peripheral command, not a universal one. Most of us don't believe Christians *have* to greet one another with a kiss, especially because in some cultures, kissing is offensive. From this peripheral command, we can deduce a universal principle. What is the *meaning* behind the command? The central core meaning is that we need to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is the universal truth for all cultures. Paul commanded them to *show* this love by *greeting* one another in what was a loving way in their culture. But the specifics of that loving greeting may change from culture to culture. In some cultures, it may be a "holy kiss"; in others it may be a hug or something else.

**b) Distinguish between what the Bible sees as an *inherently moral* issue and what it does not. Things that are not inherently moral may change from culture to culture.**

Example: Paul's sin lists are inherently moral issues, not cultural (Romans 1:29–31; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9–10; 2 Timothy 3:2–5). The same is true for his behavioral imperative lists (Romans 12; Ephesians 5; Colossians 3). These are universally true in all cultures.

However, footwashing, eating marketplace idol food, women wearing head coverings while praying or prophesying, women teaching in the church, Paul's personal preference for celibacy, etc. are not inherently moral issues. They only *become* moral issues when they are abused—either through some kind of disobedience or a lack of love.<sup>iii</sup>

**c) Determine where the Bible has a *uniform and consistent* witness and where there are differences.**

- Consistent: Love as the Christian's basic ethical response; personal ethic of nonretaliation; the wrongness of strife, hatred, murder, stealing, drunkenness, and sexual immorality of all kinds.
- Differing views (just one example for now): Women in ministry:
  - Passages seemingly "for" women in ministry: Romans 16:1–3, 7; 1 Corinthians 11:5
  - Passages seemingly "against" women in ministry: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35; 1 Timothy 2:12

We find seemingly differing views on this subject from the same author; it looks like Paul allowed women to teach in some places and in others he didn't. So he did not hold as a *universal principle* that all women everywhere should remain silent but just the women at Corinth and Ephesus at that particular time. As we look deeper into the historical context, it makes perfect sense that the women in those places would not be allowed to teach.

The women of Ephesus and Corinth were not educated and were being led astray by false teachers. This is a huge difference between their world and our world; women are as equally educated as men in our culture. These women were also asking questions and arguing with the preacher in the middle of church. They had never been taught proper etiquette in a worship service, because in their culture women weren't allowed in these kinds of environments with men except for in the church. Their presence in worship actually shows us how *pro-women* Christianity is. The church was revolutionary in its time in allowing women in these public spaces and encouraging them to learn and worship alongside men. Since Paul encouraged women in other places to teach, the issue wasn't that *all women everywhere* should be quiet, but that *these particular women* needed to be silenced until they learned themselves.

If we think about it, it makes sense that there would be verses that "seem to" conflict with one another. Not because they *actually* conflict, but because Paul was speaking to different people in different places with different issues.

**Translating the theological principle to our culture:** Just because passages are culturally specific doesn't mean they don't apply to us! It just means we need to apply them in a way that makes sense and communicates the intent of what Paul was saying. We can still apply his advice in an appropriate way. The issues in Corinth and Ephesus were:

- allowing uneducated people to teach
- allowing people to yell out questions or argue with the pastor during worship

We can apply that today. No one (not just women) should disrespectfully yell out questions, thoughts, or disagreements with the pastor during a worship service, and no one who is not well trained in the faith and

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theology should be teaching others. This actually makes the application of these verses much more important and much bigger than just saying “women can’t teach or preach.”

**d) Learn to distinguish between *principle* and *specific* application.**

For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:5–6, Paul told women not to pray or prophesy with their heads uncovered. He said, “But *if* it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.”

**Specific application:** Paul was specifically appealing to a custom here. “*If* it is disgraceful ...” He was saying whatever in your custom is considered disgraceful, don’t do it! A woman without a full-length veil covering her head would not be a problem in our culture.

**Principle:** The purpose of this advice was to refrain from being a distraction in worship by doing something that was culturally considered disgraceful so people didn’t spend the whole worship service talking about how disgraceful it was that so-and-so wasn’t wearing a veil.

What might be distracting for people to wear in worship because it is considered disgraceful in our culture? What about *doing* something considered disgraceful in worship? The goal is to find the *spirit* of the law, not the letter, and then translate that to today’s culture.

**e) Keep alert to possible cultural differences that are sometimes not immediately obvious.**

For example, when Paul told the Romans to respect authority, we need to consider the differences between our government and theirs. In our culture we’re allowed to vote people into office. How does that difference affect the way we apply Romans 13 in modern America? What *universal principles* can we glean from this passage to apply to our culture without putting meaning into the text that isn’t there?

**f) Finally, we must exercise Christian love and charity.**

Unity in the essentials, liberty in the non-essential, and charity in all things. There will be non-salvific issues about which people disagree. Christians need to recognize the difficulties in different theological issues and open the line of communication with one another. Instead of arguing, taking sides, or drawing a dividing line between us, we need to work together to come to an agreement as best we can. Even if we don’t agree on an issue, we need to disagree with respect and love, always. Always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Let your speech always be seasoned with grace (Colossians 4:6). Approach a theological discussion with humility, realizing that no one has all the right answers, and everyone comes with their own presuppositions and prejudices, some of which you may not be able to see until they are pointed out to you (Ephesians 4:2–6; Colossians 3:12–14). Instead of fighting about *particulars*, find the *universal principles* you can both get behind. Show patience, humility, and love. Keep working through your differences but without fighting. Discuss, don’t argue (2 Timothy 2:14–19; 23–26).

**2. Preaching and Teaching**

The primary way we think about pastors communicating the Bible is by preaching, but we can also teach the Bible through leading classes, seminars, podcasts, or workshops; writing devotionals or reflections; posting videos online; leading small groups, facilitating discussions. People are coming up with more creative ways to teach the Bible every day. As our world changes technologically, the ways to teach the Bible are only limited by your own imagination!

**a. Doers of the Word**

There is a lot of advice out there about effective preaching—about style, delivery, structure, length, illustrations. A lot of those things vary from preacher to preacher and are based on personality, background, experience, and audience. But the most important quality of preaching is that it should inspire action. We don’t study God’s Word just to accumulate knowledge, we learn God’s Word so we will live it out. Jesus and the New Testament writers exhorted us to be *doers* of the Word, not just hearers (Matthew 7:24–27; James 1:22–27). James said when we just hear the word but don’t do it, we are deceiving ourselves (v. 22). When we think we are religious but we don’t control our words, we deceive our own hearts, and our “religion” is worthless (v. 26). Those are pretty harsh words, but they are reality.

What if you bought a guitar, read books about the guitar, and watched videos about how to play the guitar, but you never actually picked up the guitar to play it? What would be the point? You might know a lot about the guitar, but you wouldn’t be a guitar player. That’s kind of what it is like when someone is a hearer of the Word but not a doer. The Bible was given to us to *live out*. You could read the entire Bible cover to cover every year, listen to sermons and podcasts in every free minute, watch all the videos and read all the books, but if it doesn’t change the way you live, it doesn’t matter. Your faith isn’t real; you’re deceiving yourself. The goal of effective preaching and teaching is

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not just hearing but doing. Your preaching and teaching should always start with interpretation but end with a call to action:

“In short, my goal is change. I want them to *do* something different instead of just think about it. When I’m finished preaching, I want people in the audience to know what to *do* with what they have heard.” —Andy Stanley, *Communicating for a Change*<sup>iii</sup>

#### **b. The Holy Spirit**

But he doesn’t just mean behavior modification. He means a true heart change. Preaching and teaching the Bible is more than lecturing about morality. It’s more than a recipe or a how-to guide for being a good person. It’s more than “twelve easy steps to ...” The Word of God cuts so much deeper than that (Hebrews 4:12). We have to be careful that our message isn’t just about the doing and not about changing the heart. If people change their behavior just because the pastor or teacher said so, but their heart isn’t changed, the behavior change isn’t real either. And it won’t last long. True change comes from the heart, from the Holy Spirit working in someone’s heart to change them from the inside out.

