

BEYOND THESE WALLS: HERE WE GO!

Weekly Devotional

*A ministry of Chapel Hill
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WEEK 2

This guide pairs with Mark 4:21-25 and the sermon preached at Chapel Hill on May 11-12.



Written by Kim Maxwell

Teacher and LifeGroup leader at Tuesday morning Women's Life. I married my college sweetheart, Steve, almost 28 years ago, and I am proud to be Nate and Brynna's mom. I love spending time with God in His Word and hanging out with my family, preferably outside, at church, or at a basketball game. Throw in a long walk and a good book, and I am perfectly content.

LifeGroup Guide

Head

Read Mark 4:21-25 and the parallel passages in Matthew 5:15 and Luke 8:16. How does the lamp represent the kingdom of God in these passages?

Read this passage in the context of chapter four. How do verse 24 and 25 remind you of what we learned in the parable of the sower about the nature of the kingdom of God?

How does 4:22 continue to develop our understanding of the purpose of parables explained in 4:11?

Heart

How do you relate to this parable? How have you personally experienced truth of verses 24 and 25 in your life?

How has following Jesus made hidden things come to light in your life and walk with Him?

What impact does it make for a believer to “put their light on a stand” instead of hiding it under a basket, or under a bed. How do you feel about this idea?

Hands

“To the one who has, more will be given.” Spend time journaling, or sharing a list of the things you have. How can you faithfully steward what you have been given? Think through in terms of all different areas; knowledge/experience and faith in Jesus, spiritual gifts, material possessions, money, time...

Would your LifeGroup like to go deeper into exploring their unique gifts and passions, their unique stories and personalities, and where they might serve in the church and local area? Look out for a new class, Custom Made, coming in the Fall. Perhaps your LifeGroup might be interested in participating as a group.

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:1-25

Ask

How do verses 24 and 25 remind you of what we learned in the parable of the sower about the nature of the kingdom of God?

Reflect

This week's parable is a continuation of Jesus' parable of the soils. Let's refresh our memories.

Who? (Who is speaking? To whom is He speaking?)

When? (When is this taking place? What has taken place before? What takes place after?) Where? (Where is this taking place?)

What? (What is Jesus teaching about?)

According to Mark, as Jesus begins His teaching ministry in Galilee, He opens up by preaching about the Kingdom of God. "The Jews Jesus preached to knew that God was king. They knew that He had always been king. What they did not know (apart from those who were given special revelation) was that the final, end-time, saving reign of God announced by Israel's prophets was already breaking into the world in Jesus' own person and ministry" (Dunson).¹ Jesus, the King of Kings, had come to bring God's Kingdom to earth, but in a way that no one fully understood or expected.

God's Kingdom is God's rule, God's reign. According to Mark 4, the nature of the Kingdom of God is that it starts small, but when it is nurtured (heard, received, accepted and cultivated) and we increasingly allow Him to reign in our hearts, we bear the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control). The more fruit we bear, the more we have to share, and God's Kingdom steadily advances here on earth. In this week's parable, Jesus tells us that whoever has, whoever nurtures God's Kingdom in his heart and shares its fruit, will be given more. But whoever does not have, whoever does not nurture, hear, receive, accept and cultivate God's Kingdom and rule in his heart, even what he has will be taken from him.

How are you intentionally nurturing God's Kingdom, God's rule and sovereign authority, in your heart so that it grows and bears fruit enough to share with others?

Father, Thy kingdom come! Grow and advance Your Kingdom in and through me today, in Jesus' Name and for Your glory. Amen.

¹ Dunson, Ben. "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: The Prophetic Hope." *Ligonier Ministries: the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul*, 13 June 2015, www.ligonier.org/blog/kingdom-god-old-testament-prophetic-hope/

DAY 2 – Tuesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:22 with Mark 4:10-12 and Mark 4:33-34

Ask

How does 4:22 continue to develop our understanding of the purpose of parables explained in 4:11?

Reflect

As we learned last week, parables are usually “stories out of ordinary life used to illustrate spiritual or moral truth, sometimes in the form of brief similes, comparisons, analogies or proverbial sayings. Ordinarily they had a single main point, and not every detail was meant to have significance” (NIV Study Bible). Jesus chose to teach in story form because stories engage the mind and emotions of listeners like no other form of teaching. Although these parables seem simple, the messages they convey are deep, spiritual and central to the teachings of Jesus. In Mark 4, Jesus uses several different parables to help deepen our understanding of God’s Kingdom. Parables are often grouped thematically. Understanding the main thread that ties related parables together can shed light on their overall meaning and interpretation.

Jesus our King wants us to look more deeply into God’s kingdom, so He tells three more parables in this chapter to emphasize different aspects of the kingdom. He wants us to carefully consider what He is saying from different angles, like a jeweler inspecting a diamond, so that we can greater understand and appreciate its magnificent beauty. In Mark 4:11, Jesus tells his disciples that “the secret of the kingdom of God” has been given to them. The mysteries of how the kingdom of God would operate “are revealed to the disciples but withheld from the spiritually unresponsive crowd. God sovereignly uses...parables to either harden a person’s heart so that he or she will be unable to respond, or to elicit the positive response of coming to Jesus, asking for an explanation, and accepting his message” (ESV Study Bible). Jesus helps those who have receptive hearts understand what He is saying. But there are those who refuse to listen. Even today. Jesus used parables to teach engagingly and effectively, but also to expose and judge hardened hearts.

