Christian Faith Development for Students on Non-adventist College and University Campuses

Ronald R. Pickell

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTIAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS ON NON-ADVENTIST COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

by

Ronald R. Pickell

Adviser: Allan Walshe
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: CHRISTIAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT AMONG COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Name of researcher: Ronald R. Pickell

Name and degree of adviser: Allan Walshe, DMin

Date completed: July 2014

Problem

Surveys show that between 70% and 80% of all Adventist college-age youth, approximately 100,000 are attending non-Adventist colleges (Dudley & Sahlin, 2010, sidebar of study in email message from researchers). Social science has long demonstrated the importance of faith-development in the period of college life. Other studies have demonstrated the importance of spiritual life and development among college students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, pp. 276-299). Non-Adventist college degree programs do not include Adventist faith-development as a part of their regular college curriculum. An Adventist faith-development process is needed for the spiritual life and faith-development of all students attending non-Adventist universities.
Method

A twelve-week curriculum (Journey Bible Study) was developed introducing students to the mission and message of Jesus with primary reference to the Gospel of John, including the Synoptic gospels, and the rest of the Bible. Lesson guides include introductory ice-breaker questions (Journey Together), main passage of study (Road Map) and a small group reflection (My Journey) that meets on a separate occasion during the week. A leader’s guide (Back Story) was developed as part of the curriculum. Five basic spiritual disciplines (Five S’s) are suggested as a guide to enable participants to dig deeper into the study and develop spiritual habits.

Interviews were conducted with random participants from four different groups who completed the twelve-week Journey study to determine their spiritual growth and faith development. Participant interviews included undergraduates, graduate students, and a retired professor/current Berkeley ACF faculty adviser. Participants were selected from universities across the North American Division including the University of California, Berkeley, Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas, and 2012 ACF Campus Ministry Training Institute participants. Seven interviews were conducted from a sample of these four groups. Participants were asked to reflect on their growth in understanding on the mission and message of Jesus as well as how their spiritual life was deepened through the study of scripture and following the five spiritual disciplines.

Results

Participants reported that the Journey study provided a look into the mission and message of Jesus that was fresh, challenging, and helped them integrate their life in
Christ within their broader everyday life experience. Participants were challenged to discover that Jesus had a central message—“The Kingdom of God is at Hand” and already underway with Jesus accomplishments in the first Advent. Participants were also encouraged to see how open Jesus was to “check him out.” They saw how people spent time with Jesus before they made up their own minds about who he was. The spiritual disciplines employed in the Journey study along with the group interaction, enabled students go beyond Bible study and into a real encounter with God in the person of Jesus Christ. For many, Journey was the beginning of a whole new relationship with God—one that challenged their faith and helped them apply it on campus and on into their life following college.

Conclusion

Participants in the Journey Christian faith development process were introduced to a Jesus that many had never met before. Journey demonstrates that Christian faith begins by learning about who God is and connect with his mission and message. Participants learned that there was a central message in Jesus mission. The gospel was Jesus’ message, but they learned that the gospel of Jesus was the “good news” of God’s kingdom breaking into our present existence.

Experiencing the gospel as God’s sovereign rule in the here and now helped participants integrate their faith in God on campus, at work, in their relationships—in all of life. The five spiritual disciplines in Journey encouraged participants to have a daily encounter with the living Christ. Ultimately, Journey introduced or reintroduced participants to a God who is present in every way and in their everyday life. Journey introduced participants to a brand new journey with God relevant to their life as a student.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

CHRISTIAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS ON NON-ADVENTIST COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Ministry

by
Ronald R. Pickell
July 2014
CHRISTIAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT FOR STUDENTS
ON NON-ADVENTIST COLLEGE AND
UNIVERSITY CAMPUSSES

A project document
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Ronald R. Pickell

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

____________________________________________________
Adviser, Director, DMin Program
Allan Walshe Skip Bell

____________________________________________________
Benjamin C. Maxson Dean, SDA Theological Seminary

____________________________________________________
Jane Thayer Jiří Moskala

____________________________________________________
Date approved
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When Frodo came to the place in his journey where he knew he had to press on to Mordor alone and rid himself of the fated ring, he announced to Samwise Gamgee, his trusted friend, “Go back, Sam. I’m going to Mordor alone.” But Sam answered back, “Of course you are, and I’m coming with you” (Lord of the Rings). Below is the list of trusted friends and colleagues who have traveled along with me on this journey of college Christian faith development making sure I remained on course and did not give up along the way.

I thank my wife, Carolyn, for her own love for God and spiritual journey that has helped shaped my life in God and our shared life with college students through the years. We have “sought first the kingdom” together and her faith in God and me, especially throughout this project, has been a constant source of encouragement and blessing.

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I thank the congregation at Berkeley Seventh-day Adventist who was extremely patient and generous allowing huge chunks of time to work on the project as well as a supportive faith community in which to forge a process of college faith development.

I thank those who participated in the Journey Bible Study and the Journey interviews described in this dissertation. They are Jessica Kisunzu, Lucien Nahum Isaac, Anthony Rodriguez, Elissa Morris, Lynn Savedra, Margret Lumban-Gaol, and Ben Cha.
The quality of these student/participants has increased the success of the Christian faith-development process, and they have been a joy to learn with.

I thank the hundreds of students down through the years who have shared their lives with me and who I have journeyed with, learning as much from them as they from me about the complexities of a vibrant Christian faith in the skeptical environment of a university campus.

Finally, and most of all I thank Jesus who gave us this Christian life through his death, resurrection and ascension. His kingdom on earth has made seeking the kingdom of God in our everyday life a real option. Because of Jesus, we all have a journey!

These and many others have made possible what is reflected in the following pages.
CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH DEVELOPMENT AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS ON NON-ADVENTIST COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

Introduction

Surveys show that between 70% and 80% of all Adventist college-age youth, approximately 50,000 are attending non-Adventist colleges (Dudley & Sahlin, 2010, sidebar of study in e-mail message from researchers). Social science has long demonstrated the importance of faith-development in the period of college life. Other studies have highlighted the importance of spiritual life and development among college students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, pp. 276 - 299). An Adventist faith-development process is needed for the spiritual life and faith development of students who attend non-Adventist universities.

Personal Ministry Context

I serve as the lead pastor of a campus church a few blocks from the University of California, Berkeley, the campus pastor of Adventist students attending UC Berkeley, and the Volunteer Coordinator of Adventist Christian Fellowship North American Division (ACF/NAD), the official Seventh-day Adventist ministry on non-Adventist college and university campuses throughout the North American Division (United States, Canada, Bermuda, and Guam). In this dual role I serve the spiritual needs of approximately 40 students at UC Berkeley as well as the Adventist students on campuses...
across Northern California. In my role as NAD Campus Ministry Coordinator, I also oversee approximately 150 Adventist campus ministry groups and their chaplains. The estimated number of Adventist students attending non-Adventist college and university campuses has been estimated between 80-100,000. Through ACF we are able to be in contact with around 2,500 of these Adventist students and a large number of their friends.

I began serving as a chaplain to Adventist students on college campuses in the fall semester of 1985 as the campus minister of Advent House, Seventh-day Adventist Student Center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I served there until the summer of 2001 when we moved to Berkeley and assumed my current position at Berkeley Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Statement of the Task

The task is to create and implement a Christian faith-development process or curriculum, primarily, but not exclusively, for Adventist students that will introduce them to a life of faith in Christ, enabling them to live a growing and vibrant faith on campus that will prepare them for a life-long journey of faith and discipleship. Research will include a twelve-week curriculum—the Journey Bible Study—introducing students to the mission and message of Jesus and inviting them to ‘come and see’ who Jesus is. A select group of seven individuals from various Journey Bible Study groups were interviewed by answering six questions related to their experience in the Journey study.

Justification for the Project

Adventist students attending non-Adventist college and university campuses are currently requesting resources that will encourage and support their life with God while attending a non-Adventist campus. No known current Adventist resources are available
for the kinds of unique spiritual questions and issues students are facing in a non-
Adventist university environment. A spiritual growth process is required for student faith
development.

Current research demonstrates the importance of religious groups and clubs
(Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Therefore, non-Adventist students need to learn about
Christian faith through the apologetic of an on campus Christian community of
transformed Adventist students who are excited to share the life of God within them.

This faith-development process needs evaluation. A random sampling of seven
individuals that participated in the Journey Bible Study was interviewed to determine
how their experience in the Journey study influenced their life in Christ on campus and
after leaving school.

**Description of the Project Process**

Theological reflection focused on the New Testament and Psalms, with primary
focus on the gospel of John (invitational model of Jesus) as a basis for developing a
student Christian faith-development process.

Current literature from journals and books on campus discipleship models
published over the last ten years have been reviewed, surveying the best methods and
models of student Christian faith-development.

A student-based Christian faith-development process was developed from these
resources and tested by program participants (students who are 18 years or older involved
in an already existing Adventist campus ministry program on non-Adventist university
campuses).

Students were invited to participate in a twelve-lesson study on the mission and
message of Jesus through the *Journey* Bible Study. The context varied between a larger and smaller group experience. Participants met from week to week and were given time to share in group questions and study. They were given five spiritual disciplines to practice in the *Journey* study to help them encounter God in a personal way. Participants were also encouraged to meet sometime during the week to connect with an even smaller group to reflect on how God was using the *Journey* study in their faith development throughout the week.

A select group of seven individuals from various *Journey* Bible Study groups were interviewed by answering six questions related to their experience in the *Journey* study. Participants were asked about what they learned about the mission and message of Jesus, the impact of the spiritual disciplines on their life, the overall impact of the *Journey* study on their spiritual life, the comparison between a large or small group experience in the Journey process, about their understanding of what it means now to ‘seek first the kingdom of God’ having participated in *Journey*, and finally, about whether they could recommend *Journey* as a valuable resource for college spirituality and Christian faith development. These interviews were transcribed and comparisons were made to determine the overall impact of the *Journey* Bible Study as a resource for college Christian faith development.

The implementation phase of the project was completed by December 15, 2013.

**Expectations From the Project**

This project demonstrates how students have been encouraged and strengthened in the development of their Christian faith from their participation in the *Journey* Bible Study.
This project provides a ministry resource for Adventist students reaching out to fellow university students.

This project demonstrates a new resource for college pastors and campus leaders who are directing students in a Christian faith-development process.

This project has already become a resource for Adventist ministry on non-Adventist campuses throughout the North American Division and the world field.

This project has helped develop my skills and ability as a mentor by leading students in a process of Christian faith development for their spiritual life and the growth of God’s kingdom.

This project is helping stem the loss of Adventist students from the mission and message of the Adventist church by encouraging their spiritual life and engaging them in the mission of the church while attending a non-Adventist campus.

**Delimitations**

This project is about Christian faith development among Adventist students on non-Adventist college and university campuses in North America. Comparisons of how faith in general is developed among young people in non-academic settings or even the general student population can only be made by comparison and would be beyond the scope of this study. The faith-development process is limited to questions about the *Journey* Bible Study, mission and message of Jesus, and the five spiritual disciplines included in the *Journey* study. The interview questions were my own and intended only to provide some sense of what participants received from their involvement with the *Journey* Bible Study. Participating in the *Journey* Bible Study is certainly not the only resource for developing Christian faith among college students. It can also be assumed
that anyone who engages in a concentration of personal Bible study, spiritual disciplines, small group interaction with their peers, and personal reflection will receive some degree of development in their faith.

**Limitations**

Faith development by its very nature is subjective and difficult to quantify. This is why the interview process is perhaps the best way of determining how participants benefited from the project and how their faith was developed in the process. The number of people involved in the project was also limited by the time and availability of the participants. The project was not exhaustive. Our goal was to learn how students encounter God as introduced to him through the mission and message of Jesus, small group participation, daily disciplines, and personal reflection. The interviews were extremely insightful on what students learned about God and his purpose for their lives.

**Definition of Terms**

This study contains only a couple of technical terms. Although each is defined in its context, attention to the meaning of these terms here may prove helpful to the reader.

First among these is the term *faith-development process*. By faith development there is not a better definition than that given by the Apostle Paul in Col 2:6, 7, which includes receiving Christ, being rooted in him, living in him, growing in him, and overflowing in thankfulness. The college Christian faith-development process we have described here is an introduction and invitation to Jesus’ mission and message, five spiritual disciplines to help apply biblical truth, a group experience to journey along with others in both a large and small group context, and a mentoring component with the
Journey leader.

One technical term demands definition—Kingdom of God. The best definition comes from Jesus himself as he referred to it with his disciples in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9, 10), where Jesus taught them to pray for God to be glorified on earth as he is glorified in heaven. By kingdom of God, here we mean the reign or government of God. God’s kingdom is wherever he presides. The main priority of Jesus was the glory and reign of his Father here on earth as God rules supremely and is honored in heaven. For our purpose we are concerned about the honor of God and the extension of his rule on campus in the lives of students who have accepted him as their Lord and Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord.
CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGY OF COLLEGE CHRISTIAN

FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Discipleship as Narrative

Whenever I make a new Christian friend or make the acquaintance of a new campus minister or ministry colleague, inevitably in the course of getting acquainted and learning more about each other we both take turns sharing our “story” or Christian narrative—our personal journey to faith—how we each came to believe and follow Jesus. The reason we do this and why it is such a common practice among believers is that, fundamentally, the Christian experience is just that: A personal experience with God that naturally connects with the experience of others and has now become the centerpiece of our personal life story. Augustine referred to this truth telling as the two knowings—to know God and to know ourselves (Soliloquies, 1810, 2.1.1).

A narrative is more than a truth claim. It may be true or not, but it always conveys a truth and can often bring truth in from the side instead of hitting us head on. Truth through narrative is actually what discipleship and biblical spirituality is all about. In fact, the Bible itself is a narrative; a collection of stories woven together into an overarching meta-narrative including the main characters of God, human beings represented by important historical and biblical figures like Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, David, Peter, Paul, etc., heavenly beings (angels), evil archetypes like the
serpent, Satan or the Devil and his angels, and of course us—the reader, as our lives become woven into the biblical plot. We cannot leave ourselves out of the story, for all readers are left with a decision to believe or not to believe and thus we play our role in the epic drama.

Telling our stories connects us with one another and the stories of the Bible as we find our place in the grander narrative of Scripture. The Christian life is not so much a prescribed pattern of do’s and don’ts as it is a relationship with I Am—the God who just is, the One beyond space and time, but introduces himself from the very beginning as the one who enters our time (Gen 1) and space (Gen 2) and becomes the main character within the human story. The book of Genesis, “Beginnings,” is actually about the beginning of many things. The beginning of the universe, time, earth, life on earth, human beings, sin, the promise of redemption, murder, final judgment (the flood), the people of God, and God’s covenant with humanity. It is the book of Genesis that gets us going and forms the introduction to the story and establishes the plot for the rest of what follows in the Bible. It draws us in and unites us with the overarching biblical themes of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. It is here that we discover our own beginning and the fundamental truths about who we are, where we come from, why our lives have become so conflicted, and how God is “with us” on our journey.

In spite of sin and the fall, God has not abandoned us. Life becomes this great maze and journey with God back to the original intention and on to an even greater future under his faithful care. There are guiding principles to keep us on the road (commandments, instructions, laws, ordinances) but these are only rules for the road. The important thing is the journey before us and that we are being gently guided along the
way back home. We are in safe hands, demanding a real faith in God’s presence and command of the journey our lives will take.

Atheism, secularism, and relativism place us in limbo in a life without a story, where it becomes stripped of meaning. Our personal story is disconnected from others and any grander narrative. We are left with only material and biological associations, but nothing beyond our own life context. We are free floating in an undifferentiated materialism, -- severed from any personal history, defined future, or immediate purpose. It is the narrative of our own personal evolution disconnected from others by our own birth and end of life. It is a circular-story where we travel on a grand merry-go-round from an undefined and unexplained explosion in the universe as our beginning, no explanation or direction for why we are here and no purpose for why we must live on. Is this narrative? If it is it is one of our own making, the random coming together of hydrogen, carbon, and oxygen and a few other basic building blocks under absolute perfect conditions for life and suspended in space, existing on our own with no stated purpose and no proposed destiny except our own survival; a survival that is even now threatening the planet and without some kind of intentional and personal stewardship may lead to our own demise.

My Story

For this reason alone, it is important to know which story we identify with—the one in which we are playing our role and making our contribution to the main plot or the simple narrative of our single life detached and undifferentiated from the billions and billions of others who have gone and those who now currently live on the planet. One narrative places us on an unguided trajectory with no beginning or clear and hopeful future. In this story man is the storyteller and shapes his own destiny. We each drop into
the narrative somewhere and go round and round until life spits us out through the doorway of non-existence from which we came.

The other narrative connects us to one another, to a great and purposeful beginning, to an awesome and hopeful future, and to a meaning for what we do and accomplish each and every day. It is this personal dimension of our ultimate meaning and purpose which first began to draw me in to a grander narrative at age seventeen. I saw the direction that my own life and that of many of my closest friends was headed, and it was more of the merry-go-round story where the only thing that mattered was my own personal happiness and pleasure. Questions were racing around in my head about my life purpose and meaning. This led to a search for a greater happiness and meaning beyond my own personal fulfillment.

This is where the story of my life changed tracks and where my life story began to look a little more like many of the characters of the Bible. I saw no blinding lights or burning bush, but I did begin to sense a presence with me, around me, almost like I was being pursued. I began to be aware of what I can only describe as an “influence” in my life, like an undefined presence that was nudging me, listening to me: a presence that was in front of me and behind me. Finally, the Presence spoke to me as audibly, distinctly as the One who spoke to Paul in Acts 16 directing him not to go into Mysia and later by a night vision directing him to proceed on over into Macedonia.