This is why in the preaching and teaching process the Holy Spirit is so integral—both the Spirit working in your life and your words (as the preacher or teacher) as well as the Spirit working in the lives of the congregation or class. You could preach the greatest sermon in the world, and people may still walk away unchanged.

#### **c. Prayerful Teaching**

Though you will be held responsible for what you do, you are not responsible for how people respond. It is God who causes the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). It is the Holy Spirit who works in their hearts to cause real heart change. Which means that we should pray for our people as much as we teach and preach to them. Our preaching and teaching must be covered in prayer every step of the way. And we should be praying for how the people will receive and respond to our teaching.

It’s a lot like parenting. We do everything we can to teach our kids and model a godly life for them, but we can’t *make* them do what we teach. They may do what we say out of fear or obligation while they live in our house but then live however they want once they move out. At that point, we just have to pray like crazy that God will work in their hearts and lives. Our congregations are the same way. We need to do our best to teach and preach in a way that impacts them to live for Jesus and model that life for them. But we can’t make them do it. Only God causes the growth.

#### **d. Practical Advice**

##### **a. Keep It Simple**

Many people argue for a three- or a five-point sermon or lesson. Others argue this is too much for a modern audience, with our TikTok-level attention spans. They argue for having just one memorable point and ensuring that everything else in your message reiterates that point. It has been said for many years in education circles that teenagers and children can only handle one main point per lesson, but this is also true for adults. It’s what most political experts recommend for political speakers and what the designers of TED Talks say about any form of public speaking. Political experts recommend speaking on a middle-school reading level. About half of adult Americans read at or below a fifth-grade level. The next 36% read at a middle-school level. Only 12% of our country reads at a high-school level or higher.<sup>iii</sup>

This doesn’t mean you have to “water down” your message—not at all! It just means you need to explain it so clearly that a middle schooler would not struggle to understand. This is what it means to *teach* someone something. Not just say something but *teach* it. If you preach a sermon, even if it was perfectly true and eloquent, it doesn’t matter if people didn’t understand it. You didn’t teach them anything. You might as well have been talking to yourself.

##### **b. TED Talk Guidelines**

Even with the rise of podcasts and TED Talks, it’s not easy for the average American adult to absorb information in a lecture-style environment. While we don’t need to throw out sermons altogether, we do need to think carefully about how to make them more effective. TED Talks are intentionally, by rule, no longer than eighteen minutes because the researchers who designed them determined that’s long enough to flesh out an idea but short enough that a listener could digest and understand all of the important information.<sup>iii</sup>

You will also notice that all TED Talks focus on one main point. Most TED Talk speakers are highly educated leaders in their field. Their talks are not “watered down;” they’re streamlined for effectiveness. This is what we’re shooting

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for when we talk about communicating to an audience in an effective way. The rules of a TED Talk are helpful in thinking through how to keep preaching simple and effective:

- Distill your life's work into a 3-, 6-, 9-, or 18-minute talk.
- Be authentic and vulnerable.
- Convey one strong idea.
- Tell a story that hasn't been told before.
- Tell, don't sell.
- Absolutely and positively stick to the time limit.

In a sermon or Bible lesson, the first point means to distill all there is to say about the Bible passage or topic down to a simple talk or lesson. You may have twenty pages of research, but you distill the lesson down to forty-five minutes or the sermon to twenty. It might be a little much to try to "tell a story that hasn't been told before" every week of your ministry, especially since we are teaching from the Bible. But you can tell the old story of Christ in a fresh way.

Otherwise, this is solid advice on how to write an effective talk. Not that your people need a TED Talk-level message every week. That's a pretty high standard. When people are preparing TED Talks, they may do one or two in a lifetime, not one per week for thirty years! They could work on one message for months, while in ministry we have to crank out multiple talks every week. We want to prepare every sermon with excellence because we're doing it for the Lord, but don't pressure yourself to have a TED Talk-level sermon every week. These are simply excellent guidelines for thinking through how to keep your sermon or lesson streamlined and effective.

#### **c. Know Your Audience**

This all assumes you're speaking to a group of "average" American adults. If your church happens to be full of more academically minded people who all want a three-point sermon with more seminary-level type stuff, go for it! But make sure that's what your audience really wants/needs, not just what you want to do. Doing something deeper might also work if you are teaching a series geared toward the more spiritually mature in your congregation. Let's say you are offering a seminar or teaching series on Sunday or Wednesday nights for more committed disciples. Maybe you are doing a teaching series for your elders and volunteer ministry leaders, and they want something more.

The key is to know your audience. These suggestions are for a general audience of average Americans. This style of talk works well with large audiences with a very broad base. If you were speaking to all college professors or pastors or church leaders, you would likely speak differently. But your talk should still be streamlined and focused, even if it has three or five points.

#### **d. Structure of Sermon or Lesson**

Several experts give detailed explanations of how to structure a sermon. We recommend Andy Stanley's *Communicating for a Change*, Bruce Wilkinson's *The Seven Laws of the Learner*, Lawrence O. Richards, *Creative Bible Teaching*, and Duffy Robbin's *Youth Ministry Nuts and Bolts*. These books all give the same general outline, but they have different titles for each section. To break it down even more simply, here's a brief bullet-point summary of three different preaching and teaching experts who use this same basic pattern but with slight tweaks:

Andy Stanley:

- Me (How do I struggle with this?)
- We (How do we all struggle with this?)
- God (What does the Bible say about this?)
- You (What should you do about this?)
- We (How can we all live this out together?)

Duffy Robbins

- Preview (What does the world say?)
- The View (What does God's Word say?)
- Me View (How can I live out what God's Word says?)

Lawrence O. Richards:

- Hook (Get the audience's attention)
- Book (Examine the Word)
- Look (Expound the passage)

- Took (Make an appeal)

They all start with meeting the audience where they are. Wilkinson calls it “building the need,” showing them why they need this message. What issue do they struggle with, wonder about, or need to change or fix that can be changed by your sermon or lesson? Wilkinson says this need can only motivate them as much as they *feel* it. “They must be moved to be motivated.” You need to make them feel their need, not just tell them they have it. These methods all do a great job of taking your audience, class, or small group on a journey from “you are here” (what they believe or do now about this issue) to “where God wants you to be” (what God wants them to believe and do about this issue). That is how this method is effective in communicating *for a change*. Duffy Robbins defined his goal by asking, “What do I want them to do differently on Monday morning because they heard this talk on Sunday?” The focus is not just on filling minds but on changing hearts and lives.

### **C. Discussion Questions (25 minutes)**

#### **Practice interpreting several different passages together:**

- How should we understand Leviticus 19:19, which prohibits wearing a garment made of two types of material? Does this mean obedient Christians should wear only 100-percent cotton clothes? What is the theological principle we can develop from this passage? What questions about historical and literary context do we need to ask to understand it?
- In Judges 6:37 Gideon put out a fleece to confirm what God told him. Does this mean we should put out fleeces when we seek God’s leading? What is the theological principle we can develop from this passage? What questions about historical and literary context do we need to ask to understand it?
- Peter walked on the water in Matthew 14:29. Does this mean we should attempt to walk on water in our obedience to Christ? If not, what does it mean and how can we apply it to our lives today?

#### **Interpretation: Group Discussion Questions:**

- What questions do you still have about the interpretive journey of hermeneutics?
- What concerns do you have about trying to make sure your interpretations are accurate, biblical, and God-honoring?
- What resources, spiritual disciplines, or other activities would you suggest for making sure you have a solid interpretation?
- How can we help one another develop sound interpretations of Scripture?

