KINGDOM LIVING



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AN EIGHT WEEK **DEVOTIONAL JOURNAL**

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KINGDOM LIVING

Jesus was launching His public teaching ministry. He'd gathered some followers and healed people who were sick — like deathly ill people were restored to full health and people who couldn't walk were literally jumping with joy.

One afternoon He climbed a gentle slope above the Sea of Galilee. His reputation was growing, so a big crowd gathered: some skeptics, some ready to believe, some young, some old, but all seeking something.

As the breeze rustled nearby olive branches, He opened His mouth and began to speak out. What flowed from His heart to the ears of hopeful listeners was a message that still rings true 2000 years later. We call it the *Sermon on the Mount*.

Like a composer who lays out key melodic elements in the overture of a masterful symphony, the greatest teacher who ever lived laid the groundwork for His ministry that would shake the world. And it still echoes into the hearts and lives of people today. His words contain wisdom so simple that children smile in wide-eyed in wonder, and so profound that scholars still delve the depths of their meaning. Over the next two months, we'll explore Jesus' message together, shining a light on the multifaceted truth and hope it holds.

The apostle Matthew, one of Jesus' close friends, wrote an account the earthly life of Jesus. We call it The *Gospel of Matthew* and it's

one of the books in the Bible. In the coming weeks, we'll open up Matthew's gospel and set our hearts on seven principles for living Jesus shared on that Galilee hillside.

Jesus makes some sweeping claims about God and the good life and how we can live as people of God's Kingdom. Plan to join us at Woodmen each weekend for the teaching series, *Kingdom Living*.

This journal is designed to help you prepare and grow in your faith journey. Each week, set aside a few minutes with God to prayerfully reflect on the scriptures and questions in these pages. It's our hope and prayer that together, we'll find a clearer, fuller understanding of the real Jesus, and what it looks like to follow Him as our King today. This chapter of scripture is a great starting place to discover Jesus and what it looks like for His Kingdom to come and His will to be done, in Colorado as it is in heaven.

Thanks to the Kingdom Living Journal Writing Team: Andrew Gearhart, Don McCaleb, Kenzie Tenpas, Matt Ferrell, Micah Parker, Traci Hollingsworth, Tim Davis

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. Isaiah 60:1-2

In God's word, light is a big deal. Check out these Bible verses and how they speak of God and light:

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness ..." John 8:12

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. – 1 John 1:5

These passages and many more declare that our creator King is light. He's radiant and beautiful. His glory shines and illuminates our way!

But the scriptures don't stop there. Notice the way these passages speak of light and God's people:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. – Matthew 5:14

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. – Ephesians 5:8

In one of the beautiful mysteries of our faith, not only is God light, but WE are light! As children of God, created in the Father's image, saved by Jesus and indwelled by the Holy Spirit, we radiate His love. As the church — as the gathering of God's people — we are called to be a radiant city on a hill.

In the weeks ahead, we'll explore what it looks like to shine the light of His Kingdom into the lives of those around us. As you pray today, thank God for His light, and Invite Him to help you shine His light in your community.

More about Light: James 1:17, Philippians 2:14-16, 1 John 1:5-7

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:13-20 Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

GETTING SALTY

If someone tells you you're salty today, they're probably letting you know you sound a little bitter or heated about a person or situation. But in the days of Jesus, salt carried a totally different meaning.

Jesus shared His message with a gathering of fisherman and farmers, moms and managers, peasants and power brokers. He called them to be "salt" and "light." It was a way to invite people to live lives that aligned with God, and further the reign of His Kingdom in the world. Stepping into this kind of Kingdom living preserves the best in our hearts and our communities, and illuminates the path for others to find the way home to God.

How do we practically live this Kingdom life? A great starting place is to circle back to the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5:2-13. Jesus begins to unfold what it means to live as salt and light:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

God invites us to step out into our community and live the blessed life of His Kingdom. This week, ask Him to stir your heart toward mercy and purity. Call on Him to strengthen your hands for peacemaking, justice and righteousness. As people who trust in Jesus, the beatitudes give us an opening framework for the kind of Kingdom people He's calling us to be.