For me it was a presence in front of me, bringing me to a stop. By then I knew in my heart without having to be told by anyone that the Presence was Jesus. I also knew that he wanted me to give him my life, but I was afraid, because the other thing I knew was how unsuccessful I had been at previous attempts in living for God. I answered back
to the Presence like Balaam replying to his donkey, that I would not make a good disciple and that I was not very good at following the rules. That is when I heard and understood the gospel in a way that for the first time made great sense to me, for the Presence shot right back with, “Good. I’ve been waiting for you to realize this. I do not want your promises. I want your life. I will take you just as you are. Any changes in your life will not be up to you, but me.” I thought about it for a moment and decided I had nothing to lose.

If Jesus was willing to take me as a failure and just as I was with no promises for good behavior on my part how could I lose? So I surrendered to him right there on the spot. This began a journey with Jesus that has continued and grown ever since—a new chapter in my life in which Jesus has been completely faithful to his word. Jesus accepted me as I was, foul mouth, ungodly thoughts, bad habits, and all, and began a brand new work of transformation that has continued in me since that day.

In this way, my own story has many similarities with many of the stories of people in the Bible where God shows up and speaks into a person’s life, calls them to repentance, and moves in them turning their lives around. Again, just as in the story of creation, God enters our time and space and speaks into it calling forth a new thing, bringing order out of our chaos, and leading us into a divinely directed purpose. As a young person there were several obstacles I had to overcome in relating to God in bringing me to this place in the journey. First, I had to get used to the idea that God is much more personal and direct with us than I had ever known or imagined. I remember reading Ps 139 in unbelief for the very first time, for it was in that Psalm that I recognized the same kind of very personal knowledge of each one of us. I was truly
surprised and overjoyed to read a kind of play by play in the Bible of God’s ongoing presence in our lives.

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. (Ps 139:1-6)

The 23rd Psalm also quickly became an important anchor for God’s personal presence in my life. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” I imagined David on lonely nights watching over the sheep—leading, feeding, watching over, and protecting them. Eventually, he must have thought about himself and his relationship with God, and began to relate to himself as a vulnerable sheep that needed close shepherding care as he had been providing his own sheep. Just as he was shepherd to his sheep, he recognized that the Lord was his shepherd and was carefully watching over his life.

Something else I had to learn and come to terms with was the uniqueness and priority of Jesus. Up until this time, I had lumped all the great characters of the Bible into comparative spiritual heroes all existing on the same high and unreachable spiritual plane. I knew that Jesus had died on a cross, but other characters of the Bible had also suffered and sacrificed their lives: Joseph in an Egyptian prison, David running from Saul, the prophet Jeremiah thrown into a well and Daniel into a lion’s den. In the New Testament, James was beheaded, Stephen stoned, Peter was crucified upside down, and I had always been told that Paul died in the Mamertine prison while John was boiled in oil. So Jesus was really just another great person of faith to me that suffered a lot in his service for God.

I never thought that much about the centrality of his death on a cross or his great
victory in rising from the grave. This was actually one of the first things that began to work in me. I felt led into a time of reflection on God’s Son. Someone referred me to a book by Josh McDowell on the resurrection of Jesus, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (1979), and it was here that I began to realize the significance of Jesus’ death for me and how his death and resurrection was the focal point of the entire Christian faith.

I also began to identify with Jesus as the transforming ingredient for my own life. Now I understood why there were four accounts of Jesus life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Christianity was completely centered on Jesus. In fact the entire Bible is the account of God’s faithfulness to human beings culminating in reconnecting with us in the person and work of Christ. Jesus is the Christian life. Jesus was and is the only Christian! Every believer is merely an extension of the life of God in his Son. We are not called to a restored life per se; we have been called into a new life, the life of Jesus himself. As Rom 6 points out, “we were buried with him in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life,” his life! Jesus took our old life in his incarnation and buried our Adam humanity with him in the grave. Then he raised us up with him in his resurrection from the dead and has carried humanity in himself to reign with God on high.

I began to identify with Jesus. He became my greatest hero! I began to find my true and intended self in him. In seminary I learned another new and life-changing perspective about Jesus and the Christian life. It had to do with my understanding of the message and mission of Jesus. Up to this point, God had rearranged my perspective about his grace-filled acceptance of me regardless of where I had come from or what sin was hanging over my head. I had become more aware of how very personal God is.

God is sovereign and transcendent, but he is also at the same time completely
present, available and speaking to all. The life God had called me to was a life that He was giving, not one that I had to construct on my own. It was my life for his. God was challenging and redirecting my understanding of him beginning with accepting him, relating to him, and being transformed by him, but now I was learning new things about his mission and purpose. In seminary I was introduced to the good news of God’s kingdom in the preaching of Jesus.

As a young Seventh-day Adventist, much of the emphasis on being a Christian was focused on the future and a future salvation. If someone had asked me at that time to define or explain the gospel to them, I would have quickly responded that the good news about Jesus had more to do with his soon return and about our hope of going to heaven with him. This was all on condition that we overcome all the sin in our life. So the “Good News” involved having victory over sin, a future hope and a preparation for deliverance. I had no real concept of a “present” salvation. In fact, I had been taught that considering ourselves “saved” or having any real assurance of salvation before Christ’s return, was presumptuous and a basic denial of freewill.

Great emphasis was placed on our choice over God’s gift; however, coming to an understanding of Jesus’ message of the kingdom and that the kingdom of God was at hand in Jesus’ preaching and ministry, began to open a whole new understanding about salvation, Christian eschatology, and mission. I began to see that the good news was not just about a glorious future in the world to come, but present forgiveness, transformation, and healing in the here and now. I began to see that the kingdom of God had already begun and that Jesus was inviting people into a forgiven and transformed life today, and that part of living for Jesus was surrendering to his lordship right now. Through Jesus, the
kingdom of God was already here and will one day triumph over all things. His return is the consummation of a kingdom already begun and firmly established through his victory on the cross and his continuing presence in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This is the good news—Christ reigning on high and us being raised up and seated with him through his resurrection from the dead!

I now had a wonderful story of how God entered into time and space, but not just as our creator. Through Christ he had come in human flesh. God had truly become Emmanuel—God With Us! God became an actor in his own script. In fact, God was the central character both from the stories contours as creator and sustainer, but now he was the hero that shows up and redirects the plot. The story of Jesus is the greatest story ever told!

**Story of Journey Bible Study**

How many of us recognize the one of two narratives we all play a role in? What if we could share our story in such a way that the story of God in our life would make sense to others and help them realize their opportunity for the abundant life that Jesus talked about? I cannot make or force anyone to change narratives. I cannot redirect the plot, but I can tell my story. I can tell what happened to me and what I have learned along the way. I can listen to the stories of others and compare our journeys.

In my work with students on college campuses I began to consider how I might share what I have learned from my own life in Christ. If someone were to ask about living a new life in Jesus, what would I share? How would I explain my own experience with God and what I have learned about the story of Jesus? I decided to begin
with what I would most want to share with anyone who would give me the time to explain what life in God is all about.

If given the time and opportunity to share what living in God is all about, here is what I would share. I would begin with the Gospel of John where John the Baptist is “preparing the way for the Lord” (John 1:23). John understood his own mission very clearly in this—to prepare the way of the Lord. Some of John’s early disciples, John the evangelist and Andrew, were listening to John the Baptist tell about the coming of the Messiah. When Jesus showed up the following day,

John saw Jesus passing by and said, “Look, the Lamb of God!” When John and Andrew heard John say this they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?” They said, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see” (vv. 35-39).

And thus began the journey of walking with Jesus for John and Andrew as the following verse records, “So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him” (v. 39).

This is how the Christian life begins. It starts with an invitation from God to consider him and follow him in a brand new life. The journey is not initiated with us, but him. It is always by his invitation. Even when we might think it is through our own initiative, it is really a hungering for a new and better life that God is planting within us. Even in the beginning at the fall of humanity in the garden, the first conversation following their disobedience did not come from Adam and Eve. God began the conversation with “Where are you?” and our life has consisted in responding to God’s echo ever since. It is God who is drawing us to himself by his Spirit for the Bible says in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them,” so even our coming to God is in response to the Spirit acting in our life.
In John and Andrew’s case, God was working through John the Baptist to create awareness and a desire for the Messianic blessing. When Jesus appeared they could not help but express their curiosity. Jesus then asked them why they were following him. When they showed interest, Jesus invited them to hang out and spend time with him, to see where he lived. The rest of John’s gospel is actually about what John especially began and continued to see in response to Jesus’ invitation. He makes it very clear that the content of his gospel account is the highlight of all that he saw, heard, and experienced in his time with Jesus.

Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30, 31)

This was John’s conclusion after being with Jesus over the next three and a half years. The question is what did John see about Jesus that so convinced him that he was exactly who his original mentor and teacher John the Baptist said he was, God’s lamb who had come to bare the sin of the world? Following is a list of some of the things that John and Andrew saw and pointed out about Jesus and his message.

What Jesus Knows

They saw one of the same things I saw for myself—that Jesus knows everything about us. When John and Andrew spent the day with Jesus and ended up introducing him to their friends and family, friends like Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel, one of the striking things we see right away and John does not hesitate to point out is that Jesus already seems to know these guys. He knows Peter enough to give him a nickname. He changes his name from Simon to Peter (Rock or Stone). He knows Nathaniel well enough that he
says he has already seen him under the fig tree. But even more importantly, he knows that Nathaniel is a man with a pure heart for God. Jesus calls him “a true Israelite in whom there is nothing false” (John 1:47).

How does he know this about Nathaniel? Nathaniel wants to know that too. “How do you know me,” he asked? When Jesus said he saw him under the fig tree, others have commented that the fig tree may very well have been a common place of prayer for Nathaniel. Was Nathaniel praying under the fig tree? What was the focus of his prayer? Was he praying for signs or evidence of the Messiah? John provides no hint about these details, but Jesus’ direct message that he knew him and knew his character seems to reveal something like this. In fact, White in the book *Desire of Ages* affirms that this was exactly what was going on here,

It was enough. The divine Spirit that had borne witness to Nathanael in his solitary prayer under the fig tree now spoke to him in the words of Jesus. Though in doubt, and yielding somewhat to prejudice, Nathanael had come to Christ with an honest desire for truth, and now his desire was met. His faith went beyond that of the one who had brought him to Jesus. He answered and said, “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.” (1940, p. 140)

Upon Jesus’ answer, Nathaniel proclaims his confidence in Jesus as the Messiah. John, however, does not stop here with Nathaniel and what he knew about him. He goes on to mention that Jesus knew about all men. In chapter two, after turning water into wine at the wedding feast and ridding the temple of what was keeping people from really connecting with God, John makes this observation:

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man. (John 2:23-25)

The journey begins with us wanting to know Jesus, but we quickly see how much
he knows about us. Our Christian life and journey will be as much a journey toward ourselves as it is a journey toward God, a personal journey of self-discovery as Jesus begins to peel away our protective shells and to teach us about who we are and what we can become in him.

So the question becomes: How does Jesus know so much? We tend to focus on how kind, caring, compassionate, and giving Jesus was, but we do not hear so much about his wit and wisdom. Jesus was not only smart, he was incredibly intuitive, omniscient. Like Ps 139, he knows us. He demonstrates a penetrating knowledge that looks right through us. This then is one of the first things we learn as we begin our journey with God. We are not just going to be learning about him. We will also be learning much about ourselves. Where does the knowledge that Jesus has about us come from?

John makes this insightfully clear at the very beginning of his gospel. Jesus is more than a prophet, a priest, or rabbi. Jesus is the all-knowing, self-existent one. Jesus is God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1). As the Word, Jesus was the expressed thought of God. Jesus was the expression of God’s heart and mind; the heart and mind of God in human form. The God who no human being had ever seen with human eyes was being disclosed in bodily form through Jesus. This is why Jesus knows so much about us, and can speak right into us and about us, sharing thoughts and self-knowledge that only God could know. So what is the first thing I would hope someone would begin to understand about God—that he knows us. God knew us before we were ever born and had already constructed a way to be reunited with us in his Son.
How Jesus Cares

Fortunately, though he does not just know us. He loves us and cares deeply about us. He is the “Good Shepherd” in John 10. This was another thing that John began to see in his journey with Jesus. John 10 cannot be fully appreciated disconnected from John 9 where we read about the special healing of a man that was blind from birth. There is much to discuss and to draw us into this story about the man’s complete rejection from the religious establishment and his community. The fact that he was blind from birth makes it undoubtedly clear that either his parents had sinned or he did; however, since it was a birth defect I am sure that most had concluded it was his parents who sinned. God was punishing them for something, otherwise why would their son have been born blind? The teachers of the law dismiss him. His own parents fail to stand up for him and even the disciples consider him under a curse. But Jesus really sees the man. He sees him and goes after him like the one lost sheep from the ninety-nine. In fact, after the Jewish leadership kicks him out of the synagogue, Jesus goes and searches for the man. John records the shepherding care of Jesus with these words:

Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him. (John 9:35-38)

John 10 follows the story of the man born blind through the judgment that Jesus passes on the Pharisees who were standing by. If they had been caring people of God they would have reached out to the man and welcomed him in, but their spiritual blindness kept them from seeing what was right before their eyes. Chapter 10 is a comparison between Jesus and the false shepherds who do not really care for the sheep
(blind man). Jesus is the shepherd of Ps 23 that watches over his sheep and in John 10 he promises to lay down his life for them. He is also the direct fulfillment of the Ezek 34/Jer 23 shepherd who promised to come and take care of the sheep since the false shepherds had begun feeding on the sheep instead of feeding and caring for them.

This then is another one of the important things that John sees after being with Jesus. Jesus really cares for people. He cares like no other. As the Good Shepherd of our souls he watches out for us and even laid down his life for us. This personal revelation of Jesus’ care for each one reaches its crescendo in the way that John begins to refer to himself after his life encounter with Jesus. It is not insignificant that John never once refers to himself by his personal name. He remains throughout the gospel story as simply, “the disciple that Jesus loved” (John 20:2). Under the matchless and personal care of Jesus we find ourselves in a new way as people who are known and especially cared for by God. We become those who are truly loved by God.

God’s Pursuit

Not only does Jesus know us and still love us, but he pursues us. In John 6 Jesus refers to himself as the “Bread that came down from heaven.” As God fed and took care of his people in the wilderness wanderings with daily food (manna), so God was raining bread from heaven in sustaining life through his Son. Feeding the 5,000 in the wilderness was reminiscent of manna in the desert—but Jesus turns the miracle of life-giving bread into a lesson on the real bread coming down from God out of heaven. He is the living bread sent from God to them. God is from above, but we are from below so he pursues us with his own life-giving presence. He does not force people to worship and follow, but he does pursue them and demands a decision.
Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.” (John 6:53-58)

The pursuit of God for us in Christ has its own trajectory in the Gospel of John.

John mentions throughout his account of Jesus’ life and ministry the journey of Jesus from heaven to earth and back to heaven. In chapter 8, Jesus, in discussion with the Pharisees, informs them that he is from above (heaven) and they are from below (earth) and that unless they believe that he is who he claims to be they will die on earth and never reach heaven.

You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins. (John 8:23)

I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence. (John 8:34-38)

Thus we see in the Gospel of John Jesus’ ministry as a journey from heaven to earth and back again as a divine rescue plan for all humankind. This shows up again and again, but never so clearly demonstrated as in chapter 13 where Jesus very pointedly and in a dramatized fashion expresses his love for the disciples and his pursuit of them in a journey that took him from heaven to them (humiliation), laying down his life for them (atoning sacrifice), and taking his life back up again (resurrection) where he will again be seated by the Father’s side (exaltation) from whence he came.

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him
to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:1-5)

Now comes the follow-up lesson for the disciples:

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:12-17)

Of course this journey from heaven to earth and back again where Jesus will receive worship from all creation and every name that has been named follows the pattern of the messianic journey as rehearsed in what many have considered as the first Christian (creed) statement and hymn of faith found in Paul’s letter to the Philippians:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:6-11)

Jesus is God pursuing us in love that we might be won back to him.

The Mission of God

God does not only know us, he personally cares for us and pursues us. He has a quest or a mission for each one of us. He is calling us to join him in his mission. As Barnes explains:
In every biblical illustration of conversion, there is a mission attached. No one is converted for exclusively personal benefit. This may be why we have to lose our lives in order to find them. The purpose of conversion in the Bible is not our own self-actualization but Christ’s mission. The drama of biblical conversion is never limited to the safe struggle between doubt and belief in Christian doctrines. Rather, it always involves the extraordinary process of creating visionary apostles out of fearful disciples. (2006, p. 136)

Learning more about Jesus’ own self-understanding of his mission and how it influenced everything he did was a watershed moment for me in my own comprehension of the gospel story and my journey with God. As Jesus himself proclaimed at the launch of his official ministry in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the good news,” thus establishing and opening up his father’s kingdom as the very reason for Jesus’ coming.

All of the gospel narratives in their own way introduce us to this theme of Jesus and the kingdom of God. It is never just the “good news.” It is always the “good news of the kingdom.” Jesus came to interrupt a tyrannical rule of evil and destruction under the reign of Satan and the dominion of sin. Human beings are under the pall of death. As the apostle Paul fleshes out in his epistle to the Romans—under the old Adam through the fall in the garden, we are all under a vicious cycle of sin, condemnation, and death. But in Christ we have been brought into a new paradigm of righteousness, justification, and life. (Rom 5) Like the thief in Mark 3 who enters the “strong man’s” house and plunders his goods, Jesus has come into the world of the Strong Man and is taking back all that belongs to him. The present world and Satan’s evil angels have no power over Jesus. In Jesus there is a new authority—the authority of God. He commands the demons and they are subject to him. This of course is what led the Pharisees to conclude that since Jesus was obviously master over the demons then he must be in league with them (Mark 3:22).
Jesus, however, counters with the explanation that his work and ministry is evidence of not working in partnership with Satan. Rather, it is evidence of a new authority that is greater than Satan’s—the kingdom of God has come and Jesus is triumphing over the demonic empire of death (Matt 12:28).