#### **Communicating for a Change: Group Discussion**

**READ:** John 4:4–30 and 39–41.

- How did Jesus “build the need” in His conversation with the woman at the well?
- How did He present her with God’s Word in a compelling and meaningful way?
- What was the main theological point He was trying to get her to understand?
- How did He change her way of thinking to be consistent with God’s Word?
- How did He motivate her to action?

#### **Application Questions**

- Which teachers and preachers in the American church do you think are the most effective? Which have the most solid teaching? Which are the most powerful or inspirational? What do you admire about their teaching style? What can you learn from them?
- Reflect on the preachers and teachers you have found most effective in your own life. What about their teaching and preaching makes it so effective? How did they impact you?
- Regardless of their role in the church and the spiritual gifts they have, all ministry leaders are called to be teachers of the Word. What specific gifts has God given you that will help you in teaching His Word effectively and why?
- How can we all participate in preaching and teaching God’s Word regardless of what our official leadership role is?
- In what ways do you need to grow in your skills and your understanding of sound doctrine to feel confident teaching and preaching?

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## Lesson 7: IN: Community Building

### A. Introduction: Why Community? (10 minutes)

- What does the average American church do on a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis? What activities and ministries does the church devote itself to?
- How is that different from church to church or denomination to denomination?
- How is that different from what the early church looked like and what they spent their time doing?

A lot of modern American churches talk about wanting to be a “first-century church,” trying to refocus on the original design of the first church—what they spent their time doing, how they treated one another, and how they impacted the world around them. Acts 2:42 tells us the early church devoted themselves to:

1. teaching sound doctrine – both to believers and witnessing to non-believers
2. fellowship – *koinonia* – living together in community and sharing things in common
3. the breaking of bread – which could refer either to eating together or the Lord’s Supper or both
4. and prayer – not just individually but corporate prayer

In our last lesson, we talked extensively about #1 – teaching sound doctrine, because that is the primary function of elders and church leaders as described in the Bible. In this lesson, we will talk about what it looks like to build community—fellowship, *koinonia*—which includes the two other things, breaking bread and prayer.

#### 1. Community in the First Church

The first church was revolutionary in the way they treated one another.

- They voluntarily gave of their possessions and shared so no one in their community was in need (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35).
- They were incredibly and supernaturally unified—“*All the believers were one in heart and mind*” (Acts 4:32).
- They ate together in their homes—all different social levels, which was revolutionary in their culture because typically people never ate with anyone of a lower social status (Acts 2:46).

They treated everyone with equal value, the way God’s law had told them from the beginning. This was true, full community. Not merely in spirit or in words but even economically. The first church fulfilled God’s vision of a people who reflected His character to the world—a community of love, unity, humility, selflessness, and equality. This is one of our greatest callings as the church—to not just *tell* people about Jesus but to *show* them who He is by the way we love one another (John 13:35).

#### 2. People Crave Community

People in our culture crave community. The founder of Starbucks says the reason they became so successful is because they offered people way more than a cup of coffee; they offered personal connection and community. CrossFit’s website says, “You Belong in the CrossFit Community” because

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they know how much people in our culture long for close-knit, authentic, in-person community. This need grows every year as spending so much of our time online in virtual classes, meetings, and on social media can be so isolating.

What was the first church in Acts all about? Community.

What do people in this day and age want? Community.

Then why aren't people flocking to the church like they do to Starbucks? Are our churches offering real community? Or are they just offering a "show" every Sunday morning? How can our churches offer true community, a church *family*? Not something that looks like community but is really just a shallow, fake version of it. A community that supports you when times get hard, holds you accountable for your sin with real talk, and pushes you to become more like Jesus.

- Be totally honest. Being among church leadership is the perfect place for honest reflection to examine how we need to improve as a ministry. How is our church doing in creating authentic community that really reflects Jesus and the communal nature of the first church and is something outsiders looking in would want to join?
- Are we fulfilling this mission as written in our Gospel Track?
- If not, where are we lacking? What changes can we make to reflect a more Christ-like community?
- Even if we are doing well, how can we improve in building community?
- How have you seen people in our city longing for community and trying to meet that need in other ways? How can we meet that need at King's City?

## **B. Teaching: Looking IN, Building the Church Community (20 minutes)**

### **1. Fellowship: *Koinonia* – Community**

By its very nature, Christianity is a relational faith. Our God is a relational God—three persons in one, relating to one another in perfect harmony, the original community. The biblical story is one of relationship between this triune God and humankind and humankind with one another. Our whole faith is about the reconciliation of humankind's *relationship* with God. We were created for community.

The first Christian community was a picture of perfect community, but this ideal only lasted a short time. Right after this beautiful description of true community, the economic sharing of all things in community was broken (Acts 5). Then the unity of all people groups was broken (Acts 6). By the time Paul started writing his letters to the churches, he was already having to tell them to stop having divisions in the church and be unified through the Spirit. Ever since, some church communities have done an amazing job of having true *koinonia* (fellowship) while others have been nothing but places of division, politics, and backbiting, just like the world around them.

*Koinonia* means "participation, contributory help, sharing, communion, spiritual fellowship."

Fellowship is not an event or a program; it's a way of life. It's living in communion with one another and sharing all things as one big family every day. One phrase people use is "doing life together." But it's more than just being together. It carries the idea of helping one another, being there for one another, and *helping one another grow in our faith*. It's nice to have a group of people who are there for one

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another in hard times, but you can have a group like that through the PTA or CrossFit. It's only true *church* fellowship as the body of Christ if we help one another become more like Jesus.

## 2. Godly Relationships

The writer of Hebrews encouraged us to not give up meeting together as a community, but the author also told us that our purpose in meeting together is to “stir one another up to love and good deeds.”

***“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another” Hebrews 10:24–25.***

What is true Christian community? If they aren't helping you grow to be more like Jesus, they're just a social club, not a church. Just meeting together, singing a few songs, and hearing a feel-good message is not what Hebrews is talking about. That word for “spurring” in Greek is *paroxusmos*, which means to stimulate, provoke, or irritate. It is a word used for sword play when one person jabs the other. Our purpose in meeting together isn't to pat one another on the head and tell one another how great we are. It's to push one another to become more like Jesus, to grow in our faith and sanctification. Like Proverbs describes, ***“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).***

Proverbs teaches us that friendships can either be an amazing help or bring you to ruin. A true friend is with you through the hard times, confronts you with love and grace when there is a conflict rather than gossiping behind your back, and encourages you but also holds you accountable.

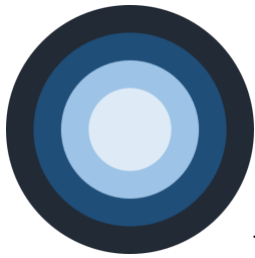
Godly friends aren't just friends, they are family, brothers and sisters in Christ with an even closer bond than your biological family (Matthew 12:48–50). In Christ you share the same purpose, the same values, ethics, and beliefs, and the same mission to build God's kingdom. Most importantly, you have the same Holy Spirit dwelling inside you, growing His fruit in you, molding you into the image of Jesus. This Spirit is the Spirit of unity that can bond in love even the most opposite people in the world (Ephesians 4:1–6). When the Spirit binds us, we can have a completely different friendship than anything the world could ever offer. These verses in Proverbs 27 give us some good wisdom about friendships:

- A wise friend holds you accountable instead of pretending everything is okay or patting you on the head and telling you how great you are. They bring things into the open and confront you directly (v. 5). A wise friend doesn't do sweet talk (v. 6–7).
- A wise person welcomes rebuke from a friend. A wise person would rather be “hurt” by rebuke so they can fix what's wrong than have someone tell them what they want to hear (v. 6). A wise person doesn't crave sweet talk from friends but truth, even if it's hard (v. 7).
- A wise person seeks friends of wise counsel. A wise person doesn't surround themselves with “yes men” but friends who offer them truly wise counsel (v. 6–9).
- Close friends can be more reliable than family. A “neighbor who is near” could mean physically near, but it could also mean emotionally or spiritually close. The bonds you have with your brothers and sisters in Christ through the Holy Spirit are stronger than any biological bond (v. 10).
- True friends make each other spiritually stronger. “Iron sharpens iron” is one of the most quoted proverbs in the Bible, but we don't often think about the reality of iron banging against iron. This is not a painless process. It hurts! But if you want to become spiritually strong, you need to find good friends who are like iron for you. They are already spiritually strong, and they are willing to “hurt” you to make you spiritually stronger and sharper (v. 17).

