



LEVERAGE YOUR LIFE



5 KINGDOM PRIORITIES

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with Sam O'Neal

Leverage Your Life: 5 Kingdom Priorities

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WEEK 1:
LEVERAGE
YOUR LIFE



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to *Leverage Your Life: 5 Kingdom Priorities!* Take a few moments to introduce yourself to the group, then use the following questions to start the discussion.

When have you felt caught up in something bigger than yourself—a team, a movement, a group pushing for a goal, and so on?

What words would you use to describe your journey as a Christ-follower over the past five years?

WATCH

Play the video for week 1. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 1 video.

Recall this quote from William James, “The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.”¹ How does it encourage you to know that God has used and continues to use ordinary people to turn the world upside down?

Consider this statement: “The mission of God is who Jesus is as He lives His life through you, not something you do for Him.” How does this statement shift your perspective as a Christ-follower living on mission in the world?

Think about the places where you live, work, and play. How do you leverage these opportunities for the mission of God? If you’re not currently engaging in these opportunities, what are some first steps you can take toward leveraging your life for the sake of God’s mission?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.

JOHN 20:21

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- God sent Jesus on mission to be our Savior.
- Mission is who Jesus is as He lives His life through us.
- We share in God's mission locally and globally.

Prayer Prompts

- God, we praise You for sending Jesus as our Savior ...
- Jesus, we thank You that you are with us where we live, work, and play ...
- Lord Jesus, guide us as we leverage our lives for Your glory ...

DAY 1: THE LAUNCH

Have you ever thought about the launch of the church on a practical level? It was extraordinary! Accompanied by wind and fire, the Holy Spirit filled the apostles, and those same apostles left the upper room and filled the streets. They miraculously spoke in tongues so that the thousands of people who had traveled to Jerusalem from other nations around the world for Pentecost understood what they were saying. Then Peter preached a message of conviction and passion empowered by the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 2:41,

Those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

One sermon. Three thousand people transformed for eternity. The next public gathering saw even more souls ushered into the kingdom. Acts 4:4 tells us,

Many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

In fact, scholars tell us that within six months of Pentecost, there were one hundred thousand Christians living, working, and ministering in Jerusalem.

The church was “launched” in almost every sense of that word. The kingdom expanded in a way that was explosive, irresistible, and unstoppable.

And it’s still expanding. Those of us living in the West often feel like the Church is dying, but that’s not the case—not even close. The Church is exploding in South America, Africa, India, and China. For two thousand years, God has carried out His mission of expanding His kingdom in every city and nation across the globe, and we are living in the greatest days in the history of Christianity to be alive. There are more people becoming followers of Jesus on a daily basis around the world than at any other time in human history.

This mission is the task we are called to as followers of Jesus. Remember, the mission of God is not something you do for Jesus. Mission is who Jesus is as He lives His life through you. We get to join, experience, and advance this incredible movement in the places where we live, work, and play as we leverage our lives for the sake of God’s mission.

Read about the early followers of Jesus in Acts 2:42-47. What values or priorities were important to them?

*Are those same values or priorities important in the Church today?
Why or why not?*

Recall the five kingdom priorities. How were these values evident in the early church? How are they evident in the Church today?

- *Seek first the kingdom*
- *Deepen devotion*
- *Stick together*
- *Think multiplication*
- *Engage your city*

DAY 2: FAITH PRODUCES OBEDIENCE

The incredible launch of the church began in Jerusalem but didn't remain there. The movement we call Christianity exploded outward from the city of David and reached every corner of the known ancient world in less than a year.

It's worth asking: what was it about that movement that allowed for such immediate impact and rapid growth? What did the early Jesus followers possess or embody that empowered them to turn the world upside down? Remember, they were just ordinary people! As we begin to dig into that question, we're going to explore Acts 1:1-14 for characteristics of the early church that can and should be true of Jesus followers today.

The first characteristic is faith that resulted in obedience. The early followers of Jesus trusted God and in simple faith did what He said. When Jesus met with His followers for the final time on the Mount of Olives, He gave them an interesting command in Acts 1:4:

While staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem. That sounds pretty simple, but we must remember the context. Jerusalem was the scene

of the crime. Forty days prior, these followers had witnessed the angriest and most powerful religious leaders in Jerusalem spew hate and violence toward Jesus and His kingdom. Jesus had been brutally crucified in Jerusalem. So, Jerusalem was not a safe place for people associated with Christ.

The mention of Jerusalem struck fear into the heart of every disciple. Not only that, but according to Acts, Jesus Himself ascended into heaven only a few verses after He gave this command—which meant His followers were seemingly on their own. The One they left everything to follow was gone.

What happened next? Verse 12 tells us,

Then they returned to Jerusalem ...

Wait! That makes no sense. Jerusalem is the last place they would've wanted to be. Why would they go to Jerusalem? There's only one answer—*it's what Jesus said to do*. They had faith that demonstrated radical obedience. They believed what He said and acted on it.

When have you acted in faith, even though you didn't understand God's direction? What happened as a result?

What obstacles hinder you from obeying God even when you know what He wants you to do?

DAY 3: PASSION PRODUCES UNITY

As we've already examined, the faith of the early church was evident in their return to Jerusalem after Jesus' ascension. Let's now look at another characteristic of these followers: unity. In Acts 1:14, we learn that when they arrived in the upper room in Jerusalem the disciples were all "with one accord."

The original Greek language of the text affirms that those earliest believers gathered together with a single will. They possessed "one heart" or "one passion." In other words, they were united. They had all wrapped their hearts and their minds around a single, unifying focus.

What was that focus? Look at Acts 1:3:

[Jesus] presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

During the entirety of the time between Jesus' resurrection and ascension on the Mount of Olives, He addressed one theme: the kingdom of God. Jesus talked about the kingdom over and over. It's almost as if He said, "If you forget everything else I've taught you in three years of public ministry, do not forget this: *the kingdom of God!*" And this should not surprise us. Consider what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 during His public ministry:

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Jesus taught His followers that everything in their lives should center in and revolve around the kingdom of God.

What's the kingdom of God? Here's one definition: *The kingdom of God is God's sovereign activity in the world resulting in people being in right relationship with Himself.* Another way to say it would be that the kingdom is the big picture of everything God is doing in the world including the church. The kingdom is the eternal, global mission of God redeeming a people to Himself from every tribe, tongue, people, and language (Revelation 7:9).

The unifying passion for the earliest Jesus followers was His kingdom. They sought it first. They were passionate about it. And, as a result, they changed the world.

Where do you see a lack of unity in the church today? What are some consequences of that lack?

Read Acts 1:14. On a practical level, what might it look like for Jesus followers to cultivate a passion for the kingdom of God? How could believers pursue the kingdom with one heart and one mind?

DAY 4: DESPERATION PRODUCES PRAYER

We've been exploring Acts 1:1-14, and this is a good time to remember that the earliest Jesus followers were not in a safe place during the events described in this passage. Relationally, they had cut themselves off from the broader community because of their devotion to Jesus. Physically, they were crammed together in a relatively small space and uncertain about the future. Even legally, they were in great danger. The same people who had just crucified Jesus were aware of them—and watching. And if all that wasn't enough, their Master had just given them a commission to take His message to the world then disappeared in the clouds as He floated out of sight.

In other words, the earliest followers of Jesus were in a desperate state. They knew, *if God is not God, then we are sunk!* And they responded in a way that should be natural for all Jesus followers when we encounter desperation. Let's read Acts 1:14 again,

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

And this became their pattern. Twenty-six times in twenty-eight chapters of Acts we find the church desperately seeking God in prayer. The book of Acts records the history of answered prayer.