More about the Kingdom:

Isaiah 9:6-7, Matthew 6:9-14, Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 4:23-24

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

This weekend we press pause on the Kingdom Living series to learn from the book of Romans.

READ ROMANS 12:9-13 Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

THE CALL TO RECONCILIATION

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:15–18

I started off with the best intentions to love someone well, to care for what's important to them. How did it all go sideways? Sooner or later, most of us find ourselves in this place.

I was recently left looking back in frustration and discord after an opportunity that initially seemed exciting ended up in a big mess. After a few days being a part of this endeavor, the communication was messy, the goals kept moving and expectations were unmet. I felt selfish and aggravated.

I paused and prayed. When I looked below the surface, I was feeling exasperation and shame. I was disappointed in the situation, but also in my own reaction to it. I'd let my emotions get the best of me.

In Acts 3:19-20, Luke gives us wisdom for moments like these: "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out. That times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord ... "

I reflected further on the teaching and the life of Jesus. How would He respond? With the help of the Holy Spirit, I let go of my frustration and shame. As my attitude changed and I began to be reconciled to the needs of others, frustration gave way to a renewed sense of hope.

God never walks away from us or finds our troubles too big; Through the power of Christ, He forgives and calls us to be reconciled with Him and with those around us.

Is there a relationship in your life that needs to be reconciled? Take a moment to invite the Lord to help you see the best in others and to open your heart to reconciliation today.

More about Reconciliation:

Colossians 3:12-15, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, Ephesians 2:14-18

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:21-26

Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

PURPOSE AND A PURE HEART

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8

Can you imagine heaven without God? All your friends, beautiful hikes and good food ... *but no God*. Would it still be heaven?

The good news is that scripture assures us that one of our eternal rewards is that we'll see God's face. (Revelation 22:4) Yep. You will see God!

Now you might be wondering, what does this have to do with purity?

Earlier in His sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Jesus didn't grow up scrolling Instagram. The Hebrew Bible was His media. So it's likely that passages like this one from Psalm 24 were on His mind as He taught. "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. (Psalm 24:3-4a)

We don't cultivate a pure heart to flaunt our righteousness, but rather to live in alignment with God's heart, to reflect His holiness to those around us and to know the greater eternal reward of seeing Him face-to-face in the new creation. In this life, through Christ, we seek to foster eyes of faith to see God in all we do, as we journey toward our final home.

Spend a few minutes with God today. Seek the Holy Spirit's guidance and help as you commit to living and interacting with others from a pure heart.

More about Purity:

Psalm 51:10-12, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, Philippians 4:8

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:27-30 Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

FIND US FAITHFUL

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Exodus 34:6

"Covenant" isn't a word we use often today. Yet we sense the longing that all humanity has for true connection and trusting relationship. Covenant points to how God steps into relationship with us. It can be defines as a relationship between partners who make binding promises to one another.

We see a cycle repeat throughout the Old Testament: God enters into covenant relationship with His people. He promises His faithful love and mercy to all who keep His commands, but time and time again, God's people fail to honor their end of the covenant.

They run from relationship, betray God's goodness. But our merciful God always runs toward His people to repair the relationship. He forgives and restores the bond that brings us life. He stays faithful, even when we're not.

In God's design for marriage, a man and woman enter into a covenant, binding themselves to each other in lifelong devotion. Marriage offers us a picture — albeit an imperfect one — of the deeper reality of God's covenant relationship with us. Spouses are called to stay faithful to each other, just as Christ remains faithful to His people.

We're familiar, some of us all too familiar, with the heartbreak of broken marriage vows. God's desire is for us to be promise-keeping people, within our marriages, our friendships, even our business relationships. Sometimes it's not easy, but He gives us grace and strength to keep our promises and to forgive, because Christ perfectly kept His covenant with us.

