

the **Call to Follow**

living the way of Jesus in the world



GOD'S STORY:
The Kingdom Journey

SESSION 1

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OVERVIEW

It all begins with God's desire for our world and each of us. Imagine a world where every person experiences freedom and wholeness, where borders between heaven and earth have dissolved. It is a world where justice and mercy have joined hands, and individuals and communities fulfill the command to love God and their neighbours as themselves. It is also a world where each of our lives and stories come into alignment with God's love for us.

God's plan had its origin in the formation of **Israel** as God's chosen people, but all of God's intentions ultimately found fulfillment in and through Jesus Christ. In him, heaven and earth became one – brilliantly, yet briefly. His words and actions revealed that he was “the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Jesus was the fulfillment of God's story in the Old Testament – he knitted together God's promises to Israel with the good of all creation. The life and ministry of Jesus validated and honoured all God did before him, and also pointed forward to God's ultimate desire for creation. This desire is a vision of wholeness and peace that Jesus described as the “**Kingdom of God.**”

Jesus also said that the Kingdom's intentions were fulfilled in him. He instructed his followers to pray for God's Kingdom to come, and God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. In his crucifixion, Jesus shouldered the disobedience, brokenness and pain of the world, bearing the fury and violence of the **evil** and sin that opposes God's desires for the world.

Jesus emerged from death, clearing the way to forgiveness and a new start for the world. Through him, new life and a new creation had become possible. God's desire for a new world surged forward into its final, unstoppable chapter. The Kingdom of God was decisively established, but it was not yet complete – the followers of Jesus (including us) are required for its full establishment.

Heaven and earth are neither the same thing, nor completely separate. They mysteriously interlock through what Jesus accomplished and is now doing

through his followers. Through God's initiative and love, this world is painfully giving birth to a new creation. The new heaven and new earth that God promises is not a dreamy paradise that will one day float down from the sky – it is a hard-won reality that requires courage, commitment, trust, and faithful living. Following Jesus is also not about tolerating or ignoring our world until we are one day snatched into heaven – it means becoming involved in God's astonishing plan to renew this world!

Fulfilling God's Kingdom purposes requires us to persevere in faith and love, while at the same time recognizing the signs of the Kingdom that are already evident. God has promised that his Kingdom will come, so it is wise to recognize and celebrate the ways that God has worked through Christians in history to advance what is good, true, and beautiful in our world. By acknowledging God's faithfulness our hope can be fueled and our commitment strengthened.

The problems and pain of our world are clearly evident in the daily news and well-documented in statistics that track poverty, illness, hunger, and inequality (see attached statistics). It is much more difficult to measure spiritual and relational forms of poverty that spring from the deeper matters of the heart, such as fear and confusion. Today Christianity is the dominant religion in Canada and the world, which speaks to the spread of the gospel message; yet horoscopes remain the spirituality of choice in Canada's daily newspapers, and greed and violence are commonplace. In countries that boast freedom and material prosperity, people struggle with addiction to work and wealth accumulation. This can be legitimized as a normal "way of life" in our culture, encouraged by the marketplace, and even endorsed by the church. Yet at the same time a thriving counseling industry is kept busy addressing the dominant issues of stress, relationship breakdowns, and loneliness.

God wants us to experience wholeness and fullness of life. His Kingdom desire, modeled and fulfilled by Jesus, is that all people be restored and nourished by "food that satisfies" – physically, spiritually and relationally. God's desire is that all people experience shalom, the peace that emerges from love and translates

into justice and mercy. A Kingdom commitment may well begin with private decisions, but these need to impact our closest relationships and public life. The Kingdom journey is a discipleship that transforms our world. This is the central theme of God's story in the Bible.

Jesus taught that God's Kingdom is both like a tiny mustard seed and a priceless, hidden pearl. When we find the pearl, we are to pursue it above all other priorities. The mustard seed needs to be planted and nurtured. Both images invite us to trust and obey God in a way that leads to fullness.