As Jesus followers, we know we're supposed to pray. We hear it all the time in church, through devotionals, listening to podcasts, and so on. And we know from Scripture that those earliest disciples were people of prayer. They understood the value and importance of prayer. But sometimes the pressure of having our backs against the wall can squeeze us into a place where prayer stops being something we do and starts to be part of who we are—like breathing.

That was the reality for Jesus' disciples in that upper room. They devoted themselves to prayer because they had no other hope for provision or solution, and they had the faith to keep praying until God showed up and did what He had promised to do.

What we need to understand today is that God, in His sovereignty, has chosen to limit His activity to the prayers of His people. Meaning that though God is sovereign and can do anything and often desires to intervene on our behalf, He waits until we reach up through faith and seek His provision. E.M Bounds said, "The story of every great Christian achievement is the history of answered prayer."²

The early church believed that and sought God desperately through prayer. And the world has never been the same.

How have your prayers changed or matured throughout your spiritual walk?

In a culture of plenty, how can you develop a level of desperation in your prayer life?

DAY 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT PRODUCES POWER

How did the earliest followers of Jesus turn the world upside down? They had faith that produced obedience. They had passion that produced unity. They had a desperation that produced prayer.

And finally, they were fueled in every way by the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:1-4 records the launch of the church:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

What a moment that must have been! But it wasn't just a moment. It was the beginning of a wave that has washed across the entire world for two thousand years. These believers turned the world upside down. And what we must remember is that the wave was entirely empowered by the Spirit of God.

We have access to that *same* power today. Every day. Every second! We have the opportunity and responsibility to join

in God's mission locally and globally, but we won't accomplish anything through clever strategies, targeted marketing, or even human willpower in its purest form.

We are entirely dependent on God's Spirit to achieve God's mission.

That leads to important questions: *How do we know if we're being empowered by the Spirit? How can we tell if we're truly joining in God's mission?*

One answer is for each of us to focus on God's values and God's priorities for that mission. Remember those five kingdom priorities?

- Seek first the kingdom
- Deepen devotion
- Stick together
- Think multiplication
- Engage your city

When we wrap our hearts around these kingdom priorities and live by the Spirit's power, we can leverage our lives for the sake of God's mission.

How have you seen evidence of the Holy Spirit in your life? How have you seen evidence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others?

In what ways are you currently relying on your own strength or resources to accomplish “spiritual” goals?



**WEEK 2:
SEEK FIRST
THE KINGDOM**



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to week 2: Seek First the Kingdom! Once the group has settled in, use the following questions to jump into the discussion.

What struck you as especially interesting from the week 1 personal study? Why?

*What are the first things you typically do after waking up each morning?
Why are these things first?*

WATCH

Play the video for week 2. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 2 video.

Does everything in your life center in and revolve around the King and His kingdom? Why or why not? What obstacles or distractions shift your focus away from God's kingdom?

How would you distinguish between your local church and God's broader kingdom? What's the difference?

Think about your family, neighborhood, job, and hobbies. How can you seek first the kingdom of God and prioritize His mission where you live, work, and play?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

MATTHEW 6:33

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- Jesus is our King.
- We are citizens of His kingdom.
- God invites us to take part in His kingdom activity.

Prayer Prompts

- Help us to seek Your kingdom as we ...
- Help us to pursue Your righteousness by ...
- Guide us to center our lives in and around Your kingdom, including ...

DAY 1: **THE WILL OF THE KING**

Did you know there are more than forty monarchies still in place around the world today? Most of us are familiar with Great Britain and its “royals.” But there are more than forty additional nations that incorporate some form of a crown into their system of government. Belgium has a king. Denmark has a queen. The tiny nation of Brunei in Southeast Asia has a sultan. Qatar has an emir. And Vatican City, which is a sovereign nation in the middle of Italy, has the pope.

Only seven of these nations are considered “absolute monarchies”—meaning, the ruler has near-total authority. But that’s the kind of kingdom that would have been most familiar to the people of Jesus’ day. After all, the world at that time was dominated by the Roman Empire, which was ruled by its emperor. Other regions were dominated by kings who had total control of their fiefdoms.

Those of us who grew up in the United States and other Western nations typically connect governance with “the will of the people.” (At the least, we think that’s how government is supposed to work.) But that’s not what mattered in the ancient world, including the New Testament. What mattered in that time was “the will of the king.”

We must keep in mind this distinction as we contemplate the kingdom of God. Why? Because we often bring an elevated

sense of our own importance whenever we participate in that kingdom. We think, *God, here are my short-term plans and long-terms plans. Let's see how they mesh with Your will and if we can come up with some kind of consensus.*

Nope. That's not how it works in a kingdom. Especially the kingdom of the almighty Creator of the universe. We must approach His kingdom with the attitude Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:9-10:

***Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done.***

Because of our culture, it's difficult to visualize life as part of a "kingdom." How should we understand that word in the context of the New Testament?

Where do you currently feel tension or conflict between what you want and what God wants?

What's one step you can take each day to intentionally seek first the kingdom—something you're not currently doing?

DAY 2:

LARGER THAN LIFE

What does it mean to be part of God's kingdom? First and foremost, it means submitting ourselves to the rule of the King. Everything in our lives should center in and revolve around the King and His kingdom. That's critical. But being part of God's kingdom also means we have been caught up in a movement so much bigger than ourselves that it's hard to even wrap our minds around the scale. Remember that the kingdom is believers, the kingdom is big, and the kingdom is being built.

Think about the chronological breadth of God's kingdom. The same God who spoke the universe into existence is the One who rules today. That kingdom has existed longer than our solar system. Longer than any star. Longer than time itself.

Consider the scope of personalities who have participated in God's kingdom work. Adam and Eve didn't start the kingdom of God; they were welcomed into it. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob each contributed in their own unique ways. Same with Moses and Joshua. Rahab and Ruth. David and Solomon. Isaiah and Daniel. Jesus' disciples continued the work of Elijah and Elisha. Paul, James, Aquilla, Priscilla, and Lydia were influential in the formation of the early church, but they were latecomers to God's kingdom. The same is true for Martin Luther, John Calvin, Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Billy Graham.

Then there's folks like you, the other members of your group, and people in your church. You're all part of that same story. Citizens of that same kingdom. The kingdom of God is eternal. Joining in God's activity is joining in that which transcends time and lasts forever.

That's the glorious magnitude of God's kingdom. It's huger than huge. It's larger than life. It's beyond our ability to conceive or comprehend in any way—and yet we are part of it. We are included within it.

What an incredible opportunity!

How is God's kingdom impacting our world today?

*In your own words, what does it mean to join in God's kingdom activity?
To be part of it?*

DAY 3: TWO KEY WORDS

Let's read Matthew 6:31-33 and more of what Jesus said about God's kingdom:

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

We need to focus on two words from those verses that can change everything when it comes to leveraging our lives for God's kingdom. The first word is *seek*.

There is a strong sense among Christians today that following God is a passive experience. A passive lifestyle. We listen to sermons and read Scripture and kneel to pray, and through it all we hope God does something to grab our attention. We invest ourselves in the same habits and hang-ups that have caused us problems for years, waiting for God's Spirit to change us for the better.