Understanding Jesus’ self-declared mission of establishing God’s kingdom rule on earth and manifesting God’s glory (“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” Matt 6:10) opens up the story of Jesus and gives meaning to our own relationship to him. Advancing the kingdom sheds light on the beginning of his ministry since his baptism seems to be more about an anointing and inauguration for mission. After the skies split open and the Father speaks that this is his beloved son, the Spirit comes and rests upon him like a holy anointing presence and John the Baptist immerses him in water as the representative of the entire Old Testament word signifying through John, as the last of the prophets, that this is the one he was sent to prepare the way for. The Spirit then drives him into the desert propelling him to be tempted by the devil.

However, the temptation in the desert should not be viewed so much as an example for our own baptism as is often suggested. The baptism was more about his preparation for ministry. Jesus was literally being driven out to the desert in search of the devil, the prince of this world, and meant to defeat him by his obedience and faithfulness to God where the first Adam had failed by turning from God and indulging in the forbidden fruit. In the desert temptation Jesus was in search of the Devil, defeating him by resisting his every attempt to loosen his hold and trust on God.

This is how we are to understand his entire mission. The good news of Jesus is the good news of the kingdom. Through his teaching, Jesus opens our understanding to his
mission and what the kingdom of God is all about. Jesus’ kingdom theology is most noticeable in his parables, which the vast majority are parables of the kingdom, teachings about the kingdom of God, and what the kingdom is like. In fact, it has been suggested that Mark’s Gospel is organized around the answer to two questions. Who do men say Jesus is (Mark 8:27-29) and, as the Messiah, what kind of Messiah is he? (Mark 8:31; 10:33, 34; 14:27, 28).

In other words, the core of Christian faith centers on who Jesus is and what he came to do instead of the great nuggets of truth we are expected to follow. Once the disciples came to the clear conviction that Jesus was the promised Messiah then Jesus began the task of deconstructing their misinformed ideas about the Messiah’s mission and purpose. Instead of his rejection, suffering, and death discrediting his messiahship, it was, in fact, central to what the Scriptures had predicted about him and his mission. Jesus had to remind them again and again that his crucifixion, death, and resurrection were part of the messianic promise (Isa 53). A correct understanding of the kingdom theology of Jesus turns everything he taught about the abundant life as a life not just for the future, but a reality in the here and now. Through Jesus, God’s kingdom is literally something that is right at hand, within our grasp, since Jesus has brought it to us.

In one conversation with the Pharisees, Jesus’ meaning is often misunderstood as a reference to God’s kingdom “within” us.

Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20, 21)

Though the kingdom is an internal reality since we are to now consider ourselves in Christ just as Christ is in us, this is definitely not the idea in this conversation. Here,
the kingdom message, as Jesus has been delivering it, has not yet been embraced by the Pharisees so it is definitely not “within them.” The intent of Jesus’ response to them is that if you are looking for the kingdom it is right in front of you or “in the midst of” you and how the “kingdom within you” should be interpreted.

How was the kingdom of God a present reality? In Jesus the reign of God had come. Jesus himself was the beginning of God’s kingdom rule on earth. Perhaps the most radical and difficult thing the disciples and all of Jesus’ followers had to grasp and accept was, Jesus’ two-phased kingdom explanation. For Jesus the kingdom was both here and a reality still to come.

He illustrated this fresh interpretation of kingdom eschatology through the metaphors of the mustard seed and yeast working its way through the dough. Jeremias (2011) and Ladd (1993) both emphasize in these parables that Jesus was not illustrating so much the growth of the kingdom from the tiniest of seeds to the largest of shrubs and the spread of the kingdom throughout the dough; rather it was about the dual nature of the kingdom in its inauguration and consummation. The kingdom was present in and through Jesus as the smallest of seeds and its life was being felt in the dough of humanity even if it did not resemble the military and political triumph of Israel over her enemies that others had predicted and were expecting.

The work that Jesus had begun would have a second phase in his return or second advent when the kingdom would then appear as the large shrub where the birds of the air would rest in its branches and it would work its way permeating every aspect of this present evil world giving it new life and raising it from the dead.

These ideas, understandings, and teachings of Jesus were revolutionary and not
easy for the disciples to understand. Jesus’ messiahship was difficult enough for his followers since he did not fit many of their preconceived notions for the Messiah. However, his explanation about his rejection, suffering, death, and resurrection were completely outside their frame of reference, which helps explain why the disciples were so confused at his arrest, trial, and crucifixion.

However, these ideas became the centerpiece of the post resurrection life of Jesus for all his followers. In passages like Eph 2, Col 3, and especially Rom 5-8, Paul helps flesh out the present/future salvation of Jesus. We have been invited to live in Christ as he is now alive in us. As we embrace the mission of Jesus we too find our own mission of living for and about this new paradigm of life, where we come to discover and proclaim the seed of a new story in which God is now reigning in our lives and we are awaiting the consummation of a new world order where righteousness dwells.

Our mission becomes “seeking first the kingdom of God” (Matt 6:33) and “going to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18, 19).

The Never Ending Story

In the Journey we begin an adventure with Jesus where we discover as much about ourselves as we do about God. We discover how much God already knows about us, loves us, how he has been pursuing us, and we join a mission with him that will engage all our faculties, talents, skills, intellect, and heart. In this adventure we are connected to the grand narrative of God and we join the main plot—first as one of the antagonists and victims, but through what we learn and in submitting to Jesus’ wonderful
offer of grace, we soon become one of the many heroes in the story by embracing new life in his name and by helping others find a glorious meaning to new life from above.

In this adventure we learn that theology is as important to practice as practice is to theology. When we understand who Jesus is, what he has done, and who we are now through him, we can now begin to live in the new way he has worked out for us. Jesus has created a new life story for us in him. Since his coming, Jesus has interrupted a life that all have fallen into by spiritual forfeit and biological association with our doomed race in Adam and Eve. However, in Christ we now have the identity of a brand new humanity. Through his death and resurrection and our solidarity with him we too have died to our old life in Adam and are now living a new life through God’s Son.

In Jesus we can begin to practice life from a new pattern; a completely new story where life has begun with Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. His story is our story. We have a new history in the true and living Word! Discipleship in Jesus thus begins with Jesus as the start of a brand new humanity. It continues as a life where we are learning the “unforced rhythms of grace” (Matt 11:28, Message) from the one who lived in perfect balance with God and humanity. It is our new life of continual dependence on him. This is why Jesus said that we are to become as little children, trusting, depending, and looking to him for everything. It is a life of constant communion, of breathing in and breathing out the Spirit of Christ. It is a life of fellowship with fellow believers in Jesus; it is a life of sharing the life we have found in him with others. As the Apostle John summed up so well in his first epistle:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.
We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

It is also a life through the classical disciplines of prayer, Bible study/meditation, time alone with God in retreats and daily reflection, silence, fasting, or pulling ourselves away from what distracts us, time in conversation and life with other believers, worship in song, praise and thanksgiving, and in sharing our faith with others. All these are ways that the life we have found in God becomes more and more real to us so that what we have come to believe about God knowing us, loving us, pursuing us, and inviting us into his mission becomes a theology we not only believe, but are living out in a day by day experience. This is how Jesus is discipling us into his own life, how we are fitting into the story. In this way theology influences practice, but our practice also leads us to adopt and live what we believe. It becomes a truly lived theology of the kingdom of God.

In the *Journey* faith-development process we are recommending five spiritual habits or practices especially to help us live a new and practiced life in Jesus. By embracing these practices in our Christian journey, the way and life of Jesus leads us into this new and living way. His story becomes our story. The five are listed in sequence as a way to incorporate what Jesus is teaching when we respond to his invitation to “come and see.”

**Best Practices: The five S’s of Hearing and Discerning God’s Voice**

*Seek*—Pray for God to open the passage up for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?

*Soak*—Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts,
questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about the passage.

Seal—Seal God’s word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most about this passage or lesson from this week.

Script—Journal or write if even a few lines noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or the group time together. This will help you keep better track of God’s voice and the way he is speaking through scripture and your fellow Journey travelers.

Share—Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in Journey. As we share what we learning it will help drive God’s word home to us even more in our own lives and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to us to bless others.

The Invitation

A famous author on the Christian life and practice, White sums up all that we are saying about the Christian journey as a present experience with an eternal future in a story that has no end with these insightful words:

As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come learn of Me, and in this coming we begin the life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human nature can bear, we may receive here. But what is this compared with the hereafter? There, “are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains
of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (Rev 7:15-17; White, 2010, p. 331)
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review will begin by assessing the hunger and climate for spiritual life on college and university campuses to help contextualize and develop a campus-based program for student Christian faith development.

Next, the more standard and most recently published models of campus Christian discipleship programs designed specifically for student faith development will be reviewed from books by Carl Wilson (1976), With Christ in the School of Disciple Building; Henry and Richard Blackaby (1996), God’s Invitation: A Challenge to College Students; Bruce Main (2002), If Jesus Were a Sophomore: Discipleship for College Students; Greg Ogden (2007), Discipleship Essentials: A Guide for Building Your Life in Christ; and finally, Laurence Burn (2004), The Discipleship Adventure.

Finally, we will examine literature and spiritual biographies of leaders and teachers that have served as models of the spiritual life down through the ages to learn the rhythms and practices that have shaped their lives into life-giving examples of faith. Last will be a reflection on how the patterns in their lives can help today’s students in the development of a personal living faith in God for campus and beyond.
Part 1: Spiritual Life Climate of Today’s Student and Campus

The current spiritual climate of the campus is a mixture of confusing religious and spiritual realities that demands attention. As mentioned by a talk in a recent on Veritas Forum on the University of California Berkeley Campus from guest lecturer, University of Oxford Professor of Mathematics, Dr. John Lennox, “As I travel around the world I fear and discover that young people are not allowed to articulate their faith and neither are their professors because some anti-intellectual correctness has paralyzed the debate” (2011).

Lennox went on to say, “We need God talk back in the university.” Some of the conflicting realities of religion on campus include: The widening gap between the secular classroom and the religious clubs on campus are well documented in Religion on Campus where researchers studied the spiritual life of students on four different college campuses spread across the United States. They reported that

if the definition of religion includes spirituality as well as the more traditional, denominationally based forms of religious expression, we can say with utter confidence that opportunities for undergraduates to practice religion were widely available at all four schools. (Cherry, Deberg, & Porterfield, 2001, p. 275)

Also the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) examined the religiosity on campuses in a survey of over 110,000 college students from 236 different institutions. According to the survey, 79% of respondents said they shared a belief in God and 81% frequently or occasionally attended religious services (“Spirituality in higher education,” 2006).

Still, even though the researchers behind the HERI study found that four out of five incoming college freshmen had attended religious services in the past year and more
than two-thirds said they pray, other studies indicated that they drop their religious
engagement once at college. In a September 2006 report, the Barna Group, an evangelical
research and advocacy organization, found that “despite strong levels of spiritual activity
during the teen years,” most “twentysomethings disengage from active participation in
the Christian faith during their young adult years -- and often beyond that.” According to
the Barna study (2003), only 20% of twentysomethings kept the same spiritual activity as
they had in high school.

These findings indicate that student spirituality undergoes great challenge and
change throughout the college years. Student spirituality tends to lean more toward a
personal (spiritual) and less institutionalized (religious) faith based on their new and
developing understanding of truth and religious practice in relationship to their widening
worldview and the challenge of campus life. Religion on campus is also often more
diverse than what students are accustomed to at home since the campus is a melting pot
of nations, religions, and competing spiritualities. The campus is also more tolerant of
religious and cultural diversity and provides openness for the exchange of ideas and
beliefs.

In light of these competing spiritual realities, there is a tremendous need for a
Christian faith-development processes that will engage a students’ faith experience and
help them practice it in the new environment of the campus.

**Part 2: Existing Models of Campus Discipleship**

What is discipleship and is discipleship the appropriate term when referring to
student faith development? This is an excellent question as we begin a review of existing
student spiritual formation models. There are many definitions of discipleship and each program of discipleship works from their own definition.

Worldwide Discipleship Association (WDA), a discipleship ministry for the university campus, was launched by Carl Wilson in 1974 to introduce students to a biblical process of discipleship gleaned from the four gospels and first implemented by Jesus with his disciples. Wilson came to his understanding of Jesus’ program of discipleship as a Campus Crusade staff worker for high school. He became convinced through his own ministry efforts and study of scripture that Jesus’ method alone as set forth in his book, With Christ in the School of Disciple Building, will bring ultimate success in growing the kingdom and transforming the church.

I believe Christ wants to renew his church. The great need of the church lies in renewal of the New Testament approach to building disciples. . . . I believe the mission of the Kingdom of God is at stake in this matter and this book can help rectify this. (Wilson, 1976, p. 11)

Wilson identifies seven main progressive steps in Jesus’ process of discipleship.

Step 1. Conversion—Bring someone to repentance and faith

Step 2. Enlightenment and Guidance—Growing and developing a personal relationship with Jesus

Step 3. Ministry Training and Encouragement—Disciples learn to minister gradually

Step 4. Leadership Development and Christian Character—Training disciples to be leaders

Step 5. Re-evaluation and Separation—Intentional following of Christ

Step 6. Participation and Delegation—Disciple multiplication
Step 7. An Exchanged Life and World Wide Challenge—Being sent out into the world

*With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* is a comprehensive approach of biblical discipleship and the standard for WDA staff. It incorporates all the major dimensions of Jesus’ method of preparing the disciples for carrying on his work following his ministry on earth. It is a comprehensive philosophy of discipleship even by Wilson’s own words, “This book is written as a biblical philosophy of discipleship and points the way for a person to go about doing it” (Wilson, 1976, p. 12). Much of its value is in providing a very excellent overview of all that Jesus did to prepare his disciples for ministry and direction for the churches mission upon his departure.

H. Blackaby and Blackaby also emphasize seven steps or realities for experiencing God in their book, *God’s Invitation: A Challenge to College Students*. The college workbook and discipleship program is an extension of the Blackabys’ much larger *Experiencing God* (1998) book and series on discipleship, the focus of which is learning to hear God and discern God’s overall purpose to discern what God is doing and join Him in His work.

Knowing God does not come through a program, a study or a method. Knowing God comes through a relationship with a person. This is an intimate love relationship with God. Through this relationship God reveals Himself, His purposes and His ways and He invites you to join Him where He is already at work. When you obey, God accomplishes something through you only He can do. Then you come to know God in a more intimate way by experiencing God at work through you. (H. Blackaby and Blackaby, 1996, p. 2)

The Experiencing God series is perhaps the best known and most popular discipleship series among Evangelical circles today. Consequently it has come under criticism by Bible only advocates. I was actually surprised to learn that some believers do
not accept any form of ongoing personal revelation or experience with God. A recent
blog criticizing *Experiencing God* in regards to God’s personal revelation comes from “A
Critique of Henry Blackaby’s” (2011):

Experiencing God teaches that God speaks directly to Christians in ways outside of
the Bible. For most of Church history, Christians have held that God speaks directly
to His people through His written Word—the Bible. Though we may see God at work
through means such as circumstances, answered prayer, and other believers, the only
way He speaks directly to Christians today is through the Bible.

Such criticisms seem to overlook a great deal of biblical teaching on God’s
ongoing revelation to his people, and in turn, makes an idol of the written word of God
over other forms of revelation. Certainly any “word” from the Lord must be tested by the
written Word of God, but the notion that God is not present and is no longer speaking
personally to his people appears to be in direct conflict with Scripture itself (Luke 11:11,
12).

Ogden provides one of the newer approaches in college discipleship, his work
takes a student from a new believer and growing up in Christ through a thorough
reflection on the message of Christ, then on to becoming like Christ and learning to serve
in Christ’s kingdom purpose. Important aspects of Ogden’s approach to discipleship is
identifying the “core truth” in each lesson, inductive Bible study, and an extended
reading that illustrates every core teaching (2007, pp. 9-12). Ogden also emphasizes a
unique approach to discipleship through a small group process that he refers to as the
“triad”—discipling two people at a time. The triad has many advantages, such as
minimizing the hierarchical structure so characteristic of so many other programs for the
Triad/Quad views discipleship as a come-alongside mutual journey toward maturity in
Christ (Ogden, 2007, p. 10).
I am currently involved in a triad ministry relationship with two other pastors; we meet on a regular basis to share our lives and ministry. The triad is a great avenue for learning from each other and tends to soften the “I am the teacher” you are the student attitude. The triad relationship protects against human dependence and fosters the desired relationship with Christ as the true master/teacher.

If Jesus Were a Sophomore: Discipleship for College Students by Main (2002) is about developing a student’s character for college and beyond. Parks, a prominent scholar on faith development in young adults, calls our college and university years the “critical years.” She says that the ages between 19 and 24 are “the birthplace of adult vision and the power of ongoing cultural renewal” (Parks, 1986, p. xii). Main goes on to say,

Forging this ‘adult vision’ begins today as you give your classes, your relationships, your work, your experiences, and your time to God and ask God for God’s creative and empowering Spirit to take the experiences of your daily grind and transform them into behaviors on which a foundation for ongoing discipleship can be established and a kingdom vision for your life can be crafted. (2002, p. 7)

The underlying premise of Main’s approach to discipleship is involving students in community mission and volunteering. Urban Promise is an inner city mission project in Camden, New Jersey, developed by Main, which links college students in summer or year-long programs with inner city youth. Programs like Urban Promise and elective mission trip opportunities help open the spiritual eyes of students and introduce them to kingdom values in practice.

It is quite amazing how influential and life changing an experience with helping others can be to anyone and especially students so open to real life lessons. Many of the character traits that Main lists for a life of discipleship are covered in a mission trip
experience and become lessons that students pick up on their own when removed from
the comfort zone of the campus. Of course the approach of discipleship discussed in If
Jesus Were a Sophomore is not meant just for experiences away from campus, but for an
ongoing life of discipleship to be practiced on campus, off campus, and on into adult life.

Getting students away and introducing them to a new environment in service to
others has been well documented for life change. Even short-term missions are capable of
producing new life perspectives for students. One research project (Liberty University)
suggests the positive affect short-term missions can have on inter-ethnic conflict from the
basis of seeing and experiencing life from the real world of those being served. One
student commented, “I went . . . hoping to change the world; instead my world was
turned upside down. . . . I had gone to Uganda hoping to impart faith and teach and see
people come to Christ. The biggest conversion of all was my own” (Fanning, 2009).