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Godly friendships are not a one-way street; we sharpen each other. It doesn't say "clay sharpens iron." Both halves of the friendship have to be iron. They both have to be strong in order to sharpen each other. You can *mentor* a newer Christian who is not as strong as you and help them grow, and you should also have friend who are unbelievers to whom you are witnessing, but in choosing your closest mutual friendships, surround yourself with friends who will be like iron for you. You can't surround yourself only with "yes men." You need to have strong believers in your life who will challenge you, confront you, and sharpen you. And you them. These are *reciprocal* relationships—"iron sharpens iron."

### 3. Circles of Relationship



Think about Jesus and the way He did His ministry. He had different relationships with different groups. You could think of them as concentric circles with increasing levels of intimacy, from the largest group of followers to His most intimate relationships.

He preached to crowds of 20,000+ and even served a miraculous dinner to a crowd that size. But He didn't have personal relationships with all of them. He couldn't possibly. And He was God! This would be like His Sunday morning worship-service crowd—His biggest group. It included faithful followers and seekers who were just there to see what He might say. It also included skeptics who were there just to see what they could disprove.

Jesus also had a group of seventy-two disciples He sent out on mission to preach the gospel and do miracles (Luke 10). They weren't just followers; they were developed enough as disciples to go out and preach. Jesus had personal relationships with these seventy-two, but not as close as with the Twelve. Jesus did have personal relationships with many people outside of the Twelve, as we know from stories about him and Mary Magdalene and Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, as well as others. Think of these as His wider leadership team. He was closer to some than others, but they were all His disciples and leaders.

And, of course, Jesus had His twelve disciples, the guys who walked with Him, lived with Him, shared everything in common every day. This would be like Jesus's leadership team small group. He had close one-on-one relationships with each of them. But there were also group dynamics among them. This is where the small-group phenomenon comes into play. Each person had a different relationship with each of the others—Peter and Andrew were brothers, as were James and John, so surely there were interesting relationships there. Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot probably butted heads about politics quite a bit. Peter probably rubbed several people the wrong way. John was so young most of the other guys might have dismissed him as "just a kid" or perhaps protected him like their little brother. We can only imagine the webs of relationships. Just think of any group of twelve people you have ever been a part of.

Then there were the three—Peter, James, and John—whom Jesus took with Him on His deeper journeys like the transfiguration and praying in the garden. Why Peter's brother Andrew wasn't involved in this inner circle we will never know, but Jesus poured more into these three than the others. They were His

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closest friends and became the first leaders of the church. Peter and John were the most active preachers in the beginning (Acts 4), and James was one of the first martyrs of the church (Acts 12). They were likely able to be so bold not only because of the power of the Holy Spirit but also because of their close relationship with Jesus while He was on earth.

We can model our own ministries after Jesus's. You preach to a large crowd. Then you have your smaller leadership team and small groups. Then one-on-one mentorships. As leaders, each of us should have all these different relationship circles. But because we're not Jesus, we also need people to minister to us. Even the senior pastor needs accountability partners, people who can show you tough love when necessary, point out your blind spots, and push you to grow in your faith.

#### **4. Building Disciples**

The Great Commission (the mission of the church) is to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). But many of the average people sitting in our pews (or chairs) every Sunday don't really know what it means to be a disciple. Simply put, a disciple is a *follower* of Jesus. When Jesus called His disciples in the Gospels, He consistently used the phrase "follow me," not "believe in me" or "pray this prayer with me."

*"Those who aren't following Jesus aren't His followers. It's that simple. Followers follow, and those who don't follow aren't followers. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it." —Scot McKnight<sup>iii</sup>*

Back in ancient times, when disciples followed a rabbi, they didn't just memorize His teachings; they did their best to emulate His entire lifestyle. Their goal wasn't just to learn what their rabbi taught but to *become like Him*.

*"Christ did not appoint professors, but followers. If Christianity . . . is not reduplicated in the life of the person expounding it, then he does not expound Christianity, for Christianity is a message about living and can only be expounded by being realized in men's lives." —Soren Kierkegaard<sup>iii</sup>*

Too many of the people in our pews on Sunday mornings aren't really *following* Jesus with their lives. They stop by to say hi to Him on Sunday mornings and occasionally call Him up when they need Him. But they don't walk in the way of Jesus. They may read and study His words, attend church faithfully, and talk about Him a lot, but they haven't "left their nets" to follow Him.

*"And he said to them all, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. For what good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?'" (Luke 9:23–25).*

Losing your life for Jesus doesn't mean you have to die a martyr. It doesn't even mean you have to quit your job, sell your house, and move across the world to become a missionary (though He may call you to that). It means giving up control of your life to Him. Giving Him the reins, the throne of your life. Living for Him in all that you do. Offering your life as a living sacrifice to Him, to be used for His kingdom, His purposes, and His glory (Romans 12:1–2).

#### **5. Making Other Disciples: Multiplication**

**Every disciple of Jesus is called to make other disciples.** That's part of being a disciple. Period. There is no other model for the church than every church member living as a disciple themselves and making other disciples. That's it. In his book, *Multiply*, Franis Chan wrote about his philosophy that *all* the members of a church multiply themselves rather than just the church staff doing the discipleship. He said the reason we have so little disciple-making happening in our churches today is that we treat it like a program rather than encouraging individual mentorship/discipleship relationships.



The “multiplication method” was Paul’s preferred method of discipleship. Yes, he preached to large crowds, but he also poured his life into people like Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:1–4, 11, 18–21, 1 Thessalonians 2:8), whom he then encouraged to pour their lives into other people like Apollos, and on and on (Acts 18:24–28; 2 Timothy 2:2). Or consider Timothy, one of Paul’s “spiritual sons”—a young man he discipled who went on to disciple others. The people Timothy discipled were then like “spiritual grandchildren” to Paul. Then they discipled others, creating spiritual great-grandchildren, and on and on, growing the family of God.

*The length of time* Paul spent training each of these disciples was significant. He didn’t do a quick six-week training seminar and send them on their way. He spent a year and a half with Priscilla and Aquila and many years with Timothy and Silas.

*The intimacy level* is also important. He *lived* with them, day in and day out. He didn’t just teach a forty-five-minute small group once a week. Paul lived with his disciples, just like Jesus had done. These were intimate, family-type relationships, spiritual father to spiritual children (1 Thessalonians 2:7–12). Paul spent a lot of time and energy on these relationships. Like real parenting, it was day-in and day-out. It probably was not always fun, but he led and guided and was there for them through all of life. It was an intense commitment, not just a once-a-week Sunday school class.

## 6. AA as a Model for Discipleship

The method/structure of Alcoholics Anonymous is a great model for discipleship. AA groups have two aspects to the program, the group meetings and the sponsor relationship. They meet regularly as a group to encourage one another, share testimonies, and help each other with setbacks. This could be compared to what we do in small groups in our churches. But it’s the sponsor relationship that is really the key to the success of the AA program, which is something that, unfortunately, most churches *don’t* have when it comes to discipleship.