But following Jesus means seeking after His kingdom. It's an active pursuit—a chase. To truly leverage our lives, we must

seek moment-by-moment to live in submission to His will and His plan every day. As God told His people in Jeremiah 29:13:

You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

The second word is *first*. We must be active in seeking God's kingdom, and we need to seek it first. Remember that everything in our lives should center in and revolve around the King and His kingdom. Nothing else in our lives should have a higher place of priority and authority than God—than the kingdom He has built and is building. Not our desires and plans. Not our habitual sins. Not our careers. Not even positive things like our families and our dreams. All of that must be second if we are to “seek first the kingdom of God.”

What are the main priorities in your life today—the things that require your time and attention?

What would it look like to invest yourself in those things as part of your effort to seek first the kingdom each day?

DAY 4: **GOD WILL SUPPLY**

It's often helpful to have practical examples when thinking through a concept such as seeking God's kingdom. So, let's look at a local church community that has been immortalized in Scripture for doing just that: the church at Philippi.

Paul encountered the Philippians on his second missionary journey. The Philippians were only around Paul for a short period of time—a matter of days—but they saw the power of God displayed through him. Lydia, a wealthy merchant who sold fabrics, was baptized. It was in her home that Paul officially launched the very first church on the modern continent of Europe.

The Philippians also saw him cast demons out of a fortune-telling slave girl. When that event caused a riot that landed Paul and Silas in prison, they all felt the violent earthquake God used to break their chains. (On the same night, the jailer and his family became the newest members of that church.)

Paul was strongly urged to leave Philippi, but the believers there continued joining in the ministry—in God's kingdom. They sought God by praying together and studying His Word. But they also chased after God's kingdom by investing themselves in it. Their jobs. Their skills. Their passions.

In Philippians 1:3-5, Paul started this letter to the believers in Philippi by saying,

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Throughout this epistle, Paul thanked them for the different ways they had sacrificed and invested in his ministry and in God's kingdom.

Near the end of this letter, Paul wrote in Philippians 4:19,

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

We often quote that verse in the church today. We need to be careful, though, because Paul was not writing a blank check with those words. Our needs and our wants are not always the same.

Because of their faithfulness in prioritizing God's kingdom, Paul could promise with confidence that God would provide for their needs out of His glorious riches. But we must recognize the first part of the equation: they were actively investing in God's kingdom. Seeking first the kingdom.

Who do you know that has made it a practice to actively invest themselves in God's kingdom? How do they offer that investment?

What is God asking you to invest in His kingdom based on the job, skill, and passion He has given you?

DAY 5: SO MUCH TO GAIN

When it comes to seeking God's kingdom, there's a question we have not yet covered: *why*? Meaning, why should we seek God's kingdom? Why should we invest ourselves in God's work locally and globally?

The short answer is because Jesus commanded us to do so. Recall Matthew 6:33,

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

And in many ways, that really is good enough. When God tells us to do something, we should do it. Remember how the early Jesus followers remained in Jerusalem when He told them to do so? We're called to obey Jesus' commands.

But to go a little deeper, let's explore why. After all, God is all-powerful. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. If He desires for His kingdom to advance and to permeate this world, He can accomplish those goals very well without our help, right? He does not need our resources or best efforts to bring about His will.

So why? Why does Jesus ask us to seek first the kingdom above everything else in our lives?

We can see part of the answer by looking at Philippians 4:19-20:

And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

There's the key word: *glory*. We seek God's kingdom, and we invest ourselves in God's work to glorify Him. To honor Him. To properly align ourselves with Him.


Think of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Did God benefit in any way by receiving their sacrifices? Was He in desperate need of cattle or incense or grain? No! Those sacrifices were an opportunity for humanity to worship God and maintain fellowship with Him.

The same is true for us today. God does not need our jobs, skills, or passions to build His kingdom. When we seek first the kingdom, we offer nothing He does not already have—yet we gain so much. So much! We become co-laborers in His incredible plan of redemption. Of restoration. We gain the opportunity to praise Him and worship Him by *joining* His plan. By working with our Heavenly Father to accomplish His will not just for today but for eternity.

That is the incredible opportunity we can take hold of when we seek first His kingdom.

In your own words, what does it mean to glorify God?

What opportunity do you have right now to glorify God by seeking first His kingdom?



WEEK 3:
DEEPEN
DEVOTION



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to week 3: Deepen Devotion! Once the group has settled in, use the following questions to jump into the discussion.

Who in your life has been an example of devotion to a person or an ideal? What have they taught you?

When you were a child, what did you think it meant to be a Christian?

WATCH

Play the video for week 3. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 3 video.

What parts of your spiritual life can feel draining or exhausting at times? Why do you think this is so?

Recall this quote from Henry Blackaby, “We are so activity oriented that we assume we were saved for a task to perform rather than for a relationship to enjoy.”³ When have you felt especially connected to Jesus or especially aware of His presence in your life?

If we must seek first the King to rightly seek first the kingdom, how can you deepen your devotion through prayer and the Word each day? What may you need to give up to better prioritize prayer and the Word?

How can our group give priority to prayer and the Word when we gather and encourage one another to do so throughout the week?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

MATTHEW 11:28-30

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- God has invited us into a relationship with Him.
- Jesus gives rest to the weary.
- Jesus desires fellowship with His followers.

Prayer Prompts

- Help us daily seek You as King by ...
- Encourage us as we pray and study Your Word to ...
- Work in us so You can work through us to ...

DAY 1: OUR MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

As we dive into how to deepen devotion as followers of Jesus, let's focus on a specific word: *relationship*.

Following Jesus is not primarily transactional. Yes, we are beneficiaries of the Great Exchange—Jesus has taken our sin and given us His righteousness, which is how we become part of His kingdom. There is a covenant involved. God forgives our sins because He has promised to do so, and He always keeps His Word. But that reality is the starting place for our connection with God. There's much more involved.

Also, following Jesus is not primarily positional. Yes, the result of the Great Exchange is that we have a new position in the world and in God's kingdom. A new standing. We began life on the outside, but through Jesus we are brought inside. We are drawn close. We are justified, which means our legal position is secure in God's eyes because we are wrapped in the righteousness of Christ. But again, our new position doesn't portray the whole picture. There's more.

To be a Jesus follower is primarily relational. We have a relationship with God—one that is personal. Intimate. Even affectionate. As Jesus said in John 15:15,

I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Just like any other relationship, we can experience different depths in our fellowship with Jesus. That connection can be shallow. It can be deep. Or it can exist at every level in between.

Ideally, the longer we live as Jesus followers, the deeper that relationship will go. The more time we spend in fellowship with Christ, the more we should know Him, love Him, understand Him, appreciate Him, and open ourselves to Him.

Unfortunately, depth doesn't happen automatically. It's perfectly possible to maintain a surface level of relationship with Christ—to exist in a shallow connection. This doesn't happen by His preference, but because of our choices when we fail to deepen devotion in our daily lives as His disciples.

Using the following scale, how would you rate the depth of your relationship with Jesus?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Surface Level Relationship

Daily Intimate Fellowship

What obstacles have hindered depth and intimacy in your relationship with Jesus? Why do you think this is so?

DAY 2: MAIN OVER MAJOR

What an incredible reality that we have a relationship with God! As lowly, created, sinful human beings, we have the privilege of knowing and being known by the almighty Creator of the universe. It almost sounds absurd when you think about it. Not only are we friends with Jesus, but we can deepen that devotion every day of our lives.

The next question is, “How?” How do we actually deepen our devotion to Christ and increase our fellowship with Him? We’re going to explore a few answers, starting with this principle: *We deepen our devotion to Jesus when we refuse to allow major things to become the main thing.*

Look at Acts 6:1:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

Understand, this issue was major. Widows in the ancient world typically had no ability to work and nobody to care for them. So, this wasn’t just some bureaucratic problem. Women were starving. Their lives were in danger.