Spend time with the Lord reflecting on your relationships. Are your attitudes and actions marked by promises honored? Whether you're married, single, divorced or widowed, invite the Lord to help you live as a covenant-keeper. Take heart today because Christ fulfilled God's covenant, opening the way for our relationship with God to be restored for all eternity. May we point others to the One who is truly faithful.

More about Faithfulness: Hebrews 10:23, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Deuteronomy 7:6-11, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:31-32

Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

THE LANGUAGE OF LIFE

Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. Proverbs 16:24

Words are honey. Words are fire. Words are poison. Words are silver and gold.

Wait. Which is it? Well, the writers of different books in the Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, used all these images to highlight the role words play in our lives.

Nothing compares to the sweetness of pure honey. It can brighten your day, calm your nerves, or soothe a dry throat on a cold winter night. Just as honey brings pleasure and healing, our words have the power to delight and soothe. Through God's grace, they can be a treasure to those around us.

The buzzing honey bee can also carry a toxin that leads to an angry sting. If we're not careful, a careless word, spoken to lift ourselves up, can tear down others. Often, those we care for most are on the receiving end of our harmful words.

Our words both reveal and guide our hearts. In the New Testament book of James, authored by the brother of Jesus, the tongue is compared to the bridle of a horse or the rudder of a ship. It's a little thing that steers something big. It sets the course for a journey toward joy or ruin.

Find a quiet spot and invite God to help you take inventory of your words today. Are you giving voice to the good, true and beautiful? What about your social media? Are your words a curse or a blessing to those you love? Call on our good Father to help you speak words that carry His life-giving kingdom into the places you live, work and play in the week ahead.

More about Words: James 3:1-12, Proverbs 18:2-8, 25:11-12, Ephesians 4:29, Psalm 19:14

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:33-37 Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

A GENEROUS LOVE

The Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:30-32

God is love. That's the bold declaration in the New Testament book of First John. But does God really love everybody?

There are some really selfish people in this world. People who take whatever they want. People who hurt others. People who just grind our gears. Can God love even those people? Yes. He can and He does!

Throughout the gospels — the four New Testament books that depict the earthly life of Jesus — it's clear that not only does He love those people, but they're the reason He came from heaven to live among humanity! And it may be hard to admit, but WE are those people. Jesus came to love us, even though we have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

If we follow Jesus, the King who loves all people unconditionally, then we have to ask ourselves: Do I love everyone? What about people who don't deserve it? People who take advantage of me? People who vote different than me? People who hurt me?

Do we, like Jesus, move with purpose to reach those who have lost their way? Not every person is easy to love, yet Jesus extends the same generous love to each one of us. Even when we're far off, He generously seeks us out.

Through His grace, we can do the same, because this love is not some feeling. It's a commitment we choose, an action we take. It is sacrifice and service, even when we don't feel it. Keep in mind that love doesn't always mean giving people whatever they desire. Sometimes it means having difficult conversations, rooted in love, that challenge them to grow and fulfill their God given purposes.

In your time with Jesus this week. Reflect on those in your life who are difficult to love. Pray for them. Ask the Lord to help you love them. Thank Him for His generous love for you through all the days of your life.

More about Generous Love:

1 John 4:16-21, 1 Peter 3:9, Leviticus 19:18, Galatians 6:2, Proverbs 11:25

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:38-42

Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

LIVING THE KINGDOM

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:17-19

Have you ever participated in the team building exercise called the "Trust Fall?" One person closes their eyes and falls straight backwards while another stands behind to catch the falling person before they hit the ground. Some folks are quick to trust and effortlessly fall back into the waiting arms of the catcher. Others, instinctively take a step back, just in case the catcher isn't ready to do their job. Our first reflex is always to protect ourselves from injury. The exercise explores our ability to rely on someone else, even when it's contrary to our natural instinct.

Kingdom living often feels that way — like God's way runs counter to our common sense or our natural tendencies. God calls us to love our enemies, seek peace instead of revenge, care for those who can give nothing in return and forgive those who hurt us.

