



## #3 The First Message | Pastor Joe Wittwer | June 28, 2009

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

We continue to “Follow the Leader,” and the game by this name is a good picture of what it means to be a Christian: we follow our leader, Jesus. In this series we are reading the story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark and learning how to follow Him. First impressions are always important, and Jesus created a strong first impression with His first message in Mark that inaugurates His ministry. What was this message? We find it in **Mark 1:14-15**:

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.  
15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

What was the good news Jesus proclaimed? “*The kingdom of God is near.*” Jesus’ central message was about the Kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God, and why is it good news?

#### 1. What is the Kingdom of God?

- It is more than heaven (although Matthew used the term “heaven” instead of “God” because his Jewish audience refrained from stating God’s name directly).
- It is not a place:
  - It is the reign or rule of God. God created us to live in a love relationship with Him and each other, but our world has rebelled. We set up our own “kingdom of me” that became the kingdom of darkness which covers our whole world. But Jesus came to liberate us and bring us into the gracious reign of God.  
**Colossians 1:13:** *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*
  - God’s Kingdom is experienced where God’s will is done. Jesus taught us to pray, “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (**Matthew 6:9-10**). God’s will is done in heaven—that’s what makes it heaven. But Jesus taught us to pray that His Kingdom will come here on earth as it is in heaven, that His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven. So the Kingdom of Heaven is both “now” and “not yet.” Jesus and His apostles speak of it in the present tense in verses such as **Mark 1:15; Matthew 6:10, 6:33, 11:12, and 12:28; Luke 10:9 and 17:20-21; and Colossians 1:13.** But they also speak of it as yet to come in verses including **Matthew 8:11 and 14:34, Luke 22:16, and 2 Timothy 4:18.**

#### 2. How do we live in the Kingdom?

Jesus teaches, “*Repent and believe the good news!*” To repent means to change. You can’t follow Jesus and stay where you are. Jesus warns, “*Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*” (**Matthew 7:21**). Paul stresses this point in **I Corinthians 6:9-11** [read it together]. We must leave the kingdom of self and enter fully into the kingdom of God. We must look only to Jesus in order to turn away from the darkness of our selfish “me-kingdoms.” As children humbly take a gift, we also can humbly accept the gift given to us by Jesus. “*But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and*

*do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it” (Luke 18:16-17). “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).*

### **3. How are we agents of the Kingdom?**

We are working with God to expand His kingdom—Paul addresses those who minister with him as “my fellow workers for the kingdom of God” (Colossians 4:11). We become such fellow workers through the following:

- Living under God’s rule ourselves. *“He [Jesus] told them still another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of four until it worked all through the dough’” (Matthew 13:33).* Be yeasty, and your influence will spread!
- Inviting others to enter the kingdom with us. *“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).*
- Actively working for what God wants. We pray for God’s Kingdom to come, God’s will to be done (**Matthew 6:10**); then we put legs and hands to our prayers!

### **C. Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What do you tend to think of when you hear the term “Kingdom of God”? From a biblical standpoint, how did Joe describe it in the sermon?
2. What does it mean that the Kingdom is both “now” and “not yet”? How does this paradox affect your attitudes and the way you live your life?
3. How do we often try to manipulate God into joining our kingdom (the “kingdom of me”) instead of willingly joining His? What’s encouraging about Jesus’ claim that the Kingdom is *near*—what does it tell us about the possibilities for our lives?
4. Since we extend God’s rule in the world by living under His rule ourselves, what are some specific areas in your life right now, today, where you need to relinquish the “kingdom of me” in order to live in the Kingdom of God?
5. In what ways are you extending God’s rule in the world by actively working for what God wants? When you pray, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done,” what do you sense God would like you to put your feet and hands to in response?

### **D. Personal Application** (1-3 Minutes)

- As you pursue the 40/40 Challenge, study the “Verses on the Kingdom” on the back of your sermon outline. Consider what it means for you to live under God’s reign in every aspect of your life; pray about how He *is* using you and *would like to* use you to extend His Kingdom.
- Who do you know who is still living in the “kingdom of me,” and it isn’t working for them? Invite them into the Kingdom of God!

### **E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Thank God giving us His Word and sending His Son as the embodiment of that Word.
- Pray that God would help you live under His merciful, joyous reign and that He’d use you to extend His Kingdom. Pray that He would put specific people on your mind to pray for and reach out to.
- Pray that He would help you be faithful in continuing the 40/40 Challenge and that He would help His Word reside in your mind and heart.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during your discussion.