And, importantly, the apostles didn't ignore that problem. The leaders of the church created a system that made sure everyone who needed help received help. They carried out the work of God's kingdom, and they did it well.

But the leaders of that same church also made it a point to prevent that major issue from becoming their main priority. In fact, Peter, James, John, and the other founders of the church made their priority clear in Acts 6:2-4:

It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

As a follower of Jesus, your main priority is Jesus. We will never rightly seek first the kingdom until daily we seek first the King. There will always be work to do in the kingdom. There will always be problems to solve and people to serve. But you must make the choice each and every day to put King Jesus first and then join in His activity out of the overflow of what He is doing in your life.

The same goes for your career. And your family. Your community. Your physical health. Your mental health. Your finances. All of those things are important. Yet if you want to deepen devotion, then none of those can be more important than Jesus.

Daily seeking first the kingdom begins by daily seeking first the King.

When have you felt the tension of something important pulling you away from your relationship with Christ? How did you respond?

Where do you have an opportunity right now to make devotion to Christ your main priority? What first step can you take toward that opportunity?

DAY 3: DITCH THE CHECKLIST

How do we deepen our devotion to Christ? How do we grow in our relationship with Him? We must always remember you cannot seek first the kingdom without seeking first the King. To join in His activity daily requires that your heart be passionate about what's on His heart and that only happens as you give priority to intimate fellowship with Him.

This means that the greatest thing you bring to the table to leverage your life for the sake of God's kingdom is daily time with Jesus. The only way to grow any relationship is with time. The same is true about your relationship with Jesus. We must give time daily to deepen our devotion to Him.

Recall what the church leaders said in Acts 6:4,

But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

We hear this all the time in the church, "Pray and read your Bible. Read your Bible and pray." Everyone seems to understand that those two activities are connected to deeper intimacy with Christ both in your personal life and in community with other believers.

That being the case, why doesn't it always work? How many times have you sat down to "do your devotions" only to stand

up and feel like nothing has been accomplished? Why do we often go to church on Sunday, pray together, listen to the preaching of God's Word, and then hop in our cars without any significant changes in our lives?

One reason so many Christians fail to deepen their devotion to Christ is that they approach these critical disciplines—prayer and engagement with God's Word—as items on a checklist. “Okay, I have prayed and read the Bible. Check. Now it's time for my coffee.” It's so easy to allow our relationship with Jesus to become one part of a busy day. An important part, but just a part.

What's the alternative? *To abide in Christ*. To saturate ourselves in His presence and His Word. That doesn't mean you have to spend all your time “doing devotions.” That doesn't even mean you need to spend more time than you currently do. Going through the motions of religious rituals is not the answer.

Instead, you will deepen your devotion when Jesus is constantly and consistently on your mind. When you read His Word and then meditate on it throughout the day. Think about it. Write it down. Respond to it.

You will deepen your devotion to Christ when you talk with Him throughout the day. Each day. Share yourself with Him. Ask for advice. Ask for wisdom. Listen for His voice and believe He will speak.

In other words, spending time with Jesus not as a task to perform but as a Person to love.

What makes you feel loved and appreciated by the people closest to you?

What is something you can do right now to remind yourself of Jesus' presence throughout the rest of this day?

DAY 4: THE IMPORTANCE OF ABIDING

We have established that you can never seek first the kingdom without seeking first the King. And seeking first the King means choosing daily to give priority to fellowship with Him through prayer and His Word. In the Gospels, Jesus taught His disciples about this principle using the word *abide*.

Abiding is not a common term that we use in describing relationships in our lives today. But it is a word that is crucial when it comes to our relationship with Jesus. Deepening our devotion to Christ is dependent on our abiding in Him. On the eve of His crucifixion, in some of the most poignant words Jesus ever spoke to His disciples, He commanded them over and over to abide.

Take a look at John 15:1-5:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

The picture described here is easy to understand. A branch lying on the ground is dead. Because it's connected to nothing, it produces nothing. In the same way, we will stall and stagnate in our relationship with Christ if we don't abide in Him—not in terms of losing our salvation, but of attempting to live according to our own resources. Apart from an abiding relationship with Christ, our lives will produce nothing of value for the sake of the kingdom.

Jesus' words at the end of verse 5 are a stark reminder of how desperate we are for God:

Apart from me you can do nothing.

And by “nothing” He means absolutely nothing. Nothing of eternal value or kingdom significance can be accomplished in our strength or relying on our own resources. When we believe that, we will abide in Him. Which means we will rely on Him moment-by-moment for strength, for wisdom, for patience, for resources, and for anything else we need. As a result, our relationship with Jesus deepens. We experience His provision and His power and open ourselves more deeply to who Jesus is as He lives His life through us. Then and only then will we leverage our lives for the sake of His mission.

*What are you currently receiving from Jesus in your everyday life?
How is He shaping your life to better reflect His life?*

When Jesus says our lives will bear fruit, what He means is His life in you being lived through you. Where do you see evidence of “fruit” in your life—the kind of fruit Jesus described in John 15:1-5?

DAY 5: HE CALLS US FRIENDS

John 15:1-5 is a critical passage for learning how to deepen our relationship with Jesus. Why is it critical? Because the insights we find are from Jesus Himself. He shows us how to make progress in our friendship with Him.

Let's keep exploring what He said by reading John 15:12-17:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Don't overlook that incredible statement in verse 15,

I have called you friends.

That is perhaps the most shocking statement in the entire Bible. Every human being is stained with sin and guilty of direct rebellion against the God who created us and sustains us in every way—and yet that same God has stepped down into our world, put His arm around our shoulder, and offered His friendship.

At the same time, don't overlook the reality that Jesus is calling His friends to join His mission to change the world. Read verse 14 again,

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

And don't overlook what He said in verse 16,

I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide ...

In other words, as we abide in Jesus and His life begins to be lived out through us, what that looks like is mission. Jesus lived His life on mission. As Jesus lives His life through us, our lives will be on mission. We will join in His activity of going and making disciples. Of sharing the truth of the gospel. Of living as light in the darkness and offering love in a world that is dying to receive it.

If you are a disciple of Jesus, then He counts you as a friend. And as His friend, what is on His heart will be on your heart. As His friend, you will leverage your life to join in His activity.

What emotions did you experience when you read John 15:12-17? Why?

*How are you currently joining Jesus in His mission to reach the world?
How would you like to join in that mission in the future?*



**WEEK 4:
STICK
TOGETHER**



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to week 4: Stick Together! Once the group has settled in, use the following questions to jump into the discussion.

What do you like best about being part of a team? Why?

*What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word family?
Why?*

WATCH

Play the video for week 4. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 4 video.

If the church is a family united by a mission, does your experience as a Jesus follower align with that definition? Why or why not?

Consider the four activities listed below. If one church can't accomplish the mission by itself, where and how do you see churches working together to make a kingdom impact in our community? How can we join in those efforts or expand our current engagement?

1. Pray
2. Give
3. Send
4. Care

What does it look like for you to be a uniter around the mission of God in our church? With other churches? How can you surrender your preferences, wants, and desires to leverage your life for the kingdom of God?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer ...

ACTS 1:14

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- God invites us into His family.
- We are a family united by God's mission.
- We accomplish God's mission together.

Prayer Prompts

- Help us give sacrificially of our time, talent, and treasures, including ...
- Show us how to partner locally and globally for Your kingdom by ...
- Allow us to encourage church planters and missionaries by ...