I have witnessed first-hand the affect in the lives of our students of even a week
away from campus serving the needs of others through our own Project Pueblo, a native
American short-term mission project with the Navajo people of Eastern Arizona.
Reinforcing kingdom principles during times of reflection always has a much greater
impact onsite than from the comfort of someone’s dorm room Bible study, or the safe
environment of the church’s padded pews. For many students, it is in the context of
serving others that the words of Jesus become real for the very first time.

Discipleship Adventure (2004) is a Seventh-day Adventist program of
discipleship developed primarily for college students attending a Seventh-day Adventist
college. Burns developed the Discipleship Adventure to involve students from his
undergraduate religion classes in a discipleship process. Disciple Adventure is an
introduction to the Christian life and the call of Jesus with practical applications as found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s classic “The Cost of Discipleship.” Burn’s Discipleship
Adventure reminds students that following Jesus is about hearing a “call”—listening, following, and obeying Jesus’ commands. Discipleship is a process of change. The call creates options. Commitment to the call rearranges our priorities. The new community we find ourselves in through the call and commitment to Jesus creates a change of relationships. Increased competence in living the call of Jesus creates a change of life and direction, which in turn leads to the grander world commission of seeing the world from God’s perspective and embracing a life-long call to reach the world for Christ (Burn, 2004, p. 110).

Discipleship Adventure invites students to take the next step of really living for Christ and to the reality that being a Christian is more than a set of beliefs about one’s eternal destiny. As Barnes writes,

In every biblical illustration of conversion, there is a mission attached. No one is converted for exclusively personal benefit. This may be why we have to lose our lives in order to find them. The purpose of conversion in the bible is not our spiritual self-actualization, but Christ’s mission. (1996, p. 22)

Burn, at least, begins to get at the important issue of introducing students to some of the spiritual disciplines of getting alone with God, listening to God, following God, reading and applying scripture to life, and praying for a life change. His model is also a life-on-life process that puts one person with another in a mentoring Christian life dynamic. Another important aspect of Burn’s approach is that each disciple agrees to disciple someone else following their own experience in the Discipleship Adventure. One observation about the Discipleship Adventure is that it is heavily weighted toward
evangelism. Discipleship according to Burn’s approach could almost be another way of describing a class on soul winning.

Pros and Cons of Campus Discipleship Models:

*With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* (1976) is a comprehensive approach for discipling others. It sets forth Carl Wilson’s overall philosophy of training campus ministry leaders so it includes principles for student discipleship, but in my analysis it is too comprehensive and philosophical in its approach for any practical use with students. Discipleship, according to the Wilson approach, is more academic than relational as a discipleship program. It is more of an overall strategy for campus ministry and a valuable resource for anyone serious about a life-long discipleship ministry among students.

The Blackabys’ program of discipleship is very helpful as an introduction for a living experience with God. It also follows some of the important issues students face in the unique context of campus life. However, it does not put enough emphasis on the life on life discipleship relationship as stressed by Bill Hull.

All who commit their lives to Christ are his disciples. One can possess all these credentials and yet miss the key part of being a follower of Jesus and that is following someone who can teach you how to follow Jesus. A disciple is someone who is in submission to at least one other person in a healthy and appropriate relationship in which the disciple has the support and accountability to develop fully as a follower of Jesus. (2004, pp. 35, 36)

Blackaby misses this important part of the process and does not put enough emphasis on the role of the mentor as a model of life-on-life. In fact, it is possible to go through Blackabys’ *God’s Invitation* with no mentor involvement at all. As such, it is a somewhat inadequate program for college discipleship. In *Discipleship Adventure*, the
role of the mentor/discipler is assumed, but not spelled out. It lacks any kind of formal covenant or initial understanding between all parties in the discipleship process.

Ogden’s discipleship process has great value in that life service is the end product, and is a very life-on-life relational approach to discipleship. It also has the added value of being a resource that anyone can use even if there is no “experienced” discipler. The triad makes Ogden’s approach a helpful model even for students who may not have an experienced mentor to join them in the process. Students can actually mentor themselves with Ogden’s method and resource. I like and dislike this approach at the same time because of my own strong conviction about the importance of the mentor. Bernier, Larouse, and Soucy have documented the importance of the role of the mentor for college students. Their work emphasizes the interactive role between student and mentor and gives support for Ogden’s triad (2005, p. 2). However, the experience of a qualified mentor in the area of spiritual life cannot be over-emphasized. A fellow pilgrim can be a tremendous support while not depreciating the importance of an experienced spiritual guide. Ogden’s Discipleship Essentials approach with the availability of a seasoned disciple/mentor is a winning combination in a triad model.

If Jesus Were a Sophomore could be added to any or all of the discipleship models in this review. Short- or long-term mission is an important part of learning the rhythms of grace in a life of discipleship. The need of getting students out of their comfort zone and depending upon God in new and unfamiliar settings is extremely important. After reviewing Main’s book and approach to discipleship I would suggest it as a resource for a larger more comprehensive curriculum on faith development for college students.
Burn’s *Discipleship Adventure* is a helpful resource on introducing students to reach out to others. It is a next step in learning about sharing our faith and taking a more active role in the kingdom process. It is a bit heavy on “doing” versus “being” even though Burn talks about the difference. It feels a bit mechanical or formulaic, which is also a criticism I have of the Blackabys’ approach. One of the important things I appreciated about Ogden and Main is the story’s and life applications that carry one along in the process. *Discipleship Essentials* is more process oriented and *If Jesus Were a Sophomore* is definitely process oriented in a life experience of student missions. Both focus on habits, but there is more focus on relationship and character development in each of them. Burn’s is a short introduction for those who are ready to take their faith to the next level of how to share it while incorporating some new spiritual disciplines along the way. It is a good beginning step of learning to hear God and obey his call.

The weakness in all of these approaches to college student discipleship is that they all assume that the person being discipled is already a Christ follower. This beginning aspect of discipleship, is the focus of this project and the first step of learning about and receiving Christ’s invitation to “come and see” (John 1: 39). Unfortunately, as has been noted by Everts and Schaupp, often the first thing a non-believer must do is meet a real Christian and begin to trust them or to at least begin to doubt their own doubts about God through the transforming process of meeting and interacting with an authentic Christ follower (2008, p. 15). Life begets life and people will not begin to follow Jesus or seek a life of discipleship until they at first take the step of trusting their lives to him. In college this cannot be assumed. Even students who come from Christian homes and strong church youth groups will be rethinking their faith when they hit the campus. Here
they will need what Keller often refers to as a “crunchy” faith or as he describes it in as “orthodox” faith—knowledge of Jesus that goes beyond the campy feeling of their home church and one that learns to examine its foundations for belief as a reasonable faith.

Discipleship will have to include an introduction to the real Jesus and his mission (Keller, 2008, pp. ix-xxii). Consequently, as I have reviewed each of these discipleship primers they are grossly lacking in the area of first steps with Christ. My focus then in this project proposal is in the development of a resource that can be used with Adventist students to clarify and ground their faith in Christ and his mission and that will become the beginning of a dynamic relationship with Christ that can lead to a life-long discipleship process.

Part 3: An Examination of the Resources of the Spiritual Practices and Disciplines From Spiritual Leaders of the Past That Provide Direction for College Faith Development

Getting back to the earlier question in the review: What is the definition of discipleship? Bonhoeffer summed up discipleship as responding to Christ’s call to follow him when he said,

The cross is laid on every Christian . . . the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. *When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die.* (1995, p. 89, emphasis added)

However, Bonhoeffer’s definition of discipleship is more about who we follow and the demand of discipleship to Jesus without a clear definition of the discipleship process. For our purposes we are following a very basic one established by the Apostle Paul where he admonished believers to “be imitators of me as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1) and “what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do” (Phil 4:9).
In this definition I am suggesting that discipleship is a dynamic process of journeying with someone else, watching as they live the faith and as we begin to model what we have learned, received, heard, and seen in their lives. It is as much heart knowledge as the transformation of our minds (Rom 12:2). Discipleship is the way of love and by its very definition a journey in relationship with God and those that God brings into our lives to model this life as a living and life-giving truth. It is as Miller describes “Sometimes you have to watch somebody love something before you can love it yourself. It is as if they are showing you the way” (Miller, 2003, p. 1). This then is what we will be looking for in the example of those who have modeled a life of discipleship from the past. Discipleship according to this definition includes:

1. Life on life: Experiencing the Christian life and becoming like Christ as modeled for us by way of example through an experienced Christ follower. “Everyone who is fully taught will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). “Every person should seek to have three people in their lives: A Paul, mentor, a Barnabas, soul friend, and a Timothy, disciple (Hendricks, 2007). Here we are focusing more on the Paul to Timothy, mentor to disciple.

2. Transformational: That disciples are becoming more and more like Christ through the help of a living example. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). Many friends have related that the process of coming to faith really gained traction for them once they started to significantly trust a Christian. “There is an invisible wall between distrust and trust—a
threshold. It seems that people must move through this threshold into trust in order for them to continue on to Jesus” (Everts & Schaupp, 2008, pp. 30, 31).

3. Discipleship involves learning (minds/understanding), receiving (trust-hearts), hearing (listening - paying attention), seeing (perceiving - reflecting). “Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You will be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you” (Rom 12:2, Message). “The bottom line for transformation is that character is developed supernaturally through habits. And those habits are acquired through discipline in the context of a faith community” (Hull, 2004, p. 62).

4. Christ-likeness: Most of all it means becoming like Jesus since we are journeying with someone who is helping us not so much to be like them as they are showing us through their own lives about being like Christ through the dynamic relationship with a seasoned Christ follower. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). “We build on Christ by obeying his word. It is not he who merely enjoys righteousness, that is righteous, but he does righteousness. Holiness is not rapture; it is the result of surrendering all to God; it is doing the will of our heavenly father” (White, 1956, p. 149).

The following is a definition of discipleship based on these principles:
Discipleship, as illustrated by the pattern between Jesus and the twelve, was a life on life experience where the disciple becomes transformed by the life of his teacher. It involves
a process of learning, receiving, hearing and seeing with the life goal of becoming like Christ.

Foster highlights the essence of all these important areas of the discipleship process in the seven streams of the great spiritual traditions when he says,

We are, to be sure, reconciled to God by Jesus’ death, but even more, we are ‘saved’ by his life (Romans 5:10) – saved in the sense of entering into his eternal kind of life, not just in some distant heaven but right now in the midst of our broken and sorrowful world. When we carefully consider how Jesus lived while among us in the flesh, we learn how we are to live – truly live – empowered by him who is with us always even to the end of the age. We then begin an intentional imitatio Christi, imitation of Christ, not in some slavish or literal fashion but by catching the spirit and power in which he lived and by learning to walk “in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). (1998, p. 3)

Besides the great biblical example of discipleship and spiritual formation between Paul and Timothy above, another great example in church history is that of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and Aurelius Augustine, who following Ambrose’s example, later became bishop of Hippo. Augustine was already opening to the Christian faith partly due to the fervent prayers of his faithful mother, Monica, and to the failed philosophies of his day, coupled with a downward spiraling of his personal life—best documented in Augustine’s Confessions. He had accepted a teaching position in Milan as professor of literature and elocution, but because of his own moral failures, “by his own admission had become a teacher in ‘the arts of deception’” (Foster, 1998, p. 190). It was here in Milan that Augustine was introduced to Ambrose, but as Foster reminds us, not so much because of Ambrose’s faith, that would come later, but because of Ambrose’s skills in rhetoric:

“I was delighted in the sweetness of his discourse.” But ultimately it was the content of that discourse that gripped Augustine, for Ambrose forthrightly declared that Jesus had the power to break the bonds of moral failure. No one had offered that kind of power before – not the Manichaeans’, not the Academics, not even the Neo-Platonist’s, who had been so helpful to him. Only Christ gave the ability to live the
virtuous life for which he longed so ardently. Further, (and this may be the most important gift to Augustine in the example of Ambrose) Ambrose opened the spiritual meaning of scripture to Augustine in a way that released him from a wooden literalism and allowed him to come to the bible prayerfully, seeking illumination of the Spirit. (1998, p. 190).

The example of discipleship between Ambrose and Augustine is a fitting one especially for students looking for teachers or instructors who will model and instruct them in the faith. Augustine was specifically influenced by Ambrose’s exemplary life even though he did not have the benefit of direct involvement with Ambrose until a few years later while serving as Bishop of Hippo.

Ambrose’s exemplary life, as a devoted servant, a knowledgeable philosopher and a powerful ecclesiastical lord, dearly loved and admired by all who knew him, made him a role model to Augustine. Augustine dearly wanted to be like Ambrose, and so he attended his services, listened to his sermons and sought his counsel whenever he could. Second, during his sermons, by using allegorical interpretation of the Bible, Ambrose was able to reveal to Augustine the deeper truth contained within the texts. (Paulgaard, 1998)

Bernier, Larose, and Soucy have documented the importance of faculty and student relations, especially outside the classroom. Even more important is the spiritual influence or the role of a soul friend in the spiritual direction for a student to teach the way of spiritual life by example. In the dynamic of a seasoned spiritual leader a student can ask the right questions, see a pattern of how following Christ can become real for them, and learn the kinds of disciplines they will need to embrace a life-long pattern of biblical faith.

Such spiritual disciplines for college students will be similar to what we see in scripture and in the example of Augustine under the example of Ambrose. They will include the classic disciplines like those mentioned by Dybdahl. They include:
1. Worship along with helpful reminders of the importance for worship as a beginning point to help us realize there is a huge difference between us and God (a very important beginning point and a needed spiritual discipline for college students).

2. Repentance, confession, and forgiveness—accepting God’s gracious invitation and offering ourselves to him.

3. Prayer and meditation—learning to be in conversation and thus relationship with God.

4. Study—opening up of biblical truth and life application.

5. Meditation—ruminating on the word for proper digestion and transformation.

6. Guidance—learning to hear or discern God’s voice.

7. Community—watching over one another in love.

Eight and nine are what Dybdahl refers to as the core habits for communion that are reinforced by the supportive habits of:

8. Fasting—which can mean a break or refraining from normal life activities that can become distractions for spiritual growth.

9. Solitude and simplicity—turning off the many voices in our heads and ears to listen intently to the voice of love in our soul (2008, p. 8).

These are not the only disciplines we all need for success in the Christian life, but they are the disciplines most needed by students. They reflect some of the very dimensions of faith we saw in Augustine’s faith development. Like most college students Augustine began with a search for something more in life, a power that would help him live a life of meaning and purpose. His was both an intellectual as well as a spiritual quest. His search for an overarching world view that made sense and was transforming came
together through the example of Ambrose that included a new perspective on the word of God that taught Augustine to go beyond the text and seek for life application, a personal word from God through intentional listening prayer, and the transforming power of the gospel that offered both forgiveness and power to live a victorious life. The disciplines that guided him were a dynamic study of the scriptures, meditation on the word, repentance, confession, and forgiveness, a community of faith in which to share and practice his faith and compelling model of the Christian faith in other men like the scholarly presbyter Simplician and Ambrose. Examples of spiritual leaders down through time that underscore these same spiritual disciplines and habits for students today are Thomas À. Kempis (1998), *The Imitation of Christ*; Frank C. Laubach (2007), *Letters by a Modern Mystic*; Brother Lawrence (1989), *The Practice of the Presence of God* where he writes, “I have found that we can establish ourselves in a sense of the presence of God by continually talking with Him” (Lawrence & Laubach, 1973, p. 42).

The list is virtually endless and definitely outside the scope of this review of literature on the faith habits and practices for student faith development today.

**Conclusion**

Students may not be all that interested in religion or institutional faith, but according to “Spirituality in Higher Education,” (2006), students have a high interest in spirituality. In nearly 30 years of ministry experience on college campuses I have found students quite open to spiritual life and thirsty for direction in faith development.
Oliver notes this same trend in her paper on mentoring and the importance of spiritual direction among college students. Students talk about the positive influence that caring youth pastors and mentors had on their spiritual lives in their high school years (Oliver, 2010). These same trends did not continue in the same way in college without deeper connections with older and more mature members of the faith.

Burn’s, underscores the same principle when he writes, “When we follow Jesus, others will learn from our example. It is critical, if others will be following me as I follow Christ, that I be competent in my following” (Burn, 2004, p. 45). Here again it is the role of the mentor or discipler that has the greatest influence on the younger believer. Dybdahl (2008) calls this the “double longing,” the longing that we have to be with God in balance with God’s own longing to be with us. This heartfelt faith is best experienced first in the example of another Christian in where we see the relationship with God modeled before our eyes.

Of course, Oliver is pulling from autobiographical sketches from students that are just experiencing life on their own and can sometimes be seeing the new world of their campus through rose-colored glasses. Memories from home can seem better and more idealistic when reflected backward. The author also mentions that bad experiences can have a similar negative affect when youth leaders have been guilty of an inappropriate touch or sexual abuse. Here a person’s bad example can have a negative impact for life on a young follower of Christ.

Shadrach (2003) argues that more emphasis needs to be placed on the individual believer and their own walk with God through quiet reflection, prayer, and Bible reading
A poor example can always lead to causing another to fall.

As I reflect on each of these positions, I can see that it is not either/or, but both/and. Spiritual life and vitality does not come just from a positive role model. The role of a mentor has a profound influence in one’s decision to reach out to God as well as a powerful influence in staying on the path. However, another person’s mistake or moral flaw will not have the same affect when following God closely ourselves.

The common thread that runs through each of these is the importance of example coupled with a strong personal faith and personal attention to the spiritual disciplines. In the end, people are not perfect and we must prepare our students not only for their own failures, but for ours as well. We must always remember that it is not discipleship to us, but to Jesus. He is the master and we are all his disciples (Matt 23:8-12). Burn stresses this as well as Hull.

