

# BEYOND THESE WALLS: HERE WE GO!

## Weekly Devotional

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### WEEK 3

*This guide pairs with Mark 4:26-34 and the sermon preached at Chapel Hill on May 18-19.*



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Jena and her family moved to Gig Harbor in the fall of 2017. Although she considers herself a Midwest girl at heart, she and her husband Josh are loving raising their three daughters here in the Pacific Northwest. Jena's love for God's Word inspires her to write and speak on a variety of topics surrounding faith and family.

## **LifeGroup Guide**

### **Head**

What can we learn about the different roles of people and God in growth in this passage? How does this resonate with other passages you know of in Scripture? Take a look at 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

What does this passage teach about the nature of the kingdom of God? Look specifically at the vocabulary used: scatter, night and day, sprouts and grows, knows not how, first...then...then, at once. What do these words teach about the way in which seeds are planted, the speed that they grow, the process of growth, etc.

How does this passage build on what we have learned earlier in this chapter?

### **Heart**

When have you been tempted to see yourself responsible for God's part in someone else's spiritual growth?

When can you see in your story that you have been the one "scattering" or "reaping". How have you witnessed the work of God through that moment?

### **Hands**

What's harder for you? Being proactive about partnering in the work of someone else's spiritual growth, or surrendering control to let God be God with his part? Pray for what you need to grow in this area.

Spend some time this week dwelling on the incredible mystery of how God works to bring fruit in the kingdom in ways we "know not how". Find an intentional way this week to turn your reflections into praise and worship of the one who is bigger and greater than we can understand.

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**DAY 1 – Monday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 4:26-34, Colossians 2:6-7, 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

**Ask**

What can we learn about the different roles of people and God in growth in this passage?

**Reflect**

There's a garden window above my kitchen sink. It serves as my mini greenhouse all year long and it plays host to various plants throughout the year. By various I mean we've grown basil, mushrooms, aloe, succulents, and even pinto beans. I definitely don't consider myself to have a green thumb, but I do take joy in watching things grow. By trial and error, I'm learning how I can do my part in nurturing a plant into healthy growth (or accidentally forget about it and find it shriveled!)

Participating in growing plants seems to reflect how we participate in the Kingdom of God here on earth. Jesus applied this idea in a parable about how the kingdom of God grows in Mark 4 and we read it again from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3: 6-9. As you read the Mark and 1 Corinthians passages draw two circles on a sheet of paper. Label one with God in the center and the other as "me". Inside each circle record who is responsible for the various aspects of gardening according to our verses. Who is responsible for the growth? Only God. What jobs have been assigned to us, God's Kingdom dwellers? Sharing God's Word (sowing/planting), consistently nurturing and loving others in truth and grace (watering), gathering in and enjoying the fruits of growth (harvesting). It's a simple visual with eternal implications.

God has given us everything we need to fulfill our gardening roles. We have buckets full of his Word, faith to step into fields God has prepared for planting, and eternal water overflowing from our Spirit-filled hearts. Let's pray for the eyes to see and the ears to hear where God's harvest is ripe so we can be people celebrating the amazing work God is doing in and all around us.

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**DAY 2 – Tuesday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 4:26-34, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**Ask**

What does this passage teach us about the nature of the kingdom of God?

**Reflect**

This is really good news for us: God's kingdom grows from unseen places. While we're sound asleep and when we're rushing through our schedules, God grows eternal things through his people and by his promises. We fear the unseen and unknown both in us and around us, yet it's where God's kingdom does some of its finest work, and like it says in 2 Corinthians, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

We see the weeds of this world taking over, seemingly choking out the good we work so hard to experience, and God is doing greater things below the surface of our hearts in places we cannot even begin to touch. By God's saving grace, we have eternity planted in our hearts. The roots are deep and anchored in Jesus' finished work on the cross. We can take full joy knowing and trusting that God's kingdom in us will come to fruit and the harvest will be glorious.

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**DAY 3 – Wednesday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 4:1-34

**Ask**

How does this passage build on what we have learned in previous passages in this chapter?

**Reflect**

Throughout Mark 4:1-34 we see a reoccurring theme of Jesus bringing his followers to new levels of understanding about how his kingdom operates. The kingdom Jesus describes belongs to him and is built under his reign. It's a kingdom that's both present and future; now and not yet. Jesus prayed for us to experience his kingdom on earth with his words, "Your kingdom come" in Matthew 6:10 and tells us to "seek first the kingdom of God" in verse 33. His is a dominion of humble beginnings and holy outcomes: an infant Immanuel, water to wine, paralysis to eternal life, sinners turned disciples, crucifixion to resurrection, and resurrection to a coming kingdom.

Both the parable of the seed (verses 26-29) and the parable of the mustard seed (30-32) expand on one word from verse 8. That key word is "yielding". How does the kingdom of God thrive? From our limited, earthly perspective it grows in mysterious and unexpected ways. From God's unlimited and eternal perspective, it yields crops in their exact right timing and for his holy purposes. People listening to Jesus knew full well mustard seeds didn't normally grow larger than all the other plants in the garden. He was stating the impossible is possible in his kingdom. Anyone who has planted seeds understand the limited control they have in actually forcing a seed to sprout. Our role is to simply sow the seeds of God's grace and love trusting the outcomes and the harvest to Him.

Where does that leave us today? We're like plants with roots in this natural world, yet with spirits soaring in heavenly places. We're citizens of Jesus' now and not-yet kingdom who have a job to do. Let your life be an invitation for others to meet God.