DAY 1:
**DIVISION IS
DESTRUCTIVE**

There's no doubt the church has been declining throughout the northern hemisphere over the past century or so—first in Europe, then in North America. The statistics are undeniable with fewer churches and reduced portions of national populations who identify as Christians. In Europe and in North America, the power and influence of the church is fading.

There's no single answer that explains why this is happening, but one factor is certainly a major contributor: division.

There's nothing that diminishes influence quite like division. There's nothing that disrupts relational momentum quite like division. And there's nothing that destroys community faster or more effectively than division, discord, and in-fighting. It causes a sour taste even for people who aren't a part of that community.

Sadly, the modern church has experienced increasing division for decades. In many ways, we define ourselves by those divisions. This political party or that political party. This denomination or that denomination. This style of worship and that style of preaching. Our preferences have become our biggest priorities.

Paul called out the destructive power of division when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12:

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

As individual churches and as the capital "C" Church or the global body of Christ, we will not regain our impact and influence until we address the divisions among us. If we don't make it a priority to stick together as a body, we will continue to fade.

Where do you see evidence of division within the church? Within your community?

As individual followers of Jesus, what are some ways we often contribute to the division and discord within the church?

DAY 2: UNITY IS ATTRACTIVE

We know that division is destructive within the church. And while our current experience as the body of Christ is being marred by disunity, we aren't the first generations to deal with that problem. In fact, there has been division in the church for as long as the church has existed.

That's the bad news.

The good news is that division can be healed! What's cracked and broken can be made new, especially when the power of God's Holy Spirit comes into play. And we have a road map for seeking that healing in the book of Philippians.

We explored some background of the church at Philippi in week 2. What we didn't mention is that the Philippian Christians were dealing with significant strife within their congregation. Most notable was the presence of false teachers, which Paul strenuously opposed. But there were also relational squabbles that arise whenever people become invested in a community.

Look at this instruction from Philippians 4:2-3, for example:

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side

with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Why did Paul spend precious biblical ink addressing a minor spat between two believers in a small congregation? Not just because division is destructive—but also because unity is attractive. Unity draws people in. According to Psalm 133:1,

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

Which makes unity effective as a means of making disciples. And which is why if we are ever going to join in God's mission of making disciples, we must do it together. We must have unity.

This is why we must stick together as followers of Jesus. Remember, the church is a family united by a mission—which means unity is foundational for who we are. For the remainder of week 4, we are going to explore three ways to stick together as fellow members of Christ's body:

1. Our one foundation, which is Christ.
2. Our one attitude, which is love.
3. Our one guide, which is the Holy Spirit.

*Make a quick list of the churches in your immediate community.
What do those churches have in common?*

When have you seen the attractional power of unity at work?

DAY 3: UNITED WITH CHRIST

How do we stick together? How do we pursue unity as the body of Christ? Let's look at Philippians 2:1-4 to gain some instruction.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Now, many of the principles in those verses are super practical in and of themselves. It makes sense that we can develop unity by “being of the same mind.” And the more we can let go of “selfish ambition” and “count others more significant” than ourselves, the more we will be uplifted by the power of unity.

But what is the foundation of those principles? What is the glue that holds them all together?

It's Christ. Look back at verse 1:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ ...

In Christ, you can pursue things like affection, mercy, and joy. In Christ, you can push for the same purpose and do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. In Christ, you can develop the kind of humility that is necessary for genuine unity.

In Christ and only in Christ.

It's impossible for us to build unity and consensus as individual human beings. Just look at our families. Just look at our politics. Each of us has our own goals and our own opinions and our own pride. How could we possibly stick together when each of us is so stuck on ourselves?

The answer is for each of us to be united in Christ. When Christ is the foundation of your life *and* the foundation of your neighbor's life, then the two of you can be joined together—not by willpower or slogans or even shared interest, but by Christ. We can stick together when we are together in Christ.

Look again at Philippians 2:1-4. Which of the principles listed there are valued by our culture? Which are devalued?

In your own words, how does Jesus provide a point of common ground and deeper connection for us as individuals?

DAY 4:
**UNITY THROUGH
GOD'S LOVE**

If there's one thing people can agree about today, it's love. We all seem to have an intrinsic understanding that love is good and that hate is bad.

It's not surprising, then, that love is all over Paul's instructions for unity in Philippians 2:1-4. He encouraged the Philippians to look out for the interests of others—which we know from Jesus is the definition of love.

So, love is critical to sticking together. And yes, that means we need to love one another as Jesus followers. We need to actively demonstrate love and care to the people we encounter each day, and especially to our sisters and brothers within the church.

But look a little more closely at verse 1:

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love ...

Whose love was Paul talking about there? Not our love. He was talking about God's love. Specifically, God's love for us. Meaning, God's love is a critical factor in our ability to stick together.

This point is essential because it's hard for each of us to grit our teeth and "choose love" when things are going wrong.

It's hard to be loving when you've been wronged or when you're tired or when you really, honestly, genuinely just don't like that other person. We don't have the ability to love at all times and in all ways.

But God does. God always loves us.

Had a terrible day at the office? God still loves you. Made a bad decision as a parent or a spouse? God still loves you. Got overwhelmed and allowed a mix of negative emotions (anger, irritation, shame, and frustration) to spill out in ways that hurt others? God still loves you. Bought something you couldn't afford? Watched something you shouldn't have watched? Said something you shouldn't have said? God still loves you.

And because the love that God demonstrates toward you now resides in you, through His abiding presence, you have that same capacity to love. Not in your own strength but through Christ in you, loving others through you. Christ in you can love others even when you don't feel like it.

Because of God's love, you can contribute to unity within the church.

When have you experienced God's love in a way that felt especially meaningful?

How does knowing God loves you help you extend love to others?

DAY 5: UNITED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

How can we stick together as members of the church? By focusing on Christ as our united foundation, by living out the reality of God's love for us, and by allowing ourselves to be filled and guided by His Holy Spirit.

Paul said in Philippians 2 that when we have “participation in the Spirit” we can be “of one mind” (vv. 1-2). Meaning, when we are driven by our own individual wants and needs and preferences, then we will experience division. But when Jesus followers are all pulled in the same direction by the Holy Spirit living within us, then we will be unified.

Paul wrote something similar in Ephesians 4:3-6:

Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Take a moment to think about being inside a packed stadium for a sporting event. Could be a football game. Could be hockey. Could be an Olympic event. The point is that you're part of this crowd that is going crazy! Your team is winning, the clock

is getting ready to run out, and everyone is on their feet and cheering with everything they've got.

Can you picture it? Can you feel the excitement in that venue? Hear the roar of the crowd?

Now, there would be all kinds of different people in that crowd, right? People of different demographics. People from different places. People of different ages. No two individuals in that crowd would be the same.

Even so, there would be a collective sense of unity within that crowd. You'd have all different kinds of people, yet they'd all be pulling for the same thing. They'd all be rooting and cheering and longing for the same goal—for victory.

In other words, everyone in that crowd would be joined in the same spirit. They would be united by their shared passion and shared desire.

The same can be true of the church. We're all different—Jesus followers are people from every tribe and tongue and nation and age. We're different. Yet we are all living in submission to the same King. We're all passionate about the same kingdom. We're all pursuing and striving for the same spiritual goals, which means we can be unified by the same Spirit.

Reread Ephesians 4:3-6. What does the repetition in this verse reveal to us about unity as followers of Jesus?

What's one step you can take this week to submit yourself more fully to the guidance of the Holy Spirit?