Jesus, give me a receptive and responsive heart (good soil) to understand, accept and obey the truths You are revealing to me today.

DAY 3 – Wednesday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:23 with 1 Samuel 3:1-11; Mark 4:9-20; and Matthew 5:14-16.

Ask

In your own words explain what you think “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear” means.

Reflect

We jokingly tell our teenaged daughter that she has bionic ears. If we smack our gum or chew food with our mouths open, she will hear it and let you know! We all have ears. To not have ears would be an unnatural occurrence. But, according to Jesus, we do not all have ears that hear. The Greek word for “hear” means to attend to; to comprehend or understand; to learn. Understanding God’s truth takes time, energy and focus; it takes a willingness to be challenged and changed. In this often-repeated verse, Jesus is alerting us to pay close attention and seek God’s wisdom concerning what He has said.

If we have ears to hear, that means we have a humble and teachable heart (good soil). When we have good soil, we learned from last week’s study, Jesus says we will be given spiritual understanding and a life of abundant fruitfulness. But if we do not have ears to hear, then we do not have a humble, teachable heart, and even what we think we have will be taken away.

The fruit from last week’s parable is the light in this week’s passage. The fruit of those who have ears to hear is a life of good deeds that shines in the world so that people who are coming in to God’s Kingdom may see and know the way to enter. “When your lamp is lit by the Word of God, and your life becomes a light of faith and joy and good deeds, don't hide it” (Piper) ² Take what Jesus gives you and make it known to the ends of the earth. “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops” (Matthew 10:27).

Hearing – humbly and intentionally listening, learning and understanding - is a high calling. It does not come naturally, but it is a gift that can be sought and cultivated. This is why Jesus warns us in verse 18, to pay attention to what we hear. Our salvation, our fruitfulness, the spread of the light of the world and the glory of God all depend on it! Do you have ears to hear?

Lord, help me consider carefully what I hear so that, like Samuel, I can share what I have learned from You with others for Your glory.

² Take Care How You Listen! Part 1.” *Desiring God*, 29 Mar. 2019, www.desiringgod.org/messages/take-care-how-you-listen-part-1.

DAY 4 – Thursday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:21-23 along with Jeremiah 23:29, Luke 8:16-18 and John 8:12.

Ask

How does the lamp represent the kingdom of God in these passages? What impact does it make for a believer to “put their light on a stand” instead of hiding it under a basket or under a bed. How do you feel about this idea?

Reflect

When we lost power during Snowmageddon in February, I was grateful I’d had the foresight the year before to purchase several high-voltage battery-operated lanterns from Costco (and install the batteries!). When the lights went out, we did not turn on the lanterns and leave them in the cupboard...we pulled them out and put them in the middle of the kitchen island and on the coffee table, right in the middle of our living spaces, so that we could all see what we were doing.

In the same way, we are to allow the light of God’s Kingdom in us to shine before men. Why? So that they may see what God is doing in us and through us and praise Him. Light is meant to shine. God uses His Church, His people, to reflect His light into this world. But in order to shine, our lamps must first be lit by the fire of God’s Word (Jeremiah 23:29).

However, as pastor and author of *Irresistible Faith* Scott Sauls says, “Instead of leaving marks of the kingdom on the world, we have let the world leave its mark on us. Instead of denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Jesus, we have instead allowed ourselves to deny our neighbors, take up our comforts, and follow our dreams.”³ How does this happen? Jesus said we are the light of the world. We are a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. Why is the light of the Church so dim these days?

Like the moon has no light of its own but reflects the light of the sun so that it shines in the darkness, the light we shine in the world is actually the reflected light of Jesus, the Light of the world. As we bask in the fire of God’s Word (Jeremiah 23:29), we are able to reflect His light more powerfully into the world. (If you’d like to dig a little deeper into this, google Charles Spurgeon’s sermon: God’s Fire and Hammer.) Does your light need to be rekindled? What practical steps can you take this week to make that happen? How can you make the light of Jesus in you more visible?

Lord, set my heart on fire! I want to reflect Your light into this world, unobstructed. Teach me how to deny myself, take up my cross and follow You.

³ Sauls, Scott. “Seriously. What If We Began Again...?” *Ann Voskamp*, 1 February 2019, www.annvoskamp.com/2019/02/seriously-what-if-we-began-again/

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:24-25 with the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30.

Ask

“To the one who has, more will be given.” How do you relate to this parable? How have you personally experienced the truth of verses 24 and 25 in your life? Spend time journaling or sharing a list of the things you have. How can you faithfully steward what you have been given? Think through in terms of all different areas; knowledge/experience and faith in Jesus, spiritual gifts, material possessions, money, time...