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**DAY 4 – Thursday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 4:26-29, John 12:24, Psalm 25:4-5

**Ask**

When have you been tempted to see yourself responsible for God's part in someone else's spiritual growth?

**Reflect**

As a little girl one of my favorite places was visiting my grandparent's 20-acre farm in Missouri. Every summer they had two gardens bursting with vegetables and fruits of all varieties. It was there where I learned the value of seeds. Though they lay small and dormant in the palm of our hands, they hold the potential to produce and generate amazing results. The kingdom of God grows in cultivated hearts and reveals its fruit in due season. Similar to the mystery of life happening beneath the soil when a living root shoots out of a seed shell, God's kingdom takes root in places we simply cannot see.

What does this have to do with the roles we play in spiritual growth? We can embrace the in-between moments by faith. Seasons God allows between when his living and active Word is sown and new life is evident is where we get to practice faith in God's promises. God is constantly at work cultivating the exact conditions necessary for new life to grow through the very seeds we sow in the lives around us. We get to spread the word and plant seeds for the next generation fruit-bearers. Seeds are sown by the lives of faith we lead and the words of love we speak, but it's God who assumes all responsibility for growth. Sometimes we get to see the fruit of our labor this side of heaven, but there are many times when we live in faith trusting God's "in-between" work even when we can't see it.

Are there relationships in your life where you can surrender perceived control or disappointment, and claim God's faithfulness for the "in-between" seasons? Have you forgotten that seeds can lay dormant during winter seasons? Ask God to see spring arrive in lives around you!

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**DAY 5 – Friday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Mark 4:26-29, John 5:24, John 11:25-26

**Ask**

How have you witnessed the work of God through moments of “scattering” and “reaping”?

**Reflect**

Parenting is full of scattering and reaping. My husband and I try to parent our three daughters with a sower’s mentality hoping the good things we invest in our kids will eventually produce fruitful lives they can then turn and reinvest into the next generation. Our heavenly father uses this idea of scattering and reaping to describe how he grows his kingdom in and through our lives. Seed by seed, his kingdom produces new growth in the lives of people who come to salvation through faith in Jesus.

My life was forever changed when God used one high school friend to scatter the seeds of Jesus’ saving grace in my heart. When I decided to get baptized at nearly 18 years old it was because God had done a work in me that I knew couldn’t hide. Like a brand-new shoot ready to burst out from under the darkness of soil, I couldn’t hold back the new life growing in me either. I wanted to fully live in God’s light and sow his seeds of grace in other people’s lives. One of my ongoing prayers over the past two decades is that God will continue to produce fruit in me that others will see and desire to know its source. God is the source of life and growth. He’s also the reaper who sees the harvest coming long before we even know it’s taking root. Our relationship with Jesus Christ means we have unending bags of seed to sow and all of eternity to worship in the harvest.

Who are three people in your life who need to know that Jesus is offering them the free gift of salvation? How can you demonstrate God’s love to them in practical ways this week? Your seed bag is full and ready for scattering. Pray and ask God to give you the audacious faith scatter seeds even when you can’t yet see the harvest.

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## **DAY 6 – Saturday**

### **Daily devotional**

#### **Read**

Mark 4:30-34, Ezekiel 36:26, Psalm 32:8

#### **Ask**

What's harder for you? Being proactive about partnering in the work of someone else's spiritual growth, or surrendering control to let God be God with his part?

#### **Reflect**

Be honest, how did or do you feel about group projects in school? Personally, I didn't enjoy them. I preferred taking on responsibility for the assignment myself. Pass or fail, I liked having the autonomy to carry out the work how I saw fit without the fear of disappointing or being disappointed by others.

If I'm not careful similar notions of independence creep into how I view my role in God's kingdom too. I slip into faulty beliefs that God hands out his syllabus for kingdom living and we retreat back into our daily lives to bear the burden of the results. Questions like, "Have I done enough? Did I say the right thing?" riddle my conscience in those moments.

God's kingdom doesn't operate on earned grades or meritocracies, and that's fantastic news for us. He is a loving father who has invites us into his family as heirs in his eternal kingdom. Try reading Psalm 32:8 again and imagine it spoken by a loving father. He is able and willing to allow us to carry the seeds of his kingdom and guarantees their growth. Are we willing to sow them believing God will do the growing in his timing?

In Mark 4 Jesus shares family secrets about his kingdom. He says our efforts to share God's word will seem small and insignificant, but we can have faith knowing he'll use them in mighty ways to grow his kingdom. No effort is too small, no role too trivial when we're sending out God's life-giving word into this dying world. It's by *his* grace we're saved and from *his* will our stony hearts are turned to flesh. In Christ, we're invited to join the family business with all the joy of knowing his compounding returns will never fail.

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**DAY 7 – Sunday**  
**Daily devotional**

**Read**

Ephesians 2:8-10, Galatians 5:22

**Ask**

Praise and Prayer! Take some time to thank God for his goodness and pray to have an eternal kingdom mentality today

**Reflect**

*God, give me heart of a farmer in your kingdom of here and not yet. Give me eyes to see your abundant harvest all around me. Show me the new, tender shoots barely breaking ground and the stalks reaching high into the sky. Forgive me for discounting the unseen roots anchoring new life below the surface of my awareness. Only you, Lord, know the dark, hard places where forgotten seeds are buried. By your word new life bursts from places we once thought dead, and by your Spirit fruit forms even after a long winter. Amen.*

The late Eugene Peterson beautifully paraphrased the words of Ephesians 2:8-10: “Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.”

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