**WEEK 5:
THINK
MULTIPLICATION**



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to week 5: Think Multiplication! Once the group has settled in, use the following questions to jump into the discussion.

What's an idea or value that nobody was talking about five years ago but everyone is talking about today? How did that happen?

When have you felt motivated to share about a product or service with others? Why?

WATCH

Play the video for week 5. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 5 video.

If we think multiplication of disciples, what are the biggest obstacles or setbacks you've encountered regarding personal evangelism?

Who is in your circle of influence that you can walk alongside and pour into as a disciple of Jesus Christ? What step can you take toward greater investment in that relationship?

If we think multiplication of churches, how is that happening in our church? Where do you see that happening in our community?

How might God be calling you personally to think multiplication?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

REVELATION 7:9-10

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- Multiplication has always been God's plan.
- The kingdom is bigger than just us.
- God's kingdom includes every nation, tongue, and tribe.

Prayer Prompts

- God, thank You that You allow us to participate in multiplication of Your kingdom by ...
- Show us how to multiply individual disciples by ...
- God help us to multiply churches through ...

DAY 1:

THE PRINCIPLE OF MULTIPLICATION

In the world of the church, multiplication is a term typically reserved for professionals—for pastors and authors and denominational leaders. It gets relegated to the same bin as other jargon terms and phrases such as “missional” or “giving units” or “propitiation.”

That’s a mistake, and we’re going to begin to explore why. But first, let’s take a step back and make sure we have a firm understanding of what multiplication actually means within the context of God’s kingdom.

First, the concept of multiplication means the same thing in the context of Christianity as it does in the rest of the world. It means starting with one thing or a few things, then investing resources in a way that produces many things. Think of a family. When a husband and wife grow their family, they produce children. Then those children produce grandchildren, and those grandchildren produce great-grandchildren—which results in this huge family tree of sons and daughters and cousins and nieces and nephews and everything else. That’s multiplication!

The same principle applies in God’s kingdom. When we leverage our lives for His kingdom, it results in more Jesus followers. We join in a spiritual harvest of souls within God’s family.

The second thing to remember is that multiplication happens when something is healthy and mature. If you want to raise a farm of chickens, you can't try to breed chicks. Nor can you start with a stock of sick, dying chickens and hope to produce a healthy flock.

In the same way, believers in Jesus will naturally multiply when they are healthy and mature. In fact, spiritual multiplication is part of what it means to be healthy and mature as a Christian. If we aren't multiplying, then something is off. We are spiritually immature or spiritually unwell.

Jesus gave us a picture of multiplication in His parable of the sower. Remember that story? A farmer planted seed in four different areas. Three of those areas did not provide the right situation for growth, but the fourth area was productive and fruitful.

As Matthew 13:8-9 says:

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

Healthy Christians will think multiplication of disciples and churches. They will join in a spiritual harvest that advances and expands the kingdom of God.

Where have you seen spiritual multiplication done well? (Meaning, where have you seen healthy and mature Christians reproduce more healthy and mature Christians?)

What are obstacles or difficulties that hinder multiplication among followers of Jesus today?

DAY 2:

MULTIPLICATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PLAN

Church multiplication is a popular buzzword among Christians today. But it would be a mistake to think of multiplication as something new or recent in the history of the church.

The truth is multiplication has been God's plan for His people since the very beginning. Look all the way back to the beginning in Genesis 1:27-28:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

God's plan for Adam and Eve was for them to reproduce in such a way that the earth would be filled with bearers of His image. That plan continued even when God needed to re-start humanity because of sinfulness. In Genesis 8:16-17, God told Noah:

Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of

all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.

When God determined to set apart a people for Himself through Abraham, He again emphasized the importance of multiplication in Genesis 22:15-18:

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

What did John say in Revelation 7:9 after he saw a vision of the kingdom at the end of history?

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

Multiplication has been God’s plan from the beginning.

What most catches your attention from the Scripture passages about multiplication? Why?

Where do you fit in God's plan and process for building His kingdom through the multiplication of disciples and churches? How has God equipped you in this way?

DAY 3:

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF MULTIPLICATION

We've seen that multiplication is a natural experience for Jesus followers who are healthy and mature; it's what we're designed to do. We've also seen that multiplication has been part of God's plan for His people from the very beginning.

All of that begs the question: how does spiritual multiplication actually happen? What causes it? What produces it? The answer may surprise you.

Let's return to Genesis 22. After Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by being willing to part with his beloved son, God made an incredible promise regarding Abraham's offspring (both physical and spiritual) in verses 16-18:

By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

What was the source of multiplication among Abraham's descendants? God. How did that multiplication occur?

By God's power.

Fast forward to the beginning of the church and we see the same thing. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told His first followers:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Yes, those early disciples of Jesus were responsible to serve as witnesses for the gospel. But where did the power come from? The Holy Spirit.

Look also at what Paul wrote to the leaders of the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 4:11-13:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Through His Spirit, God continues to give us the gifts and the resources we need to see multiplication within His church. He is the source and the sustainer of that good work.

When have you felt equipped by God to accomplish something important?

What's one step you can take to stop relying on your own resources and instead turn to God for strength as you seek to think multiplication of disciples and churches?

DAY 4:

THINK MULTIPLICATION OF DISCIPLES

When it comes to thinking multiplication, spiritual multiplication is not a strategy to pursue. It's a calling to obey. And making disciples isn't just something we do. It's a major part of who we are as followers of Jesus.

If we can wrap our minds around that truth, we will be ahead of the game in terms of leveraging our lives in ways that make a difference for eternity.

One way we can leverage our lives is for individual believers to reproduce more individual believers. This is what we typically call "making disciples." This includes sharing the truth of the gospel with people who don't know God and then, when they embrace Christ, walking with them to maturity. And there are a lot of people who have helpful strategies for making disciples.

But there's one way for us to multiply as followers of Jesus that is so countercultural and so unthinkable that we miss how often it is recorded in Scripture. Are you ready to hear it? This is the ultimate method for multiplication.

We die.

Specifically, we die to ourselves. We die to our own agenda, our own desires, our own schedule, our own preferences—

all of it. If you want to successfully invest your life in a way that multiplies the gospel 30, 60, or 100-fold, you need to die.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24-25,

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

In Romans 6:4, Paul wrote,

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Paul also wrote in Galatians 2:20,

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

What must happen for a seed to produce a harvest? It must be planted, which means it must die to its life as a seed and embrace something completely new. As John 12:24 tells us,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

The same is true for followers of Christ. For us to be part of this wonderful, miraculous process of spiritual multiplication within God's kingdom, we must die to ourselves so that Christ may live His life through us. And when that happens, it always results in a life leveraged for the sake of His mission which begins with multiplying disciples who multiply disciples.

What does it mean for us as Christians to die to ourselves? On a practical level, what might this look like on a daily basis in your own life?

Where do you see an opportunity right now to lay down (sacrifice) your own plans and your own agenda to allow God to produce spiritual fruit through you?

DAY 5:

THINK MULTIPLICATION OF CHURCHES

Making disciples of Jesus—what we’ve been calling spiritual multiplication—is not a strategy to pursue, it’s a calling to obey. Discipleship is not just something we do; it’s part of who we are. That begins with individual Jesus followers who die to themselves so that Christ in them may reproduce more Jesus followers through them. As we leverage our lives, we will see a spiritual harvest of new souls coming to faith in Christ.