Reflect

Have you ever given something of yourself, but received back way more than you gave?

I feel that way when I teach Sunday School. I give an hour or so of my time and energy each Sunday to our elementary-aged children. Not much, really, out of the 112 or so waking hours I have each week. But the joy and the sense of fulfilled purpose I experience with those kids far outweighs anything I’ve given. Getting to lead one of them to Jesus for the first time or watching a second grader cherishing her very first Bible or seeing children actively engage with the Word of God and understand who they are in Christ is such a joyful privilege.

Before we can give, though, we must first have something, some light, to give. I will not be a very effective Sunday School teacher if I do not first spend time preparing, praying, and being filled by God as I learn more about Him and practice obeying Him myself. If we want to faithfully steward what we have been given, and let our lights shine, we must first fill up on God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the fiery Presence of God Himself, is the greatest gift our heavenly Father could give us, and we can always ask for more of Him! Luke 11:11-13 says, “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, *how much more* will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

We serve a good and faithful God of abundance who gives to us way more than we could ever give to Him. He loves to bless us with more than we could ever ask for or even imagine (Ephesians 3:20)!

Father, You are an abundantly generous God! Everything we have comes from You. Please forgive me for the times I’ve tried to give and serve out of my own resources, without You. Holy Spirit, I need more of You. Please fill me once again with Your fiery Presence so that Your light shines brightly in me.

DAY 6 – Saturday

Daily devotional

Read

Mark 4:23-24a with John 20:1-18 and Ephesians 1:17-20.

Ask

How has following Jesus made hidden things come to light in your life and walk with Him?

Reflect

I love John's story of the empty tomb. I love John's sense of humor and competitiveness, boasting that he outran Peter. I love rediscovering each time I read it that Jesus is alive. I love the very real bewilderment and confusion of the disciples as they try to understand what has happened. (Dare they hope!?) And I love that Jesus does not initially reveal Himself to Peter or to John, His closest friends, but to Mary Magdalene, a Jewish woman from whom seven demons had come out (Luke 8:2).

After Peter and John saw that the tomb was empty, they went back to their homes. But Mary lingered at the tomb. And because she lingered, she was blessed with deeper insight than the others. Her lamp was lit. Could it be that when we take the time to linger with Jesus we too could be blessed with clarity and insight that we may not otherwise receive?

The concept of lingering is difficult for us to grasp in this busy world that demands that we do more with less. There is often more to do in a day than we have time for. But is it possible that we do not receive answers to our quick prayers on the drive to work because we did not linger long enough in God's Word to hear Him answer? If we made it our regular practice to linger, on our knees, at the feet of Jesus, what would He reveal? What would He heal? What would He resolve in our lives?

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, He brought revelation, comfort and purpose to her life. She was blessed with a greater understanding of who Jesus is (which dried her tears right up!) as well as the privileged purpose of telling her friends that Jesus is alive!

I believe God reveals Himself to us in a deeper way when we take the time to linger in His Word. By lingering, sometimes we are able to know Him better, sometimes we receive answers to our deepest questions, sometimes we are healed from our greatest betrayals, and sometimes we get much needed insight into our own sinful hearts. If this intrigues you, do not miss out on Day 7.

Jesus, help me desire to spend more time with You, and then help me carve out the time to make it happen.

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

Read

Psalm 23 (or another passage of Scripture that is meaningful to you right now).

Reflect

Today we get to practice lingering. Carve out some time today where you can spend open-ended time with God uninterrupted. Read His Word. Don't leave. If anything is distracting you, write it down so you can get to it later. Re-read the passage. Research any words or phrases you want to understand. Re-read the passage again. Tell God what is on your heart. Be honest with Him. Are you battling anxiety or fear? Unanswered prayer? Guilt or shame? Do you just want to hear His Voice? Confess any sin He brings to light. Then, be still. Listen. Expect God to speak to you in the quietness of your heart. And with open hands, literally, receive whatever He has for you. Don't leave until you are confident you have heard from Him. God is always speaking. The trick is positioning ourselves so that we can hear what He has to say. How do we do this? Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Imagine Jesus is sitting right beside you. Ask Him to open the eyes of your heart to the wonderful things in His Word.
- 2) Read the passage slowly several times.
- 3) If you have a study Bible, read the notes.
- 4) Look for God's attributes. Do you see Jesus in this passage? Worship Him! Remember Who He says He is.
- 5) Turn the passage you are reading into a prayer for yourself, for those you love, and for anyone else God brings to mind.

As you do this, keep asking God for more insight. In Ephesians 1:17, Paul wrote, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." The Holy Spirit loves to reveal the deep things of God to us!

My prayer is that this week's study has helped tune your ears to hear what God is saying to you personally so that the light of Jesus in you grows and shines brightly in your world.

Glorious Father, give me Your Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that I may know You better. Enlighten the eyes of my heart as I read Your Word so that I may know Your hope, Your riches, and Your power. May the light of Your Kingdom shine in me and through me so that You are glorified. Amen.