

Using these Bible Studies

The studies are broken down into different sections that each focus on one of St James in the City's values. We think this is a helpful way to have time together that focuses on many different areas of our lives as Christians, and not simply in getting more 'head knowledge' about God.



Live:

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. The questions in the section will help you get to know the members of your group and help grow that sense of family which we are called into.



Grow:

In this section, the questions are designed to bring you to a deeper understanding of the Bible and to help you consider how the truths of the Bible can impact your life.



Serve:

Nothing is more fulfilling than using your God-given gifts to serve and help meet the needs of others in God's family. This section will help make that desire a reality. You will be encouraged and challenged to take steps to serve those inside and outside of the group.



Build:

The thought of sharing our faith can be scary and can feel awkward. Don't worry: this is a common feeling! However, God wants to use you to reach those around you for Christ. This section is designed to give you and your group practical, manageable steps for sharing Christ that can become a part of your everyday life.



Love:

You were made for God's pleasure. Even when we gather as a smaller group, it is great to have the opportunity to worship and to surrender your heart to God. This could come in a variety of forms such as prayer, singing, or simply sharing what God is doing in your lives. Contribute as much or as little as you feel able to.

Introduction

This series is based on a series of sermons preached in Autumn 2018 with all the passages taken from Matthew's Gospel.

The phrase 'the kingdom of heaven' is used only in Matthew – it appears 32 times (with 'kingdom of God' occurring four times). Most think that Matthew used 'heaven' instead of 'God' because he was writing to a primarily Jewish audience and that the two phrases are identical in meaning. (Note that Mark and Luke both prefer 'Kingdom of God').

Both these phrases are about God's rule and reign – his new era that is beginning in the life, ministry, teaching, and healing of Jesus and which is ultimately brought into being through his death and resurrection. Especially early on in his ministry, Jesus preaches 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is *near* (or *at hand*)'. This shows something of how immediate and demanding Jesus considered his kingdom to be.

There are many more passages we could have picked for the Bible studies. If you want to keep thinking about 'the kingdom of heaven' as a small group once these studies are exhausted then there are some more suggested passages below:

- Matthew 5:13-20 (Salt and light, righteousness in the Kingdom of Heaven).
- Matthew 10:1-20 (What does 'the Kingdom of Heaven is near' look like?).
- Parables about the Kingdom of Heaven:
 - Matthew 13:1-23 (Farmer scattering seed).
 - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (Wheat and weeds).
 - Matthew 13:44-52 (Treasure and fishing net).
- Matthew 18:1-5 (Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?).
- Matthew 18:21-35 (Parable of the unforgiving debtor).
- Matthew 20:1-16 (Parable of the vineyard workers).
- Matthew 22:1-14 (Parable of the wedding feast).
- Matthew 25:1-13 (Parable of the ten bridesmaids).
- Matthew 25:14-30 (Parable of the three servants).

Notice that many of these references to the Kingdom of Heaven are within parables. Perhaps this shows us something of how we can understand the Kingdom – we have to approach it from many angles and need the wisdom of God to understand it. The Kingdom is hard to pin down exactly and precisely but it is revealed in these parables and in the teaching of Jesus.

A good starting point to help understand the parables would be David Wenham's book 'The Parables of Jesus'.

Study 1: 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near'

Live

What new skill would you most like to learn and why? How would you go about starting to learn it?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for his power and for the way he calls us to follow him.

Grow

Read Matthew 4:12-25 together.

- What is the significance of v12-16? What is Matthew saying about the Gentiles?
- What images does v16 conjure up for you? What does the light do?
- Jesus starts his public ministry in v17 saying: 'Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near'. What does he mean by the word 'repent'? How does this fit with his assertion that 'the Kingdom of Heaven is near'?
- What is the significance of Jesus calling the first disciples at this point in his ministry (v18-22)?
- What does the good news of the Kingdom (v23) look like?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- How often do you confess your sins to God? What impact does confession and forgiveness have on your walk with God?
- What does the call to follow God look like in your day-to-day life?
- What areas are you following God closely and immediately (v22), and what areas are you struggling to follow God in?
- Do you have someone who you can be accountable to in your journey with God? It might be this group or it might be a trusted friend, or both!
- Where are you seeing 'the good news of the Kingdom' in your family, your friends, your work colleagues etc.?

Build

How does this passage encourage you to share 'the good news of the Kingdom'?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray that you would follow Jesus more closely each day and that we would also be good news to those around us.

Study 2: The Upside-down Kingdom

Live

What is the best song/piece of music you have ever heard? What about it made it so special and beautiful?

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Thank God for how different his Kingdom is and praise him for his justice.

Grow

Read Matthew 5:1-12 together.

- What does Jesus mean by the word 'blessed'?
- Identify a few of those described in these verses to discuss further.
For example:
 - Who are 'those who mourn'?
 - What does it mean that 'God will comfort them'?
 - Who are those who mourn today?
- What overall picture do you get of the Kingdom of Heaven?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- The Beatitudes are often seen as characteristics of those who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. How well are you reflecting these characteristics in your life?
- How can this passage encourage you in difficult circumstances?

Serve

Where are you fighting for justice and for the marginalised in your life? What practical steps can you take to help those on the edge in church and to help St James and your small group reach the marginalised?

Build

Where are those on the edge and how can you reach them in practical ways to demonstrate God's love?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray that God's Kingdom would come fully soon and for his justice to reign.

Study 3: The Growing Kingdom

Live

If you could only take one book (except the Bible) onto a desert island, which book would you take and why? (Decide if you will allow series!).

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Perhaps use the song 'Build your Kingdom here' by Rend Collective and reflect/pray on the words used.

Grow

Read Matthew 13:31-35 together.

- What are the point of parables? Why did Jesus use them to teach rather than 'straight teaching' about the Kingdom?
- What are the deeper truths revealed by the parables?
- Why is the growth of the Kingdom guaranteed?
- Who are the birds who nest in the tree (v32)?
- What did Jesus reveal in his parables; what was hidden from the foundation of the world (v35)?

Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- What is our role in helping to grow God's kingdom?
- One thing parables do is lead us closer in our relationship with God. How do these parables lead you closer to God?
- Is this parable encouraging to you or challenging (or both!)? Why?

Build

What specifically are you doing to help grow God's kingdom? Who are you having conversations with and witnessing to, and in what ways?
How can you support each other in your evangelism?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other's witness and evangelism. Perhaps list a few names who you want to have conversations about Jesus with in the next few weeks.

Study 4: The Child-like Kingdom

Live

Describe your childhood: what was it like, what did you want to do and be as an adult, what is your earliest memory etc.

Love

Start your time together in prayer and worship. Perhaps read Philippians 2:5-11 and thank Jesus for his humility and the way he came down as one of us.

Grow

Read Matthew 18:1-5 together.

- What characteristics do children show?
- What are the powers in this world? Who and what are powerful and have an impact on the world around us?
- Why are children the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?
- What does it mean to change and be more like a child?
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Thinking about our own walks with Jesus...

- What are the powers in control of our own lives? What powerful things do we need to give up?
- How do we reflect the characteristics of children in our own walks with Jesus?
- How do we welcome children into our own lives and to the life of STJ?

Serve

How can we serve God and STJ in the small things?

Prayer

Close in prayer for each other: pray for humility and for the ability to be child-like.