The genius of submission is that it is a two-way street. Since no one is master, both are servants of Jesus, both benefit greatly from the relationship. One person is generally the more seasoned and could be considered the lead teacher who is showing the other person how to follow Jesus. This provides the strength required to hold people together as they face the challenges to faith.” (Hull, 2004, p. 38)

In the end, the best hope for real faith development is the method Jesus has outlined for us in his own example with the twelve: a personal faith in God reinforced by strong spiritual habits, and the example of someone who has traveled the path before us to help guide the way. Christ is the master discipler and he has promised that the work that he has begun in us is a good one, and that he will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6).
CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGY, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF FAITH-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Setting up the Model

Early in my years as a college chaplain I began to dream about developing a Christian faith-development curriculum that would help students deepen their life in God throughout their college years. I decided to make this the focus of my project document. Students are challenged from the time they hit the campus with new ideas, new experiences, and relationships. It is a time in their life when they are ready and open to examine their faith and what is true or untrue about the world and the way they have been taught to understand it. College is where most young people shape their own view of the world and they have a great need to engage their faith experience with as much seriousness and rigor as they are investing in their majors and their other college life experiences. This project includes a faith-development curriculum that engages students in the life and mission of Jesus in the very time of their life when they are considering what their life goals will be and what they will devote themselves too.

This curriculum includes a biblical study of the mission and message of Jesus focusing primarily on the New Testament, Prophets, and Psalms with special focus on the gospel of John and the invitational model of Jesus.

Unlike the synoptic gospels, John does not leap from the baptism and temptation
of Jesus into his public ministry. Whereas the synoptic gospels focus on the “call” of Jesus (Matt 4:12-22; Mark 1:14-20; Luke 4:14-5:11), John seems to emphasize the invitation of Jesus, “Come and see” (John 1:39). It is clear from the earlier “unofficial” ministry of Jesus that many of those disciples who would one day become the twelve, spent time with him and were making up their own minds before Jesus extended the formal call to discipleship as Mark records it. During this period, which lasted about a year and a half, the disciples accompanied Jesus on various ministry excursions between Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee area and witnessed many important miracles of Jesus, but the actual call to leave all and follow came much later.

This is important as we share the good news with people today, and especially with skeptical and curious college students. Like John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel, students may need some time to hang out with the questions they have about Jesus and God before they are ready to leave all and follow. Faith develops by hearing and seeing with our own eyes as John so beautifully shares in his first epistle:

The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:2, 3)

As with John and these first disciples, students are invited to “come and see” for themselves by being with Jesus for a while to see what he is doing, listen to his message and ask questions about his mission, and one day believe as they did. Like the disciples, they too will then have to choose to follow or stay behind. Whether students are connecting with Jesus for the first time or reconnecting with him as they head off to college—such connections will only occur as they walk with Jesus and learn to pick up the rhythms of his life.
*Journey* was written and developed to introduce students to Jesus’ mission and message so they could hang out with him over a semester and begin to follow him on campus. *Journey* follows a 12-week outline through the gospel of John, Psalm 23 and 139, the book of Daniel, and some of the writings of Paul to help students see some of the many things the disciples saw in Jesus that led them to believe.

*Journey* course outline is as follows:

1. The Journey Begins: *Come and See!*
2. Who Am I? *Journey to Self Discovery*
3. Guide for the Journey: *Jesus, Our Good Shepherd*
4. The Hound of Heaven: *Search & Rescue*
5. Jesus on Message: *Where Are We Going?*
6. The Stone Kingdom: *Jesus Mission Rooted in History*
7. Heaven Now! *The Two-Phased Kingdom*
8. Kingdom Architecture: *Defining the Kingdom of God*
9. Dressed in Royalty: *New Clothes From the King*
10. Kingdom Transactions: *Passports to Freedom*
11. Giving Away the Kingdom: *Sharing the Good News*
12. The Main Thing is Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

**Getting the Most out of Journey**

*Journey* includes an introduction with suggested ways to get the most out of it:

Here’s what you are going to need for the journey.

- An open and receptive heart—good soil
- Determination and diligence—working the soil
• Desire for God—hunger & thirst after righteousness

Best Practices: The Five S’s of Hearing and Discerning God’s Voice

• Seek—Pray for God to open the passage up for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?

• Soak—Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thought’s, questions, connections, or anything God speaks to you about it.

• Seal—Seal God’s word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most about this passage or lesson from this week.

• Script—Journal or write, if even a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God’s voice and the way He is speaking through scripture and your fellow Journey travelers.

• Share—Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in Journey. As we share what we are learning it will help drive God’s word home to us even more in our own lives and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to us to bless others.

Journey participants are encouraged and held accountable for following the suggested spiritual disciplines in the guide to getting the most out of Journey.

Testing the Model

Several individuals and groups have experienced Journey, and it is from these
various *Journey* groups that I selected random individuals to participate in an interview process at the end of the experience including questions designed to help determine the effectiveness of *Journey* in helping develop faith and inspire spiritual life among students.

One focus group was a small group consisting of five young UC Berkeley men that met in the winter/spring semester of 2009. Another was a committed/closed small group of seven people not including the discipler that met winter/spring semester of 2012 among UC Berkeley students. *Journey* was also incorporated as an introduction to the Christian faith study as part of the morning curriculum of the 2012 ACF INSTITUTE campus ministry training program. ACF INSTITUTE is a ten-day introductory course on college student ministry covering the four main areas of practical campus ministry, apologetics, campus evangelism, and an overall philosophy of campus ministry. ACF I 2012 was held on the campus La Sierra University, Riverside, California. Participants from southern California and across the US attended the 2012 ACF I. In this focus group, there were fifteen participants to work with.

A final focus group for the Journey study was during a Friday night meeting Bible study series for a college ministry group at Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas, in the fall of 2012. In this group, a person I mentored helped explain the Journey process to a graduate student, who in turn taught the *Journey* lesson each week.

A total of seven participants from the various focus groups were selected to answer six questions following their experience with *Journey* to help determine the effectiveness of *Journey* as a resource for developing college Christian faith.

My first interview was with a doctoral student from UC Berkeley in Chemistry. Jessica Kisinzu participated in *Journey* during the 2011 fall semester in a
closed/committed group of seven additional members that met at the ACF Faculty Advisors home on Sunday evenings.

On December 6, 2013, Lucien-Nahum Isaac was interview number two. Lucien participated in the first draft of “The Christian Life and Journey” one-on-one with myself as the instructor in the fall of 2008, then shared it with a group of University of California, Berkeley ACF students in a small men’s group experience in the 2009 Winter/Spring semester. This first draft of Journey did not include the Five S’s, spiritual disciplines, or the My Journey section. It was mainly a Bible study through the gospel of John. Lucien also participated in Journey during the ACF INSTITUTE campus ministry training during the summer of 2012, where a small group of approximately 15 shared the Journey experience as a morning Bible study.

I interviewed Anthony Rodriguez on December 10, 2013. Anthony was an undergraduate history major at the University of California, Berkeley and is currently studying law at Hastings School of Law in San Francisco. Anthony completed Journey on two occasions. The first time was in his sophomore year during the Winter/Spring 2009 semester with a small men’s group study conducted by his campus minister. He participated again in a committed, closed group of eight people not including the instructor in the fall of 2011.

My interview with Elissa Morris took place on December 10, 2013. Elissa is a Doctoral student in Chemical Engineering at Texas A & M University, College Station, TX. Elissa was the student leader of her ACF group at Texas A & M at the time in the fall of 2012. Her campus group was just getting started and they were looking for a resource to follow for their ACF group that met on Friday evenings. I agreed to meet with
Elissa on the phone each week and go over the *Journey* study with her since the leaders guide had not yet been written. Elissa then in turn shared it with her ACF group.

I interviewed Lynn, a retired nursing instructor, on December 12, 2013. She is also the faculty advisor for our ACF group at UC Berkeley. She participated and hosted *Journey* in a closed, committed group at her home in the Fall 2011. Lynn also went through *Journey* in a one-on-one study with a searching Christian friend in the Spring of 2012.

Margret Lumban-Gaol was interviewed on December 15, 2013. Margaret is a recent graduate of the University of California, Berkeley still living in the Bay Area. She participated in *Journey* through the closed, committed small group at our faculty advisors home during her Fall 2011 semester.

Ben Cha was the final interview. Ben is currently an undergraduate biology major at Glendale Community College and participated in *Journey* on two occasions. Ben’s first experience was as a freshman with a small men’s group Bible study in the Spring of 2009 with his campus minister and four other men. This was more of a Bible study on the main passages in *Journey*. It was the first draft of *Journey* and at that time it was called *The Christian Life and Journey*. The five S’s (spiritual disciplines) were not a part of the *Journey* study at this time and it did not include a “My Journey” section. The second time he participated in *Journey* was during his junior year in the Fall of 2011 with a committed, consistent UC Berkeley group that met in the ACF faculty advisors home once a week.

Following are the questions that participants were asked to reflect and comment on:

1. What did *Journey* teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?
2. Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s—seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

3. What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

4. Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey in a large group, please share the benefits of a large group setting. If you experienced Journey in a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

5. If seeking first the Kingdom of God (KOG) is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey, what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

6. Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

Interview Process

The interviews consisted of meeting with participants in person on an individual basis whenever possible and when not over the phone. The interview process proved to be very effective in providing the necessary feedback for participants to reflect on their life with God and their experience with the Journey study. Participants spoke freely about their experience with God and what they learned about the mission and message of Jesus in the Journey study. The interview process was in keeping with the overall approach of the Journey study since Journey is about learning and sharing our life in God together. No instrument could have offered the kind of life on life sharing that took place in the interview process that was so vital in determining the effect of the Journey study for each
participant. I cannot imagine how I could have obtained the valuable feedback I received during our interviews in any other way.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH-DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Results of Student Comprehension of the Mission and Message of Jesus After Participating in Journey

Interview question number one relates directly with the student’s comprehension of the message and mission of Jesus after participating in Journey. All participants commented how Journey had a life transforming impact on their deeper understanding of the mission and message of Jesus. The overall impact was a new awareness of how practical and relevant Jesus is. For some Journey opened their eyes for the first time that the kingdom of God is already under way. This was a brand new concept for them. For others it was a reminder to make God’s kingdom the first priority in their lives.

The impact of this concept was unique for each participant. One person mentioned that being reminded that God’s kingdom had already begun in and through Jesus helped her consider the implications of looking for and expecting to see the presence of Christ in everything she does on campus. Perhaps the best response to this question came in the related question number five where one participant wrote,

In my everyday life, seeking first the kingdom of God looks like asking God to grant me a God-conscious/God-awareness all day along. I want to be paying attention to and obeying what Holy Spirit is telling me to do and say in every interaction and circumstance. I have a greater desire to be actively engaged in “seeking,” not just benefiting from or thinking about the Kingdom, but actually making and giving Jesus the pre-imminent place in my life that only he is worthy of.

Others talked about how Journey was helping them integrate their life in God
with their everyday life experience. Seeing the kingdom of God as having already begun in Jesus and at work in all areas of life like the leaven that works its way through the dough as Jesus illustrates in the parable of Matt 13 and Mark 4, forced them to look for God at work in all their relationships and experiences. They began to see the relevance of Jesus’ message as the rule of God in their fields of study, in the way they relate to being in college, in the affect it will have on what they will be doing when they leave college, and on their relationships with others on and off campus. Becoming aware of the real message of Jesus was helping them see the relevance of living for Jesus and what that really means.

Some even mentioned that Journey had opened their eyes to who God is. They actually saw God in a completely new way. The emphasis in Journey on the invitation for students to check Jesus out before any kind of commitment and the way Jesus seemed to already know the first Christ-followers before they learned anything about him was a whole new idea to some. Also, seeing how God is pursuing us in the personal visitation of Jesus was another life changing experience.

The Good Shepherd study was the one that made the most important impact on my life. To see how God is pursuing us was powerful! Jesus is pursuing me! I am not pursuing him – He is pursuing me. He knows me better than I even know myself. Even though He knows all about me, with all my flaws – He still loves me. My strongest realization was how deeply loved by God I am. I had never felt it like this before. Jesus is definitely my very best friend! It made our relationship real. Journey brought Jesus to life for me. (EM)

Journey also helped clarify Jesus’ mission for each participant. One person commented how the mission of Jesus is about “meeting people’s needs and showing us what God is really like” (LS). Seeing how practical Jesus was encouraged participants to want to be even more involved in the mission of God on campus. One person wrote,
I have wasted so much time! I want to be involved in the mission of Jesus now. I want to share the mission and message of Jesus. I see now that we have been doing it all wrong. We need to introduce people to the person of Christ. Journey taught me how to go about the mission of Jesus. It has literally changed everything. I am really looking forward to next semester and doing more with our ACF group and with others.” (EM)

Truly, each participant has been changed by looking closely at who Jesus is, and what he had come to do. It challenged and transformed their own understanding of what it means to be a Christ-follower and it changed the way they live and relate to others all around them.

**Outcome of Student Articulation and Sharing Their Faith With Others From Participating in Journey**

The emphasis in *Journey* is not so much on following Jesus as it is in being introduced to Jesus and what he came to do. Having said that, it is still evident that our very perception of Jesus changes the way we relate to others, for hearing the good news of the kingdom turns us into bearers of good news. This was certainly true in the interview reflections. Each participant commented how the way they view the world now had been transformed by their participation in *Journey*. They had all been challenged to engage their world with the good news of the kingdom.

An example of a direct correlation with *Journey* and sharing *Journey* with others is a reflection on the last of the five spiritual disciplines—Share. Though it is evident from the interviews that not enough emphasis was placed on the spiritual disciplines, still even the mention of them caused most participants to at least take notice and practice them in some way. A number of people responded by mentioning how sharing took place within the group Bible study. Even this was edifying to them. Some, however, wrote
about sharing *Journey* concepts with their friends. One even mentioned that it was not so much about *Journey* itself, but about the concepts that were raised in the group study and how those ideas that were working around and rumbling in his head often made their way out in conversations with his roommates as he discussed the implications of heaven as a present this-world reality. (AR)

The indirect implications of sharing *Journey* and the mission and message of Jesus are in seeing the world in new ways. One student wrote about the relevance of *Journey* especially in her life as a student at the University of California, Berkeley campus where there is such a strong emphasis on student activism. She mentioned,

>This was a very new concept for me, especially growing up as an Adventist where there was so much of an emphasis on the second coming of Jesus. Heaven for me was always a long way off. This was important to me as a college student—especially as I think of being a student at UC Berkeley with so much emphasis here on student activism and wanting to make changes now and for my faith to make a real difference. Students can get jaded with heaven in the future—especially when you wonder if heaven even exists. A future goal is not convincing enough to be a Christian. Being a Christian can seem very selfish if the only reason to be involved is to escape the fires of hell. The KOG now has made being a Christian a much more relevant truth – much more alive and active. (ML)

As participants learned more about the mission and message of Jesus, it naturally turned them outward, toward others. This has brought up many opportunities for them to be more active in their faith.

**Evaluation of Small Group Experience as Part of Journey**

*Journey* was developed for ACF groups and the common campus spiritual program schedule. The majority of Adventist Christian campus groups meet on Friday evenings for their larger group gatherings as a way to begin and celebrate the Sabbath together. *Journey* is ideal as both a large and small group experience. A typical Friday
worship-gathering format includes: sharing a meal together, worship followed by a speaker or Bible study discussion, and prayer. *Journey* works well with this format. After the meal and worship, whoever is leading can introduce the night’s topic in the *Journey* study by sharing the beginning introduction. Video clips have also been created to help illustrate many of the *Journey* lessons. Participants are then encouraged to break up into smaller groups of four to five at the most for the small group experience. This allows for greater participation for all in the group. After the “Road Map” or actual passage of study portion of the *Journey* experience, the smaller groups are encouraged to come back together and share highlights of their time together and the passage of study. Then the whole group is encouraged to meet in smaller groups at various times and places to reflect briefly on how *Journey* is impacting their life during the week.

Two groups followed the larger group and smaller group format. The first took place during the campus ministry training ACF INSTITUTE, 2012 and the group that Elissa Morris led at Texas A & M University. This means that most of the comments and reflections about small versus large group experience from the interviews relate to the small group experience with the exception of the interviews with Lucien Nahum-Isaac and Elissa Morris. All of the participants commented how important the small group experience of *Journey* was for them.

The small group experience is key for *Journey* because of the deeper concepts and study that participants are engaged in with the passages of scripture, and also because of the dynamics that can only take place in a small group experience where everyone gets a chance to share and are encouraged to participate. One participant mentioned how core the small group experience is to *Journey*, “Both of my experiences were a small group
context. The first time was a bit more impactful since it was an even smaller group experience. The core will always be a small group experience.” (AR)

The ACF Faculty Advisor, Lynn Savedra who hosted Journey in her home, had an interesting perspective on the importance of meeting in the small group experience. “I saw more how important a study like this in the life of students. The committed group did not give pat answers. They shared in an honest and open way. It also showed the importance of a church family in the life of a student.” (LS)

Those who experienced the closed, committed small group experience of eight participants at the faculty advisors home all said that this was the best context for internalizing the deeper mission and message of Jesus. One example of this came from one of the participants.

In a large group setting during an event (weekend training, etc.), Journey doesn’t reach its full potential. Journey provides provocative food for thought in the moment but the lasting impact may be compromised because there’s isn’t a context that facilitates a continuous journey in that direction. The benefits were clearer to me in a small group setting. When there is a clear agreement to walk together, to study together, to submit to one another, then there is a forward motion and growth above and beyond a new approach to seeing God and what He’s doing the world. (LNI)

Another comparison between Journey as a large group versus small group experience made the following observation.

[We] started out in a small group context, but wound up doing it all together. People did talk when in a small group where sometimes in a larger group only a few ran the discussion. In the large group setting—a few dominate the conversation. Those not talking zone out. Journey is much better as a small group experience.” (EM)

To sum up, it is abundantly clear that the small group context is critical for the full effect of Journey and applying the mission and message of Jesus to our lives.
Results of Participating in Spiritual Disciplines and Weekly Assignments in Journey

Participation in the spiritual disciplines or five S’s of Seek, Soak, Seal, Script, and Share were all over the map. All felt that this part of the Journey experience did not receive enough direction or support in the way it was presented. One person suggested that a way to help emphasize the importance of these disciplines would be to include a time for sharing how participants had engaged with the disciplines in the beginning of the next week’s group interaction before moving into the actual lesson for that week.