Much like a Trust Fall, Kingdom living gives us an opportunity to fully depend on Jesus. Aligning our lives with His words and His way of walking the world will often be at odds with our culture and our natural wants. Yet we can trust that Jesus sees what we don't see and in the long run, His wisdom will lead to good, true and beautiful things for us and for others.

Are you ready to trust the instructions of Jesus even when they feel contrary to your instincts? Which biblical instructions are easiest for you to follow? Which are most difficult? As you pray this week, ask God to help you fully trust the wisdom of Jesus for Kingdom living. Place your faith in Him to bring about the best for you and for those in your care.

More about Trust: Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-3, John 10:27

PREPARE FOR THIS WEEKEND'S TEACHING

READ MATTHEW 5:43-48 Take a few moments to pray and reflect on the scripture.

What is revealed about God — about His character, His conduct or His concerns?

What do I learn about people — about our identity, our tendencies, our condition or our relationships?

Is there an example or principle to follow?

How does this passage connect to the grand story of scripture and God's plan to save His people?

KNOWING JESUS

God created each of us to know and love Him. The Bible, God's written word, makes it clear that a life of deep joy and lasting satisfaction is found only in relationship with Him. God, our good King, wants us to have this life on earth and in eternity.

From the first people He created, right up through today, we've each turned from God and chosen to go our own way. Our rebellion shows up in many different forms and the Bible calls it sin. Sin breaks our relationship with God.

But God's unfailing love doesn't change regardless of where we've been or what we've done, so He sent His son, Jesus, to earth to restore our relationship with Him. Jesus was God in the flesh. He lived a perfect life and died to save us from sin. He was crucified, murdered on a cross.

It looked like Christ's death would be the end of the story, but God was just getting to the best part: Jesus rose from the grave. He defeated death and sin!

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God made a way for us to be forgiven and welcomed into a right relationship with Him. What an amazing gift! Each of us can begin a relationship with God by simply receiving His gift in faith. Through the power of His Holy Spirit, we can trust Him to bring about what's best for us now and for eternity.

You can pray right now to receive Jesus. Prayer is simply talking to God. You can pray something like this:

> "Jesus, I recognize I am a sinner and believe that You are God, You died for me, and You rose again. Thank You for giving Your life to save me. I need You. I open my heart to You. Help me to live a life that reflects Your love."

BAPTISM AND THE BELIEVER

Jesus calls each of us to live as a new creation! One of the ways we proclaim our new life in Him is through the sacrament of baptism. For those of us who believe in Jesus, baptism is an identification with His death and a declaration of the victory of His resurrection.

At Woodmen, we practice baptism by water immersion after a person decides to follow Jesus. It doesn't make a person a Christian. It's an act of obedience and a personal symbol that illustrates our hope in Jesus, who won the victory over death. He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..." (Matthew 28:19).

Baptism doesn't save us, but as we briefly go beneath the water and are raised from it, baptism points to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection: "... Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ... he was buried, and was raised on the third day ..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

You might wonder when you should be baptized. It's wonderful to take this step soon after you commit your life to Jesus. There's no reason to wait! Yet it's never too late to be baptized. It's good for a believer to be baptized, even if it's years after becoming a Christian.

It's a glorious day when a child comes to faith in Jesus. And when a child decides to be baptized, it's a big deal. That's why we have some special steps for kids who want to be baptized. If you're in 6th grade or below, we'll have you complete a baptism booklet with a parent or caregiver.

Ready to be baptized? Let us know and we'll help make it happen. Talk to any Woodmen staff member, or head to **woodmenvalley.org/baptism**. Baptism services are some of our favorite times at Woodmen! As you declare your new life in Christ, the congregation will raise a ruckus to cheer you on. Your community of faith is here for you, and excited to celebrate with you.



EXPLORING FAITH

Where are you coming from? When it comes to Jesus, are you hopeful? Skeptical? Full of questions or doubts? Maybe you're brand new to all this church stuff and something about Jesus or faith made you curious today. No matter where you're at, we're here to help you on your journey.

Join us for Exploring Faith, a free, three-week discussion group coming together in May 2025. Scan the QR code to take a look or sign up.



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