When you go through AA, you are told to select a sponsor from the group, a person who has already gone through the program successfully and can help you along on the journey. Your sponsor is your personal mentor through the program. They offer advice, praise, encouragement, and accountability.

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This relationship is absolutely *crucial* for success. Pretty much anyone who has ever gone through AA would say they couldn't have done it without their sponsor.

Christian discipleship should work the same way. Though discipleship groups can be helpful, the most effective discipleship happens in personal mentoring relationships. In AA, everyone who has gone through the Twelve Steps will one day become a sponsor for someone else. They "pay it forward," helping another person along in the journey. The same should be true for discipleship. *Every* Christian should be paying it forward to another believer.

### **C. APPLICATION: Building Gospel-Centered Community (30 minutes)**

#### **1. Discipleship and Spiritual Formation**

In theory, small groups, Bible studies, classes, and one-on-one mentorships are the perfect places for discipleship and spiritual formation. But in many churches, these groups don't really do much to disciple people; they become more like social or support groups.

- Compare and contrast these two different quotes about small groups and whether they really "work" for growing disciples of Jesus.

*"It is in small groups that people can get close enough to know each other, to care and share, to challenge and support, to confide and confess, to forgive and be forgiven, to laugh and weep together, to be accountable to each other, to watch over each other and to grow together. Personal growth does not happen in isolation. It is the result of interactive relationships. Small groups are God's gift to foster changes in character and spiritual growth."* —Gilbert Bilezikian<sup>iii</sup>

*"Small groups are things that trick us into believing we're serious about making disciples. The problem is ninety percent of small groups never produce one single disciple. Ever. They help Christians make shallow friendships, for sure. They're great at helping Christians feel a tenuous connection to their local church, and they do a bang-up job of teaching Christians how to act like other Christians in the evangelical Christian subculture. But when it comes to creating the kind of holistic disciples Jesus envisioned, the jury's decision came back a long time ago—small groups just aren't working."* —Bryan Jones<sup>iii</sup>

- What has been your experience with small groups over the course of your Christian life?
- What are our small groups at King's City like? Are they fulfilling their purpose of growing disciples? If not, what needs to change? If so, how can we become even more effective?

We can't expect all discipleship to happen in weekly small group meetings or Bible studies. It can be encouraged by people pushing each other to grow in their faith, but spiritual growth is something each believer must pursue *for themselves*. You can't make someone grow spiritually, no matter how hard you try. And you can't expect that simply putting someone in a small group will magically result in spiritual growth. Each person has to do their own hard work of prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines. Each person has to have the passion, drive, and commitment to focus their life on Jesus and let the Holy Spirit change their life. Small groups don't magically make that happen. But when led by a mature believer and structured in an effective way, they can create an environment where people encourage one another and push one another to grow. Really challenge and pray for one another. We can't control other people's spiritual growth. That's the Holy Spirit's job. But we can create an environment in our small groups where people can push one another to grow through personal relationships.<sup>iii</sup>

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## 2. Discipleship Convictions<sup>iii</sup>

Below are some helpful things to think about when creating small groups and/or a discipleship program, based on the article in the footnotes:

a. **It takes time to create a disciple.**

Like YEARS. You can't put people in a small group for six months and expect to pop out a group of fully mature disciples, like a discipleship factory. It takes years and years of growing together. Does this mean it's most effective to keep people in the same discipleship group for ten years? Maybe, maybe not.

Depending on how transient your community is, that may not be possible. If you have a lot of people moving in and out of your city for job-related reasons, that strategy probably isn't feasible. Also, it may not be helpful to have the same group together for that long. They may get stagnant and complacent. It may be better to mix it up more often than that, so they get to build relationships with more than just a few people in your community. This is something your church leadership and small group leadership will need to decide on a case-by-case basis, by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever you decide, make sure your leadership and your people understand that discipleship is a lifelong process. Becoming a mature disciple doesn't come from taking a training class. It is an ongoing, lifelong pursuit. Even pastors and leaders who are already spiritually mature never "arrive" at full maturity. They keep pressing on and growing over the course of a lifetime (Philippians 3:13–14).

b. **Most of the time it takes separating men and women.**

There can be couples' groups, especially ones that talk openly about difficulties in their marriages. Sometimes couples' groups can be effective because spouses in the same small group experience the same discussions and prayer times. But in many situations, it is very difficult for men to be truly vulnerable when women are present and vice-versa.

c. **It takes a very small group.**

The smaller the group, the more vulnerable you can be. Six to ten is a good size for a group, but it depends on how many groups you can create with the qualified leaders you have. If you are struggling to find leaders, start by forming your own group of potential leaders and pouring your life into them as a small group for a year. Then send them off to start their own groups. It will take time, but you will have a *more effective* discipleship ministry *over the long term*.

d. **It takes a genuine disciple.**

If you want your small groups to actually build disciples, you have to have a true disciple for a leader. A small group leader cannot take their group where they have never been. We are all growing throughout our lives, so no one ever fully "arrives" at spiritual maturity, not even Paul (Philippians 3:12–14), but your leaders must have some spiritual maturity to be leading others in spiritual maturity. This doesn't necessarily mean they have been believers or church members the longest; some people have gone to church their whole lives but aren't really disciples. You will know them by their fruit (Matthew 7:16–20; Galatians 5:22–25).

e. **Group time must be balanced with "out there" missional time.**

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If we only ever sit in our little small group circles talking about discipleship, we become a “holy huddle.” We need to go out and live it. Jesus spent time with His disciples, and He also went out into the world to heal, teach, rebuke, serve, and love. We will never grow spiritually if we don’t do both—study and learn together and go out into the world and do what Jesus did.

### 3. Leading a Small Group

Leading a small group is not preaching, teaching, or lecturing. It is *facilitating*. You are facilitating the building of relationships among the small group members and facilitating/guiding a discussion, not teaching or lecturing. Your *preparation* for your small group Bible study might much like preparing for a sermon or a class, but your *delivery* of the material is not. The biggest measurement of the difference is simply how much talking you are doing:

- When you are preaching, you do ALL the talking and the people listen.
- When you are teaching, you do MOST of the talking but also let students discuss a topic after you have presented the material to them.
- When you are facilitating a discussion, the group does most of the talking. You GUIDE the group through a discussion.

Jesus did preach and teach, but He often helped people *discover truth for themselves* by asking questions. Educators call this the Socratic Method because it was made popular by Socrates. The idea is that instead of just giving the answer, the teacher *guides* the student to discover the answer for themselves through a series of questions and discussions. Jesus really listened to what people said and responded with questions that connected to what they had said but took them deeper. He did this with His disciples, but He also did it with His opponents. When they challenged Him with a question, He answered with a question. It was not just sneaky. It was an intentional method of catching them off guard and making them think in a deeper way, beneath the surface. Jesus was the expert question asker. He always knew just what to say to probe deeper.

We can’t really teach you how to lead a small group in this class. You have to learn on the job. You learn to lead small groups by being in a small group with someone who has done it before and watching how they do it. Some people are naturally good at leading a discussion and other people have to work at it over time, but all of us can get better at it with experience.

#### How to Create a Safe Space:

- Make rules about confidentiality and respect.
- Be authentic, transparent, and vulnerable.
- Be patient and encouraging.
- Be enthusiastic and relational.
- Spend time in personal sharing and prayer.

#### How to Lead a Discussion:

- Be attentive.
- Involve everyone. (Tone down the big talkers and work to draw out the quiet ones.)
- Steer the conversation the way it should go (especially when it gets too off track).
- Don’t be afraid of silence.