Still, most had positive things to say about the Five S’s in Journey, especially as they reflected on their place within Journey and its effect on their encounter with God. One person even commented that the spiritual disciplines in Journey were key to his own transformation with the mission and message of Jesus.

I didn’t at first remember the five S’s until I saw these questions, but I did remember them and I really appreciate that you introduced these to us. The ones I was able to incorporate were seek, script, and share. Soak and seal were more unfamiliar to me. Now I understand especially soaking in God’s word to me. Through these disciplines that is where people really encounter God. I would suggest that we spend more time in the first study introducing the Five S’s so people can get more familiar with these disciplines. (BC)

I was personally made more aware of how important the spiritual disciplines are to a person’s direct encounter with God. As a result of the interviews, I can see how people benefitted from the five S’s and I am committed to emphasizing these in future Journey lessons. Every participant who reflected on these disciplines as part of their encounter with God commented how important they were to their on-going experience with God during the week. This means that the five S’s are critical in helping participants in Journey to a real encounter with God and in the Christian faith-development process.
Overall Effect of Student Participation in Local Church Fellowship After Participating in Journey

Church involvement and participation as a result of Journey is more difficult to assess. Every one of the participants that we interviewed is involved in their local church in some capacity and most of them are serving in a leadership role. Still, this was not one of the interview questions. However, an observation from our faculty advisor does speak to this topic. Her comment came as a response to the first interview question: What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus? Her response is directly related to how she perceived college students being impacted by Journey in relation to their involvement and participation in the local church,

Jesus came to meet the needs of people—showing us more about God and to meet people’s needs. I saw more how important a study like this is in the life of students. The committed group did not give pat answers. They shared in an honest and open way. It also showed the important role of a church family in the life of a student. (LS)

Of course the correlation can be made that Journey helped participants make a stronger connection with their spiritual life and their life in the everyday world. This means that it also helped them make a stronger connection with their church and to emphasize a kingdom perspective for their church experience as well. The proof is in the fact that all participants are closely engaged in the local church and see their church experience as encouraging a kingdom perspective in their ongoing life with God.

Results of Students’ Love for Christ, for one Another, and Sense of Mission for Their Campus After Participating in Journey

All participants commented on the effect of Journey in helping them make a connection with their life as a Christian and their overall life context. One participant even shared that having a heaven “now” perspective makes Christianity real. Heaven as a
far distant reality can mean that being a Christian is only important when we die or when Jesus returns. “In general my overall understanding and impression of Jesus and my relationship to him is that He is much more real and present in all I do when I understand that Heaven is now and Hell is now depending on our relationship with Jesus!” (JK).

Others commented on how it changed the mission focus for them as an Adventist group. Before Journey their focus on campus was more about preserving their Adventist faith causing them to be more insular as a Christian group as opposed to seeing the bigger picture of engaging their campus for Christ. Two interview comments particularly demonstrate this very thing.

I have wasted so much time! I want to be involved in the mission of Jesus now. I want to share the mission and message of Jesus. I see now that we have been doing it all wrong. We need to introduce people to the person of Christ. Journey taught me how to go about the mission of Jesus. It has literally changed everything. I am really looking forward to next semester and doing more with our ACF group and with others. (EM)

This was important to me as a college student—especially as I think of being a student at UC Berkeley with so much emphasis here on student activism and wanting to make changes now and for my faith to make a real difference. Students can get jaded with heaven in the future—especially when you wonder if heaven even exists. A future goal is not convincing enough to be a Christian. Being a Christian can seem very selfish if the only reason to be involved is to escape the fires of hell. The Kingdom Of God now has made being a Christian a much more relevant truth—much more alive and active. A future heaven seems kind of boring and only for the distant future. (MG)

Finally, one last comment from our faculty advisor and long-standing church member, Lynn Savedra, “Journey moved me into a more personal application of how to share the Kingdom of God with other people.”

Taking the time to really understand the mission and the message of Jesus transforms our understanding of who we are, our relationship with Jesus and his mission and moves us to greater and greater compassion and thus action for others.
Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Spiritual Mentor
From Participation in Journey

Even though this was not one of the interview questions, the effect of the mentor relationship can be inferred. In one example, the small men’s group experience was conducted from teacher to student who then shared the Journey study with five young men in his group. For several of our interviewees this was their first experience with Journey and it had a profound impact on their life. “Both of my experiences were in a small group context. The first time was a bit more impactful since it was an even smaller group experience. The core will always be a small group experience” (AR)

In another example, Journey was shared over the phone each week with a student who then led out in her student group on campus. In her words, it was the mentoring relationship over the phone that helped bring Journey to life for her,

When we were going through Journey—it really presented Jesus in a way I have never thought of before. Jesus is personal and so cool, available and relevant. People wanted to hang out with Jesus. Someone I never really knew before. (EM)

In my own reflection as the author of Journey, I began to see how important and necessary the added explanation in the “Back Story” section is to the experience of Journey. It was also gratifying that two of the participants actually taught the Journey study themselves having been personally guided through it one-on-one.

Finally, I was surprised at how important the interview sessions were for me, the project, and each of those I interviewed. One suggestion I would make as a follow up to the Journey study is some kind of similar meeting with every participant to sort through the impact the Journey study has had on each one. This interview would be a great way to wrap up what each person took from the Journey study. It would also help strengthen the mentor/mentee relationship.
Personal and Professional Outcomes

This project began as a Christian faith development process for students attending non-Adventist universities. The participant interviews in this project document the importance of Christian faith development in college. The Journey Bible Study has also been proven to be an effective faith-development resource for those leading in the spiritual lives of students. However, what I could not have imagined at the start of this project was how my own faith would strengthen and grow in the process.

I have grown personally in several ways as a result of this project. First I have grown spiritually in my own encounter with God. I have begun to act on Jesus message, ‘the good news of the kingdom’, in my own life by expecting God’s presence every day and in seeking a daily encounter with the living Christ. I have even begun to refer to this new encounter with God as revelation in the fourth dimension (Revelation 4D).

I have always known that God is revealed in nature and creation, through the written word, through incarnation in the person of Christ, but through this project and my coursework I have begun to realize the presence of God even more in an ongoing continuous revelation - the result of Jesus victory over death and in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. My experience with God has taken on a more continuous communion – an ongoing relationship with God as a result of Jesus message and mission.

I have also benefitted personally from the support of my DMin small group: Tara VinCross, Scott Ward, and Emily Whitney. Our journey together through this cohort—sharing life, ministry, and helping each other through each step of the process has been more valuable than I can ever express. Our small group has been an “anointed fellowship,” a real life experience of Ps 133. In these three people, I have found true
spiritual companions in the Christian life and ministry.

As I have poured over the literature, my understanding of the topic, Christian student faith development, has also grown. It has been a great encouragement to see the new interest in college spirituality over the last decade. Campus ministry has become an important topic and reading the literature in this area created a wonderful dialogue for me with other campus ministry leaders. In this conversation, I have felt understood and challenged at the same time. Reading and comparing what others are have been writing on this topic also made the Journey Bible study a much stronger resource.

Finally, I would have to say that the area I have grown in the most is my own role as a campus minister. Undertaking this project reinforced how important the group process is in faith development, the value of a mentor, and the priority of listening. I learned a great deal from the personal one-on-one interviews about the experience of each person in their encounter with God through the Journey Bible study and small group experience. Without this feedback, I would never have realized the affect that Journey had on their life and how much it had helped them with integrating their faith on campus. Going through the Journey study with each of participant was a life-changing experience for me. I was able to see first-hand the difference that the good news of Jesus and his kingdom is still able to make in a person’s life when they respond to it themselves. I was reminded that it is this personal involvement in the spiritual lives of college students that has kept me passionate about campus ministry all these years and why I still care about the topic of Christian college faith development.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Being a college student today does not necessarily lead you to become an Atheist,
but students can easily go adrift from their faith in their college years. In the past, Seventh-day Adventist students have developed their faith through the incubation of the Adventist educational system with Christian teachers and campus chaplains to help nurture and encourage their spiritual life. However, the growing trend even among Adventist students is to obtain their formal education outside the Adventist educational system. Lutz says, “College ministry is the most strategic mission field today” (2011, p. 149). It may be the most strategic mission field for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well, as the church seeks to reconcile its own loss of young adults away from the church (“NAD You Lost Me Barna Study,” 2013).

Adventist Christian Fellowship (ACF), the official presence of the Seventh-day Adventist church on non-Adventist university campuses in the North American Division is the church’s best hope in connecting and reaching out to the thousands of Adventist students now attending secular universities. It is also the best hope the church has in engaging students in the mission of the church and helping them to develop a faith in college that will stand against the rigorous skepticism of academia and speak positively and convincingly to their peers.

ACF will need funding, campus ministry leaders, campus ministry resources, and training in order to be successful in its mission of connecting, engaging, and involving Adventist students in the mission of the church on campus. One of the most important resources it will need for success in this mission is a Christian faith-development process that will connect and engage Adventist students in the mission and message of Jesus. Students will need to connect with God in a personal way and the gospel will have to make sense to them—enough sense for them to live it on campus and want to share it
with their friends. *Journey* is the first of three Bible study/experience resources being developed especially tailored for Seventh-day Adventist students on non-Adventist college campuses. *Journey* was developed to engage Adventist students with the mission and message of Jesus on a college level, helping them encounter God on campus.

In this project we have demonstrated the effectiveness of *Journey* as an introduction to the ministry of Jesus. Through the *Journey* Christian faith-development process the Christian faith of students was developed and enhanced by:

1. Being reintroduced to Jesus through the story of Jesus as told in the Gospel of John and throughout other New and Old Testament scriptures. Participants in *Journey* mentioned that they were introduced to concepts about Jesus’ mission and message that had not been made clear to them before, primarily that the kingdom of God is inaugurated in Jesus’ first coming and ministry on earth. In *Journey*, participants reported learning so much about Jesus that the Jesus they have now come to know is a whole new Jesus—a Jesus much more relevant to them in their college life.

2. The *Journey* Christian faith-development process also challenged students’ understanding of the gospel. Many Adventist students equate the gospel of Jesus with the good news about his return. This means the gospel for Adventist students is something more in the future. Spiritual life becomes a “lifestyle” that students are pressured to live by as they await Jesus’ return, but with little reward or substantive difference in their lives today. The good news of the kingdom that students are introduced to in *Journey* is a good news about what Jesus has already done and is continuing to do in our lives right now as we await the consummation of his kingdom at his return. This means that the message of Jesus has relevance for our life today. The gospel that students learn about in
Journey is a gospel they can seek and be engaged with on campus.

3. The Journey Christian faith-development process also made a difference in students’ spiritual lives in the here and now since the gospel is relevant for life today. This means that students were able to see how being an Adventist Christian makes a difference in the way they live their lives today. In the Journey study, participants learned to integrate their spiritual life with their lives on campus.

4. Through the Journey Christian faith-development process participants were also encouraged to develop five spiritual disciplines that transformed the way they read and experienced scripture and in turn in the way they encountered God. Through the five S’s of seek, soak, seal, script, and share, participants began the process of developing spiritual habits that revolutionizes the way they read, study, and apply biblical truth.

5. Ultimately, through the Journey Christian faith-development process participants learned about a God who is for them, not against them—a God who is present in everyday life—a God who is not afraid to invite them to ‘come and see’ and in the journey make up their own minds just as the disciples had to make up theirs about who God is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This journey will hopefully lead to the same discovery that John and the rest of the disciples made: that Jesus is the Messiah and that in him the kingdom of God has already begun on earth. Embracing him as Savior and Lord means to seek first the kingdom of God in all things.

As a result of the participant interviews we have three recommendations to make concerning the success of the Journey Christian faith-development process.

1. Participants encounter with God in Journey will be even stronger if the five spiritual disciplines introduced in Journey receive even greater emphasis. We suggest that
these spiritual disciplines be included as part of the beginning of every Journey small group meeting as participants share how they have encountered God through the spiritual disciplines throughout the week.

2. One participant mentioned that Journey would have an even stronger appeal if the illustrations and stories were taken from a college student context. Some illustrations were less contextual to college life than others and should be taken into consideration in any future revisions of the Journey study.

3. The mentor relationship between participants and those leading the Journey Christian faith-development process would be even stronger if the leader met with the participants during and following Journey to see what they are learning and have learned from their experiences in Journey and how their understanding of the mission and message of Jesus is being transformed. Asking people the main question: What does it mean now to you when Jesus says to, “seek first the kingdom of God”? is an appropriate and obvious question at the conclusion of a twelve-lesson study in the Journey experience.

Christian faith development in college has to be a number one priority if the church intends on seeing young adults embrace, live, and share their faith on campus. The Journey Christian Faith-Development Process is proven to be a powerfully effective resource that introduces students to the mission and message of Jesus, enabling them to develop a faith in Christ that is more accessible to them personally and naturally integrated with their life as a student on and off the campus.
APPENDIX A

JOURNEY BIBLE STUDY

Come And See! The Journey Begins

As Frodo Baggins left the safety of the shire on an adventure to be rid of the ring, we are embarking on a journey together with Christ where God will take us where He chooses in an adventure of real life with him. Jesus is The Way, The Truth and The Life. He is the resurrection and the life. He came that we might have the more abundant life with him.

Journey Together:

1). What’s the best trip you have ever taken?

2). Describe your greatest childhood fantasy adventure.

3). How can we relate the Christian life as a great and exciting adventure?

Note: When John describes what it was like having been with Jesus, boring was nowhere in the vocabulary. Notice his reflections on life with Jesus…

1 John 1 “1From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. 2The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we’re telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us. 3We saw it, we heard it, and now we’re telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ” (Message Bible)

Road Map: John 1:35-51.

4). John and Andrew wanted to hang out with Jesus. What do you think impressed John, Andrew and in turn Peter, Philip and Nathaniel to want to know more about Jesus? What indications do they have that he is in fact the Messiah? What was Jesus’ response to them?

5). Why does Nathanael question if anything good could come from Nazareth? What might be questionable about Jesus’ background?

6). Jesus shows an interest in each of these early followers – especially Peter. What nickname might Jesus give you?

7). What are some obstacles in the way of you discovering more about Jesus?

8). What intrigues you most about Jesus? What seems to be drawing you to want to know more about the life of God? What great things do you want to see from God?
9). What further questions do you have from this week’s reading?

10). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

1). How has God been using journey in your life this week?

2). What were the Jews looking for in their expectations of the Messiah? What were some of the promises that Jewish Messiah’s were making?

3). As you meditate on verse 39, what does Jesus want you to come and see about Him?

4). What further questions do you have from this week’s journey?

Back Story: As we begin with the Journey bible study, we begin with setting out on a journey of discovery about God through the life and ministry of Jesus. There are several key points to make about this first lesson that will help set the stage for the entire Journey study.

1). This is an invitation to check Jesus out. John makes very clear why he wrote his gospel account of Jesus in John 20:30, 31 – that we might believe. In other words, John has been very selective. In John 21:24, 25 he tells us that he is the one who wrote the account and that if all that he knew about Jesus was written down there wouldn’t be enough books to contain all the good things Jesus did. So again, he is being very selective in what he includes so that from the stories we might come to the same conclusions he did. This means that John’s gospel needs to do the work. As you lead out in this study, the pressure for people to come to faith rests on God’s word not on you the leader. Let the Word to do its work and let people wrestle with the word. John points out seven signs concerning Jesus as Messiah:

1. Water to wine @ Cana wedding (Jn. 2)

2. Healing of Officials son – Cana (Jn. 4)

3. Healing @ pool of Bethesda, Sabbath (Jn. 5)

4. Feeding of 5,000, Passover (Jn. 6)

5. Replacing water & light, Tabernacles (Jn. 8)

6. Man born blind (Jn. 9)

7. Raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11)

But of course the greatest sign of who He is - is his death and resurrection, which all these signs point to.

2). We discover right away that in our checking Jesus out – he already knows us. This is a great lead in to lesson 2, which talks about who Jesus is and how he knows everything about us. The
journey with Jesus is as much a journey to self-discovery as it is learning about God. We see this in this first lesson as Jesus gives Peter a nickname and how he knows so much about Nathaniel.

The reflection on Nathaniel is important since it demonstrates to Nathaniel that Jesus is the Messiah. What was it about Jesus seeing Nathaniel under the fig tree that convinced him that Jesus was the one? Ellen White suggests in the book Desire Of Ages that Nathaniel was praying for direction about the messiah’s coming – see DA, p. 140. Other scholars also agree with her that the fig tree might have been a place of solitude and prayer for Nathaniel and that Jesus heard and saw him praying for insight. This would explain his enthusiasm and 180 degree turn around. Nathaniel’s response that Jesus came from Nazareth is not so much about how bad Nazareth was. Everybody knew that the Messiah was supposed to come from Bethlehem – Micah 5:2. Jesus demonstrates even more knowledge about Nathaniel when he compliments his knowledge of the scriptures and remembering the true origin of the Messiah’s birth.

Jesus rewards Nathaniel’s belief and ours when he quip’s that a simple answer to prayer is enough to believe. Nathaniel will see much more than this. In Jesus, Nathaniel will see Heaven opened and constant access to God. This is also what John intends for us to see. Heaven will be opened up for us as we walk, watch, listen and pray for God’s revelation of himself through Jesus.

3). One final emphasis in this first lesson. Encourage participants to follow the five S’s in the introduction and guide. The principles of Seek, Soak, Seal, Script, and Share will make the difference in helping each journey participant become more than a spectator as they listen in and follow the disciples on their journey with God in personal life discovery. Enjoy The Journey!
Who Am I? Journey To Self Discovery

Who really knows you? How can we truly even know ourselves? Most of us are afraid of being known by anyone so we hide and pretend to be something we’re not or what others want us to be. One of the greatest evidences of “the fall” is our own sense of inadequacy – self-doubt and self-hatred and so we wear our masks to cover up. Is it possible to truly know ourselves and love ourselves? It begins by seeing ourselves the way God sees us. This is why our journey with God begins not by self-examination, but by examining God. In this weeks road map of scripture we will focus on God and what he knows about us. God is before all things so his knowledge of us and his love for us is key to knowing and loving ourselves. If he already knows and loves us, understanding this is the first key to knowing and loving ourselves.