The second way we can invest ourselves in this kind of multiplication is for churches to reproduce new churches. In fact, this approach is critical if we want to make any progress in terms of impacting lostness in our communities and our world. No one church can accomplish the mission by itself. We must multiply to join in God’s activity of expanding His kingdom locally and globally.

Sadly, when most people talk about “growing the church” in our culture, they think of individual churches growing larger. This includes the pastors and leaders of those individual churches. When we are invested in a spiritual community, it’s natural to want to see that community grow. We want our church to increase in attendance from two hundred people to three hundred. Then to five hundred. And that is not a bad thing. All living, healthy things grow, and healthy churches should be growing.

But the core element of spiritual multiplication is not increasing the size of our congregations—it's increasing the *number* of our congregations. It's churches planting churches that grow, develop, and plant new churches that grow, develop, and plant new churches—and on and on.

That's how the church began. Jesus told His followers that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The church was launched in Jerusalem, but God, in His sovereignty, allowed persecution to come upon His early church. Persecution drove Christians far into the Roman Empire, and those Christians started new churches—which then sent out missionary teams that planted other churches, and the body of Christ spread like yeast through dough.

Take a look at Acts 11:19-26:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ... Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Where do you see the power of multiplication on display in Acts 11:19-26?

Where can you contribute right now to the process of churches reproducing more churches?



**WEEK 6:
ENGAGE
YOUR CITY**



GROUP STUDY

CONNECT

Welcome to week 6: Engage Your City! Once the group has settled in, use the following questions to jump into the discussion.

Where is your favorite place to spend an evening in our city? Why?

What are three words that describe the city in which we live?

WATCH

Play the video for week 6. As you watch, take notes and write questions you'd like to discuss.

TALK

Use the questions you noted or the following questions to discuss and apply the week 6 video.

How often do you look for things in Jesus that are not in you? How can reading the Gospels help you grow in Christlikeness as we engage our city?

Where do you see evidence of lostness in our city—specific ways in which our city reveals its need for the gospel? How can we strategize to impact the lostness of our city?

How can we serve our city? How can we build relational bridges to share the gospel? How can we shift from a “you come to us” to a “we go to the city” strategy?

Consider the neighborhoods, businesses, and communities in our city. In what practical ways can we think micro about the places where we live, work, and play to reach the macro goal of engaging our city?

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Use the following Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a conversation between your group and the Father.

And when [Jesus] drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.

LUKE 19:41

Identify and celebrate God's praiseworthy attributes.

- Jesus grieves over lostness.
- The gospel changes cities.
- God uses His followers to impact lostness in cities.

Prayer Prompts

- Allow us to serve our city by ...
- Give us a passion to impact the lostness of our entire city ...
- Help us plan to multiply Your church in our city by ...

DAY 1:
**START WITH
THE CITY**

We're going to wrap up our study on leveraging your life for the sake of God's mission by exploring what it means to engage our cities with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When Jesus gave His commission to His first disciples in Mark 16:15, He said,

Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

This commission demands that Jesus followers then and now move beyond the boundaries of church buildings.

Strangely enough, most churches and denominations in today's world engage a city the same way a restaurant might engage that city. We start by building a little franchise or renting out a physical space. Then we do some advertising: "Hey, if you want to learn more about Jesus, come join us on Sunday at 11 a.m." Then we open our doors and hope people show up.

Just a cursory look through the book of Acts shows us that the earliest apostles had a different method for joining in God's activity to advance His kingdom. They engaged the city first. They went to that city and walked the streets. They interacted with the people there. They served and shared the gospel of the kingdom and preached and performed miracles and stood

their ground against demonic forces—they did the kinds of things Jesus did when He visited new cities.

In the natural course of things, they made disciples. And as disciples were made, then churches were born to continue to carry out the mission in that city. They came into the city thinking like missionaries, made disciples, and saw churches birthed that then continued to live out the mission in those cities.

Let's look at an example in Acts 18:1-4, when Paul first engaged the city of Corinth with the gospel.

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul's example is a model we can follow as we engage our own cities with the gospel.

*Read Acts 18:1-17 to get the full story of Paul's first encounters in Corinth.
What do you find interesting in this passage?*

*In this story, what were Paul's methods and priorities when it came
to engaging the city of Corinth with the gospel?*

DAY 2: ENGAGING THE WHOLE CITY

Most of us can get on board with the idea of engaging our city with the gospel—of joining in God’s activity of expanding His kingdom by taking that very gospel out into the streets. It’s a worthy goal.

But here’s a truth we need to consider: engaging our city means engaging *all* of our city. In other words, we fulfill our commission to make disciples of all nations by presenting that gospel to every people group within our city. Not just the people who look like us. Not just the people who travel in our social circles. Not just the people who think like we do or vote like we do or even speak the same language.

Engaging your city means engaging every aspect of the culture and communities in which you live. Even those that seem uncomfortable.

Let’s look again at Paul in the city of Corinth. As we previously studied in Acts 18:4,

He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul started in the synagogues, because that’s where he felt most comfortable. He was a Jew, after all, and he engaged

Corinth first by addressing his fellow Jews. But then read what happened next in Acts 18:5-8.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

It's easy for us to keep walking the same circles and pushing the same rocks up and down the same hills. But if we want to engage our cities with the gospel, we need to broaden out, as Paul did. We need to speak with anyone who will listen. Engage with anyone who needs help or who might be open to a conversation.

Yes, it makes sense for us to start where we feel most comfortable. But we can't stay there. Not if we want to obey our Savior's command and fulfill His commission.

What boundaries mark your comfort zone within your city or community? In other words, in what places and with what groups of people do you feel most at home?

What's one step you can take this week to move beyond those boundaries and begin forging new connections to leverage your life for the sake of God's mission?

DAY 3:

GO WHERE PEOPLE WILL LISTEN

We've been exploring how Paul engaged the city of Corinth in Acts 18. But let's flip back one chapter and look at Acts 17:16-18, where we find Paul in the city of Athens. It was an interesting trip, to say the least.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babblers wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

There's a lot going on in those verses, but one thing that's important to note is Paul's willingness to go where the action was. He felt "provoked" by the level of idolatry present in the city, and he decided to do something about it. As was his custom, he started by going to the synagogue and speaking to the Jews. But because Paul wanted to engage all of the city, he went on to "the marketplace" and continued to preach the gospel.

Once he got there, things got weird.

The people of Athens were known to be philosophically minded in those days. They enjoyed a good debate, and they were often open to hearing a new point of view. So, Paul gave them something they'd never heard before—the story of an all-powerful God who became human to save all humanity from sin.

Sure, some people made fun of him. That happens. But others invited Paul to a new place: the Areopagus (vv. 19-21). That was a whole different level, but Paul preached the same message in Acts 17:22-23.

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”

The point is that Paul was anxious to go where people were willing to hear and engage. He didn't limit his conversation to the people he knew best. Instead, he went where people were asking questions. He found people who were passionate and engaged—people who were looking for answers. He sought out places where dialogue was welcome, and he launched himself forward with what he knew to be the truth.

What's stopping you from doing the same thing?

Where are the places in your community people are willing to engage with new ideas or debate important topics?

When have you engaged with someone who was willing and open to learning about the gospel? What was the outcome or result?

DAY 4: ENDURE OPPOSITION WITH GRACE

As we have studied, Paul's effort to engage the city of Athens did not go entirely smoothly. According to Acts 17:18, some responded,

What does this babbler wish to say?

Others scoffed at him, and still others argued and debated with him about his ideas.

For Paul, that meant Athens was a pretty easy day at the office. He was used to much more difficult (and dangerous) reactions when people didn't like what he had to say.