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- Learn to ask good questions.
  - Know how/when to stop arguments and mediate conflict.
  - Know when to correct theological heresies. (Some things we can allow people to say as their opinion, about which we can agree to disagree, but if it's a heresy, you need stop the discussion and correct it.)

Our goal in small groups isn't *just* to teach a small group of people information about the Bible. It's also to build authentic community. To build strong church family relationships among the people in our church. Body-of-Christ relationships. Iron-sharpening-iron relationships. Keeping that goal in mind will completely revolutionize the way we do small groups.

### **Group Discussion Questions:**

- Describe the best small groups you have ever been a part of. What made them great? Was it just the people involved or were there logistical elements that made it effective (location, the study you used, the time you met, or anything else about the group or the greater church community)?
- Describe any one-on-one discipleship experience you've ever had. What made that relationship effective in helping you grow as a disciple? How can we implement that at King's City?
- If you could choose anyone you know to mentor you, who would you choose and why?
- What qualities would you look for in a spiritual mentor? Why?
- What makes people feel comfortable opening up in a small group setting? What makes people feel uncomfortable opening up? As a leader, how could you create a safe atmosphere where people feel comfortable being vulnerable?
- Share some difficulties you have encountered in leading small groups in the past. How did you resolve them? How do you think you could have resolved them better?
- What other suggestions do you have for creating a safe space for small group sharing?
- How can you match people with small groups in a way that most effectively fosters community and relationship building? Is it important to match people with their friends? With people of the same age, demographic, or stage of life, or intentionally different? With people who are at similar levels of spiritual maturity or mixed so the more mature can strengthen the less mature? Should you let them choose their own groups? Should it be totally random?
- What kinds of things do we need to keep in mind when trying to organize a church-wide relationship-based discipleship ministry? What kinds of potential obstacles or problems would we face? How could we overcome them? How might things get messy?
- How can we combine small groups and one-on-one mentorships into an effective discipleship model?
- What is important in deciding the kind of curriculum to use for your groups? Should every group study the same thing or not? What are the pros and cons of studying along with the sermon series? How much life discussion versus Scripture study?
- What other things do we need to think about when structuring small groups?
- How else can we build community at King's City?

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## King's City: Leadership, Lesson 8: OUT: Kingdom Building

### A. Introduction: Kingdom-Minded Church (10 minutes)

- What does it mean to be a kingdom-minded church?
- What does it look like for an individual to live as a kingdom-minded person?

From the beginning of this study, we have been talking about how God's big-picture plan wasn't just about saving individual people and reconciling their individual relationships to God, but about God reconciling all of creation to Himself.

### The Big-picture Plan of the Bible – the Gospel from Genesis to Revelation:

- Creation (Genesis 1–2)
- Fall (Genesis)
- Redemption (in Christ)
- Consummation (Revelation 21–22)

God's end goal isn't just about redeeming individual human souls. It's about redeeming all of creation. It's about bringing His kingdom in all its fullness. But every part of the process is more big-picture kingdom-focused, not just the consummation.

After creation and the fall (Genesis 1–3), ***the whole rest of the Old Testament*** is the story of God building His ***physical*** kingdom through Israel, as a picture of what the final kingdom will be like.

After the redemption in Christ, ***the whole rest of the New Testament*** is the story of God building His ***spiritual*** kingdom through the church, also as a picture of what the final kingdom will be like.

- Creation (Genesis 1–2)
- Fall (Genesis)
  - The rest of the OT: God builds His physical kingdom through Israel
- Redemption (in Christ)
  - The rest of the NT: God builds His spiritual kingdom through the church
- Consummation (Revelation 21–22)

In the Old Testament, after God redeemed them from *physical* slavery in Egypt, God created a *physical* kingdom of His people to live by His ways with Him in one land together. Living by His ways would create a picture for the world of what God is like and what His kingdom would be like (Deuteronomy 4:1–8). They would be a light to the Gentiles and a kingdom of priests to the world (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 49:6). But Israel never lived up to that calling. Instead, they lived just like the world around them.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus created a picture of what God's kingdom would be like not only by everything He taught but also by what He did—healing the sick, casting out demons, feeding the hungry, reaching out to the marginalized, touching lepers, flipping power structures. By His words and His

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actions, He showed us that God's kingdom would be a place with no more suffering, sickness, death, pain, inequality, oppression, or any kind of evil at all.

Then in the New Testament, after God redeemed His people from *spiritual* slavery to sin through Christ's atoning death and resurrection, He created a spiritual kingdom of His people to live by His ways with Him, but in many different nations all over the world. But they still had the same mission—when they lived by His ways, it would create a picture for the world of what God is like and what His kingdom would be like (Acts 2–4; 1 Peter 2:9).

This is our calling as the church today, to be a kingdom of priests to the world (1 Peter 2:9), to show the world what God's final kingdom will be like by the way we live both individually and as a church community. This is what we've talked about the last few weeks—what it looks like to live as a church community that is a light to show the world what God and His kingdom are like.

But a kingdom-minded mission is bigger than just how we live in a church community. It's about reaching OUT to the world around us, changing the world around us the same way Jesus did in His ministry—preaching the gospel both with our words and with our actions. It's not just about personal evangelism, preaching the gospel to save individual souls; it's also about doing what we can to make the world more like God's final kingdom.

As ambassadors for His kingdom living on earth, God gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11–21). This doesn't just mean reconciling people's individual relationship to God, though that is part of it. It's also about reconciling all of creation to God, reconciling all the things that were broken in the fall. So, every time we heal disease as a doctor or nurse, we reconcile sickness to God. Every time we work to heal marriages or friendships as a therapist or friend, we reconcile human relationships to each other. Every time we bring justice in any situation as a lawyer, judge, social worker, lawmaker, or advocate, we reconcile things to the way God designed them to be.

Many churches are focused only on building their own individual church—getting more people to attend their worship services, growing their own inward-focused ministries, building bigger and better buildings. But a gospel-centered church will be kingdom-minded. They will think beyond the four walls of their church buildings to the community around them. They will think beyond growing their own church, which often results in being competitive with other churches, and instead think about how to work *with* other churches as one “big C” church to impact their community.

Instead of creating a “holy huddle” that separates themselves from the world, they will be ambassadors to the world. They will think beyond saving individual souls and think about how they can make the world look more like God's kingdom. They will see every job as a vocation, every believer as a minister, and every career as a calling from God to impact the world for His kingdom.

From the King's City Gospel Track:

*If the purpose of the kingdom of God is to heal all the results of sin—spiritual, psychological, social, and physical—then Christians must also intentionally use their gifts and resources to fight disintegration in every area. This means fighting disease and hunger. It means providing help for the sick and physically afflicted. It means working to lift the poor out of poverty. It means bringing people together within the church of different races and classes. It means integrating our faith and work with excellence. When we do*

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*this by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bear witness to our king and give a foretaste of the eventual consummation of His kingdom.*

- Discuss the differences between a church that is focused on building their own church and its ministries and a church that is focused on building God's kingdom. What are their preaching and teaching like? What kind of ministries do they have? What are their church communities like? How do they impact their community? What are the lives of the people in each church like?

## **B. Teaching: Faith and Work (20 minutes)**

### **1. Work Is Good: Genesis 1–2**

Work is not a result of the fall, which means work itself is not evil but good. Work became *toilsome* with the curse of the fall, but it existed before the fall. Work is good and has intrinsic value. God designed work as a good thing. The opening of the Bible shows God Himself working:

*“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work” (Genesis 2:2).*

In his book, *Work Matters*, Paul Steven says the Bible metaphorically describes God as a worker engaged in “almost every trade, craft, and role in the human experience.”<sup>iii</sup> God Himself is a worker, so as people made in His image, we are to be workers. We bear His image when we work, whether we work in a church or not. In *Real Win*, Colt McCoy and Matt Carter write, “This is man’s God-established purpose from the beginning of time: to work. God placed man in the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. Note that this placement happened before the fall. This means work is not evil. It’s God-ordained. Before man ever sinned, God put him in the garden and put him to work.”<sup>iii</sup>

The word translated as “cultivate” in the garden of Eden (*abad*, to work, serve) is used elsewhere of worshipping and serving God (Exodus 3:12). Our work, *all* of our work, whether gardening, accounting, art, teaching, business, or mopping floors, is to be an act of *service* to God and to others.