Journey Together:

1). What are some funny characteristics/stories you can share about yourself?

2). Share something that best describes you to others?

3). How would your best friend describe you?

Note: Psalm 139 goes into great detail about God’s intimate knowledge of us. Notice how infinitely God knows us…

“O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways."

Road Map: John 1:1-34. This passage reminds us about Jesus’ preexistence and complete knowledge of us, leading him to take on our humanity, becoming our savior and Lord.

1). If you had the task of introducing Jesus what would you say about him? How does John introduce Jesus here? Who does He claim Jesus is?

2). Jesus is the WORD of God and the Light of the world. What does Jesus identification as the WORD tell us about him? What about light as an expression of Jesus? In what way is Jesus the light of the world?

3). Word and light are metaphors of knowledge and revelation. If Jesus is the word of God and the light of the world what does that tell us about what he knows about us? What does Jesus know about you?

4). He came from God to live and dwell with us. Jesus was Immanuel – God with us. What does moving in to our neighborhood to hang out with us tell us about his feelings for us? Would you be open to have God move into your neighborhood/campus/dorm room?
5). What role does John the Baptist play in revealing Jesus as the Messiah? What is so important about John’s mission? How does he help John (the disciple) and Andrew become followers of Jesus?

6). Meditate on verses 1-4. What does God want to say to you about the Living Word?

7). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

8). How can this group pray for you right now?

Who Am I? By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Who am I? They often tell me
I stepped from my cell’s confinement
Calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
Like a squire from his country house.

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today and tomorrow another?

Who am I? They often tell me
I used to speak to my warders
Freely, friendly and clearly,
As though it were mine to command.

Who am I? This or the other?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others
And before myself a contemptible woebegone weakling?

Who am I? They also tell me
I bore the days of misfortune
Equably, smilingly, proudly,
Like one accustomed to win.

Who am I? This or the other?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army
Fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?

Am I then really that which other men tell of?
Am I only what I myself know of myself?
Restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,
Struggling for breath, as though hands were Compressing my throat,
Yearning for colors, for flowers, for the voices of birds,
Thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
Tossing in expectation of great events,
Powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
Weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
Faint, and ready to say farewell to it all.

Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!

My Journey:

1). How has God used this weeks fellowship discussion on being known and loved by God in your life this week?

2). Meditate on verses 1-4. What does God want to say to you about the Living Word in your life?

3). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

Back Story: This weeks first steps on our journey with Jesus runs backward. In last weeks discovery we accepted the invitation to “come and see,” and we saw how people were quickly
drawn to Jesus, a brief disclosure of how his work as Messiah would open the way to God with His own reference about angels ascending and descending on him the true stairway to heaven. We also saw how much he knows about people – an insight that inspires him to nickname Simon – Peter (Rock), and demonstrates foreknowledge of Nathaniel praying under the fig tree. This culminates in John’s observation at the end of chapter 2 where he comments – “he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.” John 2:24, 25

This means of course that Jesus not only knows about the human condition. He also knows about us. This is the revealing truth as we begin to learn about Jesus. We discover right away that as we are learning about Jesus and who he is - we are also going to learn much more about ourselves in the process. A journey with Jesus is always a journey to personal self-discovery.

Where does Jesus’ self referential insight and truth come from? How does he know so much about us? This is why we must go backwards in this week’s journey with Jesus. Back to the beginning so we can see what John came to understand for himself as he walked with Jesus and personally learned about the greatness of Christ.

The task of this week’s discovery is to draw out the implications of Jesus as the WORD of God and the light of the world. What is the meaning of Jesus as the WORD of God and why does John use WORD or as in the Greek, Logos, as the all encompassing reference for Jesus? Have the group stop and meditate on this. What are words? Words are descriptors. Jesus is the exact representation – the physical action or representation of God. God’s thoughts made audible, as Ellen White expressed it in the book Desire Of Ages.

For John, this had implications both from a Greek and Jewish world-view. Heraclitus, the early Greek philosopher (535 – 475 BCE) referred to Logos as the undifferentiated material substrate from which all things came into being. Logos is the arc, the first principle of the cosmos in Pre-Socratic philosophy.

On the other hand, Philo (20 BCE - 50 AD), a Hellenized Jewish philosopher, used the term logos to mean the creative principle. Philo followed the Platonic distinction between imperfect matter and the perfect idea. The Logos was necessary, he taught, because God cannot come into contact with the material world. According to Philo, Logos is the divine wisdom.

So Heraclitus referred to Logos (WORD) as the first principle of the universe but never went so far as to associate WORD with God since he was not really a theist. While Philo, borrowing from Greek philosophy, synthesized Jewish belief with the Greek world view and claimed the Logos (WORD), the beginning arc from which all things originated was in fact God, or at least divine wisdom, but would not allow all powerful transcendent Hebrew revelation of God to have anything to do with the material world of man. John, on the other hand, claims that Jesus is the first cause of the universe, is one with God, but audaciously claims that he took on human flesh and joined himself with the material world. The WORD became flesh. God in meat - incarnation.

But John takes it even one step further. Just as Genesis, the first book of the bible declares, “In the beginning, God…” (Genesis 1) So John affirms, “In the beginning was the WORD,” and the first thing the God of Genesis created was light, so the evidence of Jesus the living WORD is light. He brings light into the dark chaos of our lives as he originally spoke light into the darkness and void of planet earth.

If the world did in fact begin with a big bang, Jesus, the very WORD of God was the first cause that spoke the cataclysmic event – the divine arc that brought everything into existence. This is
why he knows everything about us, since he is the one who spoke us into being. Proverbs 8 is another significant reference to Wisdom existing right along side God from the very beginning. Is Wisdom personified in Proverbs 8 another way of saying what John says here when he refers to Jesus as the Logos? Christ is the wisdom of God, which means that God’s wisdom has been expressed in our salvation. Paul tugs at this in I Corinthians 1 where he talks about the wisdom of God being greater than the foolishness of man!

This is where Psalm 139 fits into this week’s journey with Jesus. Psalm 139 affirms all that God knows about us, and the plans he has for us. I can still remember the first time I read Psalm 139. I sat in disbelief about the closeness of God. I felt like the curtain had been torn open and I was sitting naked before him. I had never considered how intimate and personal God’s knowledge was of me. It is this personal knowledge about us that led God to become human, accept the responsibility for our sin and to die in our place. John’s introduction of Jesus is very unique. It goes beyond his human lineage as traced by Matthew and Luke. John introduces Jesus as the first cause, the divine wisdom who knows everything about us, and the one who is bringing the light of a brand new life into our world that has become dark and void in the fall of man.

The challenge of this week’s discovery is to recognize the greatness of Christ and to learn how much God cares about us to come in search of us and to make his dwelling with us. We are not making our way to God through human effort or religious practices. God made his way to us in the person of his son. We could not go to God, so God came to us. John the Baptist testified to this. John the evangelist also testified to it through the account he provides here of Jesus life and message.

What is our testimony? What have we seen and heard about Jesus? Who is Jesus? Each week we are seeing and learning more. We are beginning to get the feeling that in our journey with Jesus we are being recreated, reborn. Already, we want to be like him!
Jesus, Our Good Shepherd: Guide For The Journey

A shepherd is one of the best metaphors we could use for the loving, constant care of Jesus. It is one thing to be known and loved. It is another thing to be cared for and protected by an attentive shepherd.

David reflects on this very thing in 23rd Psalm. Each stanza repeats another aspect of God’s watchful care. As David considers his own care of timid and vulnerable sheep he poses the question “who is watching over me?” With beaming pride Psalm 23 provides the answer, “The Lord is my shepherd.” And because the Lord is our shepherd we are getting the best of care. “I shall not be in want.”

Journey Together:

1). Have you ever owned a pet? What are some of the things a pet depends on us for?

(Read Psalm 23 out loud together)

2). What are some of the elements of the good shepherds care in Psalm 23? What specific things is he being praised for? How many of these elements have you experienced in your own life and how?

3). What aspect of God’s shepherding care do you need most in your life? Where do you need direction, protection or celebration most in your life right now?

Road Map: John 10:1-18. This passage reminds us of Jesus constant care for us.

Note: In John 10, Jesus claims to be both the sheepfold gate and the shepherd. This can seem confusing to us today. However, shepherds often protected their sheep during the night by walling them into a secluded, guarded area and placed themselves at the only opening to watch over their sheep. In this respect the good shepherd both leads his flock to safety as well as stands guard over them throughout the night.

1). What impresses you most about Jesus’ shepherding care?

2). What makes Jesus the only “true” shepherd? What distinguishes Jesus from all others?

3). Jesus has a very intimate relationship with his sheep. How can we learn to hear and follow his voice?

4). What does Jesus say the Father loves about him? What makes him the Good Shepherd?

5). Jesus said he was prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. What are some ways that Jesus has gone out of his way to care for you?

6). Shepherds watch over and protect sheep, but they also lead sheep to greener pastures and sometimes through dark valleys. What are some ways that God is leading in your life right now? How does the promise of God’s leading make you feel secure?
7). What further comments/questions do you have from this week’s reading?

8). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey

1). How has God used Journey in your life and witness life this week?

2). How has Jesus been leading and watching over you in coming to college? What are some personal examples of his leading and guarding in your life?

3). What further comments/questions do you have from this week’s reading?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Backstory: This week’s journey is a reminder of God’s care for us along the way. It can be a bit unnerving when we stop to consider God’s absolute knowledge of all things and especially of us, but Psalm 23 and Jesus reference to himself as the "Good Shepherd" clarifies that he not only knows us fully he also cares about us completely. It is important for us to realize how much God cares for us and Psalm 23 goes through some specific ways that God demonstrates his shepherding care. In Psalm 23 David reflects upon his care for his own sheep. David was a good shepherd and in his care for his sheep he must have begun to wonder who was caring for him like he was caring for them? As David reflected on it, he began to realize that God was caring for him just like he was caring and providing for his sheep – “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want…”. Having students stop and consider God’s care of them is very important. How are they experiencing God’s care for them by helping them get into college, by directing them to ACF, by God’s daily attentiveness to their needs and anxious thought’s?

John 10 is actually connected or a continuation of Jesus’ care and healing of the man born blind in John 9 (see John 10:19-21), and going back even further - the Old Testament background is the contrast Jesus is making between himself as the good shepherd and the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34/Jeremiah 23. The religious leaders and Pharisees in the story of the man born blind are perfect examples of the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34/Jeremiah 23. Just like the shepherds in these prophecies, they care nothing about this poor man who was blind from birth. Jesus is the “Good Shepherd” who cares so much about the sheep that he will lay down his life for them. This is Jesus. He will speak up for us. He will do whatever it takes to deliver us. He will even lay down his life for us, which is the greatest sign that he is the Good Shepherd predicted in Ezekiel 34 and the “Branch” in Jeremiah 23. He is both our shepherd who leads us, and also the gate that protects us and has become our gateway to God.

The goal of this week’s journey is to see exactly how far God will go to watch over and care for us. In what ways is God caring for us right now? How is God demonstrating His role as the good shepherd in our life today? What will it take for us to come to the same epiphany as David does in Psalm 23 that “The Lord is our shepherd”??
The Hound Of Heaven: Search & Rescue

“I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat -- and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet --

"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

So writes Francis Thompson in his famous poem on God’s pursuit of man. The life of John Newton (1725-1807) pastor and lyricist for the best-known hymn of all time “Amazing Grace” serves as a great illustration of God’s pursuing love. Born to a merchant mariner father and a spiritually devout mother, Newton fled from God with such determination that his journey away from God left him blind, lost and enslaved to an African queen off the coast of Sierra Leone. Newton recounts the many ways that God intervened throughout his life while Newton resisted. His conversion was the result of a horrible storm at sea where he later wrote in his journal how God finally got through to him in the midst of the storm and through a gracious deliverance. Newton forever praised God for his goodness and faithfulness in winning him back.

Journey Together:

1. What is one of the most important things you have lost?

2. What are some of the steps that God has taken to get through to you?

Note: Our first glimpse in the bible of God’s persistent pursuit of us is in the creation/fall story where God comes searching for the first man and woman following their disobedience. When Adam and Eve do not come to meet him at their daily rendezvous, God calls out to them, “Where are you?” Our disobedience and rebellion from God precludes us from running after him. Fear, inferiority and self-absorption keep us locked away in a kind of spiritual prison. God is always the one taking the first step toward us.

Jesus illustrates God’s persistent love even further in the three parables of grace: The Lost Coin, The Lost Sheep and The Lost Son in Luke 15. The Pharisees and the scribes and their surprise about Jesus’ acceptance of the tax collectors and sinners who were drawing near to him, serve as the backdrop for these three stories. Jesus not only does not draw back from these outcasts. He goes even further to demonstrate God’s persistent pursuit of them like we might seek for lost
money or a family pet. In the final story Jesus portrays God as the running father, eager to welcome home his recalcitrant son.

What do these stories tell us about God’s deep love and faithfulness toward us? When did you first experience God’s faithful persistence in your life?

**Road Map:** John 6:22-70. This passage reminds us that God is pursuing all of us in Jesus, the living bread come down from God.

1). How is bread a good metaphor of God’s sustaining life for us? What comparisons does Jesus make with himself and God’s gift of manna in the wilderness? How is Jesus the “true” bread come down from God to feed the world?

2). It looks like the people are looking for Jesus, but in truth Jesus is approaching them with the real sustaining life (living bread) of God. Have you ever thought you were searching for God only to find that it was really the other way around? Please share in your group.

3). Describe God’s pursuit of you. In what way is He pursuing you right now?

4). Jesus called for a decision from those who were following him and when challenged by it, many left. The disciples on the other hand, sealed their commitment to Jesus. What about you? In what way do you see yourself moving toward God’s pursuing love or away from it and why?

5). Take some time to read again and meditate on The Prodigal Son story in Luke 15. The real message in this story is that both sons are lost or fail to understand the Father’s love for them. What’s keeping them from their Father? One son rebelled and left home. The other lived in a kind of rebellion in spite of never leaving His Father’s side. Which son do you most identify with and why? Is there anything keeping you from the Father right now? What more would God need to do to convince you of His love other than sending Jesus to live, die and be raised again for you?

6). How can this group pray for you?

**My Journey:** For further study check out Song Of Songs 2:9-13; John 15:16 & John 6. These passages continue to illustrate God’s patient pursuit of us.

1). How has God used this week’s fellowship discussion on God’s pursuing love in your life so far this week?

2). What do these additional scripture references tell you about God’s faithful persistence?

3). Do you see yourself moving toward God’s pursuit of you or away from it and why do you think that is so?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

**Backstory:** So far we have seen that God knows us intimately, that He is watching over us and caring for us as a shepherd watching and caring for his sheep. This week we see that it is God’s deep and faithful love that moves him to go in search of us. The bring it home lesson in this week’s study is that our lost state is so great that us. These stories correspond to both groups God is searching for - whether the tax collectors and sinners group or in the group of scribes and
Pharisees. Both are equally lost and in need of a caring God to reach out to them. The message of the bible is that we are not making our way to God. God is making his way to us and in Christ Jesus he has found us.

This is the same story in John 6 where Jesus is feeding the 5,000. This miracle is reminiscent of the bread of heaven (manna) sent by God in the feeding of his people throughout their wilderness wandering. Just as God provided for the Israelites back then – so Jesus is the real bread of life come down from God out of heaven. The problem in John 6 is that the people are not seeing who Jesus really is. Just like the Scribes and Pharisees in Luke 15 they do not understand their great need of Jesus. They want to use Jesus and accept him on their terms. If he is the Messiah then he should not be hanging out with these people. If he is the Messiah then he should perform this miracle and provide bread on a daily basis. It’s the same idea. We want God to be like this or to do this thing for us – but not our Lord and Savior. But God is who he is and will not be deterred from his mission of seeking and saving those who are lost. Both the feeding of the 5,000 and the hanging out with tax collectors and sinners are indicators of who Jesus really is, since the work of the Messiah was to bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted and proclaim freedom to the captives, (Isaiah 61: 1-4). He had not come to work miracles or to be a pawn of the religious establishment. Jesus was on a mission to seek and save lost people, (Luke 19:10).

God is pursuing us with salvation. The end of chapter 6 is most compelling. After drawing a line in the sand between him and the miracle seekers who only want him while he is providing them with more bread – Jesus asks the disciples a hard question. “You don’t want to leave too do you?” - to which Peter replies, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:67-69). This is the only appropriate response to God’s loving pursuit of us – where else can we go? Jesus is the only one who deserves our full love and devotion.
Jesus On Message: Where Are We Going?

Every four years the United States engages in the national ritual of electing a new president. Candidates from the various parties begin lining up to convince prospective voters of their ideals for the country and how they will make the best and strongest leader. The presidential candidates develop their political platform – the values and key issues of their candidacy.

In recent years, voters have become more and more disillusioned by political speeches that are long on rhetoric and short on specifics of what a candidate will do to solve the nation’s ills. Voters have come to accept that we will not hear about specifics until the candidate debates. It often takes the opposing side to bring a candidate out of his corner and tell us what they really think about a certain issue and even then, we – the voters, are often surprised at the skill of some candidates to deflect and dodge the issue and tell us nothing about their true positions.

Did Jesus have a spiritual platform? What was Jesus really trying to do? Was Jesus clear about His mission? Understanding Jesus’ mission and message is a clue to understanding everything He says and does. It will also help us understand what He expects from His followers.

Journey Together:

1). How important are the messages and objectives of presidential candidates?

2). How do you decide who to vote for? How important is it to understand their message and position in making your ultimate decision?