- In Lystra, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, assumed to be dead (Acts 14:19).
- In Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown in prison (Acts 16:16-24).
- In Thessalonica, they were caught up in a riot and attacked (Acts 17:5-9).
- In Corinth, Paul's ministry flourished for more than a year before Jewish leaders violently beat Sosthenes and brought Paul in front of a tribunal (Acts 18:12-17).
- In Ephesus, Paul was caught up in another riot (Acts 19:21-41).
- In Jerusalem, he was beaten and imprisoned again, eventually winding up as a prisoner in Rome to escape assassins trying to murder him (Acts 21-25).

In short, Paul faced a lot of opposition whenever he tried to engage a city with the gospel. We should expect no less.

Our world is different than Paul's, but Jesus followers will still face hostility and antagonism whenever we seek to fulfill our commission to make disciples. The devil is real. So are demons. So is sinfulness and stubbornness and pride. These enemies aren't going to sit back and allow us to re-take ground they have claimed, nor will they play fair as we seek to engage our communities for Christ.

They are going to fight hard and fight dirty. We can count on it. That's the bad news.

The good news is that whatever opposition we face is only confirmation that we are on mission. The more we are opposed, the more we can feel confident we are joining in the mission of Jesus.

As Jesus said in John 16:33,

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

When have you faced opposition or hostility while carrying out your mission as a Jesus follower?

What are appropriate ways to take a stand or “fight back” against that opposition in our modern world?

DAY 5:
**DON'T DO IT
ALONE**

We've seen that engaging our cities is a major part of fulfilling our commission to "make disciples of all nations." Although our mission is to take the gospels to all nations, we do not always have to travel the world to seek first God's kingdom. We've also seen that engaging our city means focusing on *all* of our city, going where people are actively looking for answers, and expecting opposition.

In addition to these realities, there's one more truth we need to remember as we engage our cities: we can't do it alone. We were never meant to do it alone.

Look again at Acts 18:1-4 with Paul in Corinth:

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul wasn't a lone wolf or a rogue street-preacher operating in isolation. He gathered people he trusted—people willing

to partner in his important work. He worked with people he considered equals and mentored others who needed more knowledge and more experience. He engaged the city of Corinth as part of a community.

We need to do the same thing if we want to be effective in engaging our city. Joining in God's kingdom activity is not something we can handle on our own.

Some of you may be thinking, *But I am alone! What can I do?* Let's read more in Acts 18:9-10 about Paul's time in Corinth.

And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

As a follower of Jesus, you have His promised Helper dwelling within you (John 14:16). And if you do feel alone, remember that you are called to go and make disciples. We are not alone when we are actively investing ourselves in the lives of others.

Remember Jesus? We talk a lot about how He trained up His first followers and poured Himself into them before sending them out to change the world—and rightfully so. Jesus understood the value of collaboration. In the same way, those first followers didn't huddle together in a "holy club" for the next several decades. They continued to model kingdom collaboration, finding new partners who could offer new skills, new relationships, and new resources to continue the work of joining in God's activity to expand His kingdom.

Likewise, let us never ignore the power of connection and community as we engage the world for Christ. We can't do it alone.

Where do you see people doing a good job of collaborating for the sake of the gospel in your church or city?

What obstacles are currently hindering you from working more deeply with others (and enjoying the blessings of community) as you fulfill your call to make disciples?

BONUS: **WRAPPING IT UP**

Over the course of this study, we have examined how to leverage our lives for the sake of God's mission and five kingdom priorities that help us to do so.

- Seek first the kingdom
- Deepen devotion
- Stick together
- Think multiplication
- Engage your city

If we align our lives with these values, we will allow Christ in us to begin to live through us in a way that will leverage our lives for the sake of His glory. As we conclude, take time to answer these final questions and determine specific ways you can better engage in these kingdom priorities.

What have you learned about these five kingdom priorities over the course of this study? List specific insights, challenges, and encouragements for each priority.

Seek first the kingdom

Deepen devotion

Stick together

Think multiplication

Engage your city

In which priority do you feel you are most engaged right now? How can you continue that engagement? How can you encourage others in your group or church who may not feel as confident in living out this priority?

In which priority do you feel the need to learn and grow? What next steps can you take toward this growth? If you don't know what next steps to take, talk to your pastor, group leader, or a trusted Jesus follower about how to better engage in this kingdom priority.

If every person who comes to know Jesus first came to know another follower of Jesus, how are you using your gifts, skills, and passions where you live, work, and play to intentionally build relationships and share the gospel with others? Who in your group or church can encourage and pray for you as you do so? Reach out now to ask for their support and accountability.

How much time are you spending in prayer for the advancement of God's mission locally and globally? Why is prayer critical to engaging in these kingdom priorities?

Recall this quote from William James as we began our study, "The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it."⁴ How are you or will you begin leveraging your life for the sake of God's mission?

140 | ⁴ Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 289.

LEADER HELPS

Thank you for leading your group through *Leverage Your Life: 5 Kingdom Priorities!* In the New Testament, God used ordinary people to turn the world upside down and He continues to do so today. If we wrap our hearts around these kingdom priorities, we can leverage our lives for the sake of God's mission.

This study is designed for a group to watch, discuss, and apply the teaching video, pray together, and then continue study and application throughout the week using daily devotions. Each group experience contains the following elements.

CONNECT

Opening questions will help you kick off your group experience. These questions will start to explore principles of the teaching video each week.

WATCH

The teaching videos examine how to leverage your life and each of the five kingdom priorities. As you watch, encourage group members to take notes of their insights and questions.

TALK

Use the questions that group members noted or the provided questions to help your group discuss and apply the kingdom priority from the teaching video. If you are not able to discuss all questions during your group experience, encourage group

members to examine them throughout the week as they continue their study.

PRAY

When we seek God in prayer, He moves in power. Conclude each group experience with prayer. Use the Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, and worship-based prayer prompts as a guide to a conversation between your group and the Father.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

As you will learn throughout this study, you cannot seek first the kingdom until you daily seek first the King. Each week, five daily devotions further explore how to leverage your life and the kingdom priority for that week. These devotions are designed for individuals to study Scripture and examine ways they can engage each kingdom priority individually and as part of your church.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- To prepare for your group experience, read through it and watch the videos ahead of time.
- Honor the commitment of your group members by starting and finishing your group experience on time.
- Remind and encourage group members to complete the daily devotions each week.
- Check in with group members during the week. This may include a reminder about your next group experience or sharing insights from the daily devotions.
- Pray for your group. Ask God to reveal how each of you can begin to engage in ways to leverage your lives for the sake of His mission.



If you are interested in learning more about how you and your church can leverage your lives locally and globally, Send Network can help! Check out mobilization resources to advance God's kingdom by scanning the QR code or visiting SendNetwork.com/Mobilize.

PRAY

At the center of every great evangelistic movement is prayer. North America needs the gospel. Your prayers make a difference.



namb.net/pray

Learn how to leverage your job, skill, and passion where you live, work, and play for the glory of God.

The mission of God is not something you do for Jesus. Mission is who Jesus is as He lives His life through you.

Leverage Your Life: 5 Kingdom Priorities examines how God has used and continues to use ordinary people to turn the world upside down. This 6-week study explores how to:

- Seek first the kingdom
- Deepen devotion
- Stick together
- Think multiplication
- Engage your city

If we wrap our hearts around these kingdom priorities, we can leverage our lives for the sake of God's mission.



Scan the QR code or visit ***LeverageYourLifeStudy.com*** to access video sessions and order additional study books.

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