*“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).*

If we see our work as image-bearing service to God and others, it will revolutionize the way we work, and it can change our workplaces and the whole world. Imagine if we did our job with the mindset of serving God and others. How would it change the way we interact with our coworkers? Our customers or clients? Imagine if we thought about every spreadsheet as doing it for Jesus? Every time we interacted with a customer or coworker, doing it for Jesus? Every time we met with our boss or an employee we thought, “I’m doing this for Jesus.” How different would our words, our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions be?

If you are a follower of Jesus, if you have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, *you bring Jesus with you* into your workplace. Every single day, you have the opportunity to change the world for Jesus just by the way you do your job—by doing it with excellence, being kind to your coworkers and clients, working with integrity and ethics, and treating it as service. If every believer went into work every day with this attitude, we would absolutely change the world.

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## 2. All Work Is Sacred: Romans 12:1

In the Old Testament, life was separated into common and sacred. Because God's Spirit dwelled in the temple, the temple was a sacred place. But in the New Testament, the Spirit dwells inside us:

*"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).*

In the Old Testament, people would bring sacrifices to the temple, to the Lord. Now that we *are* the temple, all of life is sacred; all of life is holy; all of life is an offering to the Lord:

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1).*

I love *The Message* paraphrase of this verse:

*"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering" (Romans 12:1 MSG).*

Our everyday, ordinary life. All of life. Everything we do is sacred because we are holy—not because of anything we have done but because we have the Holy Spirit living within us. He makes our lives sacred. Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk in Paris in the 1600s, wrote about this. He was assigned to the monastery kitchen where, amid the tedious chores of cooking and cleaning at the constant bidding of his superiors, he developed his rule of spirituality: "Men invent means and methods of coming at God's love, they learn rules and set up devices to remind them of that love, and it seems like a world of trouble to bring oneself into the consciousness of God's presence. Yet it might be so simple. Is it not quicker and easier just to do our common business wholly for the love of him?"<sup>iii</sup>

For Brother Lawrence, "common business," no matter how mundane or routine, could be a medium of God's love. It didn't matter what you did with your life but *how* you did it, the motivation behind it:

For me, the time of business does not differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are together calling for as many different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as when upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament ... Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do. We can do little things for God. I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.<sup>iii</sup>

It doesn't really matter what you do for a job. You could be the CEO or the janitor, a missionary or a Hollywood producer. But if you do it for the kingdom, it's a sacred vocation. Truly all our life's work—not just our jobs and careers but our volunteer work, our relationships, everything we do—is sacred because the Holy Spirit lives in us. Not just because our work gives us the chance to witness to unbelievers but because the very work itself is sacred when we do it as a living sacrifice to God.

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### 3. Your Calling

*“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”*  
—Frederick Buechner

In his book, *Wishful Thinking*, Buechner wrote about vocation:

VOCATION: It comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call, and means the work a man is called to by God. There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Superego, or Self-Interest.

By and large, a good rule for finding out is this. The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you’ve presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you’ve missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you’re bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a) but probably aren’t helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.<sup>iii</sup>

That all sounds great, but what if you don’t feel like you have some special calling? Or if you don’t have the luxury to pursue your calling—you just need to have a job that pays the bills right now? Or you don’t know what your “deep gladness” is? What if you are just ordinary? Michael Horton wrote a book saying most of just live an ordinary life; we don’t have some unique, amazing calling, but we are called to glorify God wherever we are:

“Ordinary” has to be one of the loneliest words in our vocabulary today. Who wants a bumper sticker that announces to the neighborhood, “My child is an ordinary student at Bubbling Brook Elementary”? ... We think our life *has* to count! We have to leave our mark, have a legacy, make a difference. ... Nevertheless, I sense a growing restlessness with this restlessness. Some have grown tired of the constant calls to radical change. ... Facing another day, with ordinary callings to ordinary people all around me, is much more difficult than chasing the dreams I have envisioned for the grand story of my life. Other people—especially those close to us—can become props. “The Poor” can be instruments of our life project. Our big ideas to “change the world” can become ways of actually avoiding the opportunities we have every day, right where God has placed us, to glorify and enjoy Him and to enrich the lives of others. ... Sometimes, the best way to change the world is to live extraordinarily in what looks like an ordinary existence—to radically love and serve those around us every day, no matter where we are.<sup>iii</sup>

### 4. A Church for the City: Jeremiah 29:7

Church leaders sometimes debate whether their churches should be:

- “attractional” like a city on a hill that draws people *into* their church or

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- “missional” like apostles who *go out* into the world on mission.

The biblical answer isn’t either/or, it’s **both/and**. The early church was both an attractional community of believers who drew people in by the light of their love and a missional community that went out into the world to share the gospel with unbelievers and make disciples of all nations.

In Lesson 3, we learned that the *ekklesia* is not only God’s people when they are gathered for worship, prayer, study, and fellowship but also when they are spread out all over the city during the rest of the week.

In Lesson 4, we talked about Jeremiah’s commission to the exiles in Babylon to “seek the *shalom* of the city” in which God had planted them, even though it was the city of their enemies. *Shalom* is translated “peace,” but it means so much more than our English idea of peace; it’s wholeness, welfare, and human flourishing. The Babylonians were their enemies, the people who had conquered them and taken them into exile, yet they were supposed to work for their flourishing.

As Christians, we all live as “exiles” in the “foreign land” of the world. We are citizens of God’s kingdom living among His enemies, the kingdom of darkness. But instead of our churches creating “holy huddles” to stay set apart from the world, we are called to go into the world and be ambassadors for His kingdom, to bring the light to the kingdom of darkness. But that doesn’t just mean sharing the gospel message with people, it also means bringing human flourishing to the world around us.

At King’s City, we are focused on **both**—building a countercultural church community that will be a light to the city around us and going out into the city to impact the world around us. We are a church for the city of Houston.

## 5. Sharing the Gospel in a “Post-Christian” Society

When thinking about sharing the gospel and impacting our city for the kingdom, one of the biggest things to remember is that our modern American culture is relatively “post-Christian,” even in a Bible-belt city like Houston.

### a. The Rise of the “Nones”

As of 2023, 28% of U.S. adults are religiously unaffiliated, describing themselves as atheists, agnostics, or simply “nothing in particular.”<sup>iii</sup> There is a huge rise in apathy toward religion; many people simply don’t think it matters.

### b. What Non-Christians Think of Christians

There is also a rising hostility toward Christianity in particular, especially because of our political climate. This doesn’t mean Christians are being persecuted, just that many non-Christians are “turned off” by the kind of Christians they see in the news, at political rallies, on talk shows, televangelists, etc. Research in 2007 showed that young people (16- to 29-year-olds) overwhelmingly had a poor impression of Christianity. Common negatives included the perceptions that present-day Christianity is judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old-fashioned (78%), and too involved in politics (75%). These percentages represent large proportions of young outsiders who attach these negative labels to Christians.<sup>iii</sup> The book Barna researchers wrote about their findings was called *unChristian* because they said the impression most non-Christians had of Christians was that they were not very Christlike. The reputation of “the

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church” in our culture didn’t really look very much like Jesus. This seems to have only gotten worse in the last twenty years. Carey Nieuwhof writes:

- Only 21% of non-Christians have a positive perception of the church.
- Half of non-Christians don’t trust local pastors.
- Millennials think the local church is detached from real issues people are facing.<sup>iii</sup>

All of this to say that we are fighting an uphill battle when we go out into the world representing Christianity. A lot of people have already decided they don’t like Christians, even though many of the loudest Christians don’t really reflect Jesus accurately, so their view of Christians is not an accurate view of Christ. Even so, because they have already decided they don’t like Christians, they aren’t interested in hearing about Jesus or being invited to church. This can make our mission of sharing the gospel more difficult than it may have been in previous generations.

### **c. Hope in Relational Ministry**

Yet, there may be more hope than we think. From his research in 2023, Thomas Rainer made a list of seven things non-Christians think about Christians,<sup>iii</sup> and it shows some interesting patterns:

#### *1. Christians are against more things than they are for.*

“It just seems to me Christians are mad at the world and mad at each other. They are so negative. They seem unhappy. I have no desire to be like them and stay upset all the time.”

#### *2. I would like to develop a friendship with a Christian.*

“I’m really interested in what they believe and how they carry out their beliefs. I wish I could find a Christian who would be willing to spend some time with me.”

#### *3. I would like to learn about the Bible from a Christian.*

“The Bible really fascinates me, but I don’t want to go to a stuffy and legalistic church to learn about it. I would be nice if a Christian invited me to study the Bible in his home or at a place like Starbucks.”

#### *4. I don’t see much difference in the way Christians live compared to others.*

“I really can’t tell what a Christian believes because he doesn’t seem much different than other people I know. The only exception would be Mormons. They really seem to take their beliefs seriously.”

#### *5. I wish I could learn to be a better husband/wife/dad/mom, etc. from a Christian.*

“My wife is threatening to divorce me, and I think she means it this time. My neighbor is a Christian, and he seems to have it together. I am swallowing my pride and asking him to help me.”

#### *6. Some Christians try to act like they have no problems.*

“Harriett works in my department. She is one of those Christians who seems to have a mask on. I would respect her more if she didn’t put on such an act. I know better.”

#### *7. I wish a Christian would take me to his or her church.*

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"I really would like to visit a church, but I'm not particularly comfortable going by myself. What is weird is that I am 32 years old, and I've never had a Christian invite me to church in my entire life."

It seems, from his experience at least, that people do think negatively about the institutional church and about a lot of the Christians they see in the media, particularly in the political realm. Yet they *are* interested in hearing about faith but not from an institutional church environment. They are interested in one-on-one connections and relationships. They also want to interact with Christians who are authentic about their faith, not fake or holier-than-thou. People who really are walking with Jesus, find strength and peace in their faith, and can help them navigate life's struggles. When we engage in incarnational relational ministry in a missional way, we can meet people where they are, build authentic relationships, and talk to them about Jesus.

#### **d. Witnessing in a Relativistic Society**

In the past, many church leaders have lamented our living in a postmodern society, where people see truth as relative instead of absolute and as coming more from lived experience rather than reason, believing more in "what is true for me," which may be different than what is "true for you." But the good news about living in this type of society is that when you tell someone what Jesus means to you or what He done for you, they can't argue with the validity of it because it is your lived experience. It is "true for you." In this way, we may actually have a *greater* opportunity to share the gospel with people in our society, we just have to think through how to do it effectively:

- Instead of arguing facts with people or having theological debates, we share our stories, our personal experience with Jesus.
- Instead of preaching on a streetcorner or lecturing or debating people, we build relationships and share our stories after "earning the right to be heard."
- Instead of preaching *at* someone, we listen to them and have a two-way dialogue about their beliefs and experiences as well. If the gospel is really the truth, we need not be threatened by hearing their stories, beliefs, and experiences. It can help us understand their journey and know better how to meet them with the gospel where they are.
- Instead of just telling people about Jesus, we can *show* them Jesus by the way we live, specifically, the way we treat them and others around us. When we love people differently, they will take notice and want to know why we love people so well.

This style of relational evangelism may be harder and take longer than the streetcorner type of evangelism, but it will be much more effective in our modern society, in meeting people where they are and sharing Jesus with them in relationship.

### **C. Discussion: A Church for the City: 20 minutes**

#### **1. Integrating Faith and Work**

We spend most of our waking hours at work, so it natural to ask how we can use our work to impact our city for the kingdom. Split into small groups (or discuss as one big group) each person's individual career and different strategies for integrating faith and work.

- How could your career bring human flourishing to the city of Houston?
- In what ways can your career help bring healing and reconciliation to the world?

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- What unique gifts and resources do you have to bring human flourishing and *shalom*?
  - Reflect on your relationships at work with coworkers, clients, bosses, employees, etc. How can you bring *shalom* to those people throughout your days, weeks, and months at work?
  - In what ways is it a struggle to reflect Christ in your workplace (e.g., being slow to anger or doing business with integrity when everyone else is cutthroat)?
  - How can you be a witness for Christ when it comes to workplace gossip? Negativity? Integrity? Conflict resolution? Greed? Selfish ambition? Other areas?
  - In what other ways is God leading you to integrate faith and your work?

## **2. Witnessing in a Post-Christian Society**

- What is the general reputation of “the church” in the city of Houston? Does that reputation reflect Jesus? Why or why not?
- How have you experienced a negative perception of Christians? How can we, as individuals and as a church, combat those negative perceptions?
- Describe any experiences you have had witnessing to people. What patterns have you noticed about how to talk to people about Jesus in our world?
- How does realizing that we are living in a relativistic, post-Christian society affect the way we should think about strategies for sharing the gospel?
- Think about your own friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors who are not Christians. What strategies do you know would *not* work with them and why? What strategies might work?
- Why are “strategies” at all a turn-off for a culture that values authenticity?
- Share any frustrations you’ve had with trying to share the gospel with loved ones. Describe any wins you have had, however small.
- What would it look like for us to build authentic relationships with our non-Christian friends and family and simply love them and walk with them through life? What kind of impact might that make?

## **3. Missional Church Strategies**

Now let’s think about how we can bring *shalom* to our city as a church, not just individuals. We talked in Lesson 4 about missional living as individuals—impacting your own sphere of influence for the kingdom. But what can we do as a group to be a missional church? How can we as the leadership team for our church lead our congregation to be a missional church?

- Reflect on our mission at King’s City Church. What is our mission and vision for impacting Houston for the kingdom?
- How can our church as a group contribute to the flourishing of Houston? How can we bring healing, reconciliation, and restoration to the city of Houston?
- What unique resources and gifts do we have to impact our community? What unique things does our congregation bring to the table?
- How does our church’s location influence the way we can impact our community?
- What other ministries, non-profits, or other organizations can we partner with to reach our community for the kingdom?
- How can we build relationships in our community with those outside of our church?

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- In what nearby places can we connect with people (e.g., schools, shopping centers, parks, gyms, coffee shops, etc.)?
  - How can we mobilize our people to get out into the community? How can we inspire them to get on board with our mission and vision?
  - Brainstorm ideas for ways our church can get out into the neighborhoods around us to build relationships and impact our community for the kingdom. Don't be afraid to dream big, but also realize that sometimes God works best in ways that may seem small—personal relationships, one-on-one time, small groups, etc. Throw out every idea you can think of; no idea is too off the wall.

#### **D. Prayer (30 minutes)**

Spend some extended time in intentional prayer for God's leading in how you will move forward as a leadership team after this study. In what ways is God calling you to live in intentional countercultural community yet also reach out to your community in a missional way? How is God calling you to impact the city of Houston? How is God leading you to build intentional countercultural community? How is God leading you to use your specific gifts and resources and us as a church to use our gifts and resources? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you divine guidance and fill you with His mission for King's City.