3). What was Jesus message? Did he have a clearly stated mission? After listening in on Jesus conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus in John 3, what would you say was Jesus’ message and mission? (John 3:1-8).

(Answering this question will help unlock the message of the entire bible as Jesus himself once said that all the scriptures directly or indirectly point to him. It will also help us understand Jesus ongoing mission and how we fit into it today.)

The Road Map:

4). What does Mark 1:14, 15 tell us about Jesus’ message? What is the kingdom of God and how was it coming “near” at the launching of Jesus ministry?

5). Matthew 4:23 -25 again begins Jesus public ministry with an assault on Satan’s kingdom through miraculous healings, deliverance from evil spirits and forgiveness of sins. How do these actions help clarify the “good news” of Jesus kingdom?

6). In the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9 &10) Jesus taught the disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come – Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” How is heaven a good example of God’s kingdom and what would living on earth be like if God were followed and obeyed on earth like he is in heaven?
7). Kingdom is an old fashioned word that we do not often use in more democratically run societies. What do you think Jesus meant by the Kingdom Of God? How is the ministry of Jesus establishing God’s kingdom on earth?

Note: When we think of kingdom, we often think of the medieval world of king Arthur’s court and the story of Robin Hood.

8). In Matthew 12:22-30 Jesus is a kind of spiritual Robin Hood taking from the devil (self-centered Prince John) and giving back to God (Good king Richard). What are some comparisons you can make between the story in Matthew 12 and the legend of Robin Hood, and how does it help you appreciate Jesus mission from a larger kingdom perspective?

9). When asked of the whereabouts of the kingdom by a group of Pharisees Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” How was Jesus’ kingdom already “in their midst”? Where do you see the continuing presence of God’s kingdom today and where do you most need to experience God’s rule in your own life right now?

10). In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus made it clear that His kingdom was different from the nations and kingdoms of this world and that entering his kingdom demands a new birth experience. What do you think Jesus meant by this new birth experience and what is the relationship between it and entering His kingdom? How do you relate to the new birth and in what way is it like a change of governments?

11). How can this group pray for you tonight?

My Journey:

1). How has God been using Journey in your life and witness this week?

2). Surprisingly the “good news” or gospel as it is often referred to in the bible, is almost always the “good news of the kingdom”. How does seeing the good news from God’s “kingdom” perspective broaden your understanding of the gospel?

3). Read Luke 12:32. How have you experienced the kingdom of God this week? What are some ways that God might be directing you to help advance His kingdom?

Back Story: The goal of this week’s journey with Jesus is to listen closely to his message and how He describes His mission. Too often our understanding of Jesus and His mission has centered around our own personal salvation or the business of growing and advancing the church. The more we reflect and listen closely to what Jesus is saying, we begin to realize that both of these outcomes are results of His larger mission – establishing the kingdom or rule of God on earth. Understanding this larger perspective will open our eyes to who Jesus is and begin to unlock the New Testament and the entire Bible for us.

To begin with - Jesus and the disciples rarely speak of the Good News (Gospel) apart from the good news of the kingdom. It is always the good news of God’s kingdom. The challenge is to help people wrestle with what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God. How does this greater unfolding of Jesus mission and message enlarge our own understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do? What does discovering the good news of Jesus’ kingdom mean for us personally?
John does not talk so much about the kingdom of God. John tends to refer more to the struggle to accept Jesus as Messiah. However, in the night visit of Nicodemus, Jesus gets right to the point. When Nick flatters Jesus by calling Him Rabbi and refers to the miraculous works that Jesus has been performing, Jesus calls him out about his real question. Is he more than a teacher? Is he the Messiah? Nicodemus believes Jesus is somebody special and that God is with Him. But what he really wants to know is - is Jesus the One they have been looking for?

The popular view is that when the Messiah would come He would usher in the kingdom of God, which will be more like a return of the glorious days of king David and Solomon when Israel was on top. Nicodemus believes that God is with Jesus, but he wants more evidence that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah and Jesus cuts right through all the perfume and flattery of Nicodemus and lets him know that his real question is about the coming of the kingdom. In effect, Jesus says, “Nick you will not know if I am the Messiah and if the kingdom of God has come unless you have been born again” - since the kingdom of God is not the political reality you and the religious leaders are looking for. It is first off all a spiritual reality and all must be reborn to even perceive it.

This of course supports the efforts and ministry of John the Baptist since John was preparing people for a spiritual kingdom by calling them to repentance and baptism. According to Jesus, one could be in the very presence of the kingdom and miss it if they were not tuned in spiritually and if they were looking for the wrong thing. The ultimate evidence that the kingdom of God has come will be the sign of Jesus being lifted up on the cross, accepting the sin of humanity and taking it away through His death and resurrection. The cross becomes the ultimate evidence of Jesus’ kingdom. His death and resurrection mark the end of the tyranny of sin and death, and the beginning of a new life of forgiveness and freedom from sin.

Both Mark and Matthew begin Jesus public ministry on the heels of Jesus victory over the devil in the wilderness, with the proclamation that “the kingdom of God has come”. Jesus has defeated the devil and He has come to take back that which had been lost through sin. This is why Jesus teaches His disciples to pray for the full-blown arrival of the kingdom since the very reason for his coming.

But what are the implications of the arrival of God’s kingdom reign in Jesus? Kingdom is an antiquated term for most of us in democratically run societies. A kingdom is the area or space that a sovereign ruler has jurisdiction and absolute authority. Earth has been usurped by a demonic dictator – the Devil, and Jesus has come to take back the earth for God. The result is our deliverance and freedom. This also marks the end of Satan’s rule. His power has been broken and the ultimate obstacle, death, has been vanquished. “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1: 13, 14.

Perhaps no better illustration of this message can be found than the healing of the blind, deaf, demoniac of Matthew 12. This man could not see or speak and was demon possessed. His healing marked a complete turn around of the outward hold and internal grip that Satan had on him. His healing was significant and it made everyone sit up and take notice. It was so significant that the Pharisees and teachers of the law could not dispute the power and importance of it. But if they accepted it as a healing from God and gave Jesus the credit he deserved, then they would have to accept that there was a new ruler in town – that the kingdom of God had come. Satan’s power had been broken. So…, they came up with a new interpretation. They gave Jesus the credit for an amazing miracle, but tried to discredit Him by saying that His power to preform such miracles

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was from Beelzebub. Jesus' response was to tell them a story about breaking into a strong man’s house and tying him up and stealing his belongings. This is what Jesus had done. It is one of the best illustrations of Jesus message and mission. Jesus had marched right into the enemies camp, tied him up and was taking back all that rightfully belonged to God. Satan was powerless in the presence of Jesus. Here is the evidence that the Kingdom of God was at hand! Where was this kingdom? Jesus was and is the restored kingdom of God! Jesus is the rule of God on earth! In Jesus, sin and death have been defeated and God is making all things new through His Son! This then was Jesus message – “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent (and repent means - turn away from the kingdom of darkness and turn to the kingdom of God’s dear Son) and believe the good news!” (Good news meaning - the kingdom of God is here).
The Stone Kingdom: Jesus Mission Rooted In History

John Lennon’s song Imagine released in 1971 considers a world in which differences do not divide and in which people coexist in a state of mutual support and love for one another. The truth is God does more than imagine such a world. A world in which love reign’s supreme is the goal of Jesus mission.

Last week we explored the mission and message of Jesus in the proclamation of the kingdom of God. The gospel or “good news” of Jesus is actually more often than not referred to as the good news of the kingdom. The world that Lennon could only imagine was the world that Jesus gave his life for.

The coming of God’s kingdom – a kingdom literally built by God was not really a new concept when Jesus spoke of it. Jesus message of God’s kingdom was a very well established hope embedded in the Old Testament prophets. This week we are going to look at an ancient story from the prophet Daniel that helps explain what Jesus meant when he announced the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth.

Journey Together:

1). Describe your most memorable dream.

2). How has spoken or used dreams in your life?

Road Map: Read Daniel 2

2). What impresses you most about this story?

3). Describe the details of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. What successive kingdoms are presented before the king and how are they differentiated? What do we know about these kingdoms?

Note: “The learning of the Chaldeans” (Dan 1:4; 2:2; 4:7; 5:7,11) comprised the old languages of Babylonia, some knowledge of astronomy and astrology; mathematics, which their sexagesimal system of numeration seems to have facilitated; and a certain amount of natural history. To this must be added a store of mythological learning, including legends of the Creation, the Flood (closely resembling in all its main points the account in the Bible), and apparently also the Temptation and the Fall. The Chaldeans were “seers” or the closest thing to the Old Testament prophets.

4). What is so different about the fifth and final kingdom - the “Rock” kingdom?

Note: Luke 20:17, 18 seems to identify this last kingdom as the kingdom that Jesus is inaugurating – a kingdom so different from all those represented in the kings dream that it smashes and crumbles all others that come before:

“Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."
5). How does the message of the kingdom of God introduced through Jesus help us understand Jesus mission as something more than just salvation from sin? What are the implications of the “good news” or gospel of the kingdom?

6). Ultimately, the reality of God’s kingdom on earth is in process. It is something God is accomplishing through Christ. It is also something Jesus encouraged us to pray for as we mentioned last week: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” Jesus said. How is the kingdom of Jesus a source of good news for you and what evidence do you see of the presence of Jesus kingdom already at work in your life and in the life of others?

7). Why do you think God has so carefully laid out the establishing of his kingdom. What careful preparations will you need to make to enter his kingdom?

8). How can this group pray for you this evening?

My Journey: For further study John 3:22-36

1). How has God been using Journey in your life and witness this week?

Note: In John 3:22-36 the disciples of John the Baptist are jealous of the new attention people are now giving to Jesus, which is drawing them away from John. Notice how John handles the shift from himself to Jesus.

2). In what areas of your life does Jesus need to become greater?

3). How can we best participate in God’s kingdom rule right now today?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Back Story: In this week’s journey we discover that Jesus’ central message was not new with Him. In fact the coming of the kingdom of God was a foundational promise buried in the Old Testament prophets. The book of Daniel deals with the rise and fall of the great kingdoms of this world and especially their clash with God’s eternal kingdom. The great Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon came into direct conflict with the supreme power of God and His eternal kingdom. It would become quite personal for him in Daniel chapter 4 where Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would be taken away and he would learn who truly rules over the affairs of men.

“Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.
No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: “What have you done?”

Daniel 4:33-35

Because of the sequence of nations in Daniel 2 and the eventual rise of the Roman Empire – we are tempted to place the “Stone Kingdom” at the end of Earths history. Though the event is accurate, the timing is off. It turns out that The Stone Kingdom is not so much about the end of time as it is about the end Of the kingdom of man and the setting up of God’s eternal kingdom. The Stone Kingdom represents the kingdom that Jesus was inaugurating by his victory over sin and death. Daniel in fact reminds us that “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people.” Daniel 2:44

This new Stone Kingdom would come in the very midst of the rise and fall of these other nations. This was the good news that Jesus came to share and bring about. The days of oppression and injustice of these other kingdoms was over. God was establishing a new rule on earth under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

All these other kingdoms are mere idols in comparison to the government of God. This is why the apostles saw this world passing away in lieu of Christ and His mission.

Our task in this weeks Journey is to realize that the coming of God’s kingdom was actually announced hundreds of years before it was to arrive. In fact Jesus favorite reference for Himself is “Son Of Man” a term straight from Daniel 7 where one like the “Son Of Man” is ushered in to receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days. (See Daniel 7:13 & 14).

This is the same authority that Jesus declared He had been given over heaven and earth in passages like Matthew 28:18. This is the authority He was extending through His disciples. A vital part of Jesus message and mission was the end of Satan’s rule. The gospel also includes the wonderful truth that the power of Satan’s rule in our own lives has come to an end in the victory of Christ’s ministry.

John the Baptist – the forerunner of Jesus was about the only one who recognized the greatness of Jesus and the full importance of His mission. In keeping with the words of the prophet Daniel, John virtually restates the grand purpose of God in the setting up of the Stone Kingdom – a kingdom made without human hands - and His rule that would never end by his pronouncement to his own questioning disciples “He must increase and I must decrease.” John 3:30
Heaven Now! The Two-Phased Kingdom

Last week we looked at a disturbing dream given a pagan Old Testament king concerning God’s kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar was given a pre-screening on the development of history and his place in the context of God’s eternal kingdom. This dream revealed that Jesus came not only to deliver from sin, but also to completely overturn Satan’s rule on earth.

One of the very surprising lessons we learn right away about the setting up of God’s kingdom is that it did not come in one climactic event as some had expected. Jesus introduces us to this two-phased pattern in a couple of his most famous stories – the parable of the mustard seed and the leaven that works its way through the dough.

For instance, we have the beginning of the Christmas season, Christmas day and the winding down of Christmas with the New Years celebration. In a way, it is all Christmas.

Journey Together:

1). What do you love most about Christmas?

2). What part of the Christmas season do you enjoy most – preparing for Christmas, Christmas day or the New Years celebration that follows and why?

Road Map:

Note: In Matthew 13:31-33 Jesus also explains the kingdom as a multifaceted event. He relates the kingdom to a mustard seed, the tiniest of seeds that also becomes the largest of shrubs in which the birds of the air nest in its branches. He then makes another expanding comparison of the kingdom with leaven working its way completely through the dough of a loaf of bread.

1). How do these parables help explain the two phases of the kingdom?

2). Jesus makes the official announcement of the arrival of the kingdom in Mark 1:15 with, “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” What are some of the evidences Jesus gives that the kingdom of God had begun with the authority of God already at work in verses 16-45 of this same chapter? What specific things can you list?

3). What additional evidence does Jesus give in Mark 4:35-41 of who he is and the presence of God’s rule on earth? What other evidence can you think of in Jesus life and ministry that demonstrates the presence of the kingdom through Jesus?

4). Revelation 21 – 22:7 describe the second phase of God’s kingdom on earth in the coming of the new Jerusalem down from God out of heaven. What are some notable differences between the kingdom described here and phase 1 in Jesus first coming? What do you look forward to most about the New Jerusalem and the final establishment of God’s kingdom rule?

5). How does a two-phase kingdom provide a better explanation of Jesus overall ministry and mission? Some have referred to the kingdom of God as here and not yet – meaning that the kingdom has already begun, but also not yet fully realized. In what way do you already see yourself living in the kingdom? How is God’s kingdom a daily experience in your life today?
6). What will it take for God’s kingdom to be real for you?

7). How can this group pray for you this evening?

**My Journey:** Read Ephesians 6:10-18

1). How has God been using Journey in your life and witness this week?

2). Paul often referred to himself as Christ’s ambassador – meaning that he belonged to God’s kingdom while representing God’s affairs in a foreign land. In the verses above, he also reminds us that we are waged in a spiritual battle of conflicting kingdoms. The kingdom of God has come and we are victorious in God’s strength. However, the prince of darkness still fights on against God’s rule. How are we most vulnerable in this battle and what weapons are you most in need of to be an overcomer?

3). How does this fuller reality of God’s kingdom both present and future give real perspective for your spiritual life right now?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

**Back Story:** In this week’s journey with Jesus we learn that the kingdom of God is both already here and yet still to come. During the time of Jesus, people were looking for and expecting the kingdom of God. The glorious restoration of the temple in Ezekiel 43 and the future hope of God’s people predicted in all the prophets following the Babylonian captivity, was based on the hope of a David-like deliverer/Messiah. Messiah means “Anointed One”. Israel’s deliverer would lead them in triumph over their enemies and would firmly establish them as the powerful and successful nation they once were in the days of David and Solomon – only greater!

The Messiah was their only hope for the glorious return God’s kingdom as promised in the prophets. In fact, all the major groups of Jesus’ day – the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Essenes - all had their own ideas of what influence was most needed for the Messiah’s coming. The Zealots believed that if they took a revolutionary stand that God would respond by sending the Messiah. The Essenes believed that if they lived pure enough lives God would be influenced to send the Messiah and the Pharisees believed that the Messiah’s coming was dependent on keeping of the law. Each group in turn was looking for and hastening the Messiah.

Unfortunately, they misunderstood both the nature and process of God’s kingdom. They completely missed that it was a two-event kingdom. Even John The Baptist seemed to be a bit confused about the arrival of God’s kingdom. John preached a baptism of repentance in preparation for the Messiah, but when we look closely at John’s message, in Luke 3:7, it is clear that John expected the Messiah to come as a single final judgment event. John was preparing people for judgment as described in Malachi 3:1-3, where the Messiah would come as a “refiners fire”.

John was a bit confused when Jesus was not doing what he had been expecting. Matthew 11 records John’s confusion when he sent messengers to Jesus to ask him “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Matthew 11:3.

John had been correct. Jesus was the Messiah, but the kingdom of God was coming in a bit differently than even John had expected. The kingdom of God was coming in two stages. It would
appear first as insignificant and as tiny as a mustard seed. In the future, at the end of the age, the kingdom would be manifested again as the largest of shrubs. Everyone – including John was expecting the large shrub kingdom instead of the tiny mustard seed version.

We tend to focus on the great shrub kingdom as well. We are often guilty of emphasizing the “good news” of Jesus second coming, when good news has already come in the forgiving grace of God and Jesus’ deliverance from sin and setting the world right. In our longing and expectation for Christ’s return, we must remember that he is already present and the kingdom of God is at hand! Our responsibility is to proclaim the good news of the kingdom that has already begun.

It is important for us to grasp this about Jesus mission and message. It means that God is already present in the world and his kingdom has already begun! It means that salvation is already being offered. When Jesus tells the story about the great banquet in Luke 14. It is a banquet that the religious leaders are being invited to right then, but are making excuses so Jesus began inviting the poor, the lame and the Gentiles. The good news of God’s kingdom was being extended, but people were refusing Jesus’ offer.

The force of this week’s lesson is that the kingdom of God is already here and people need to listen to Jesus invitation and accept his gracious offer. If we are waiting for the kingdom in the return of Jesus, we are waiting for something that is already under way. Only those who enter into God’s kingdom now while looking forward to Jesus return and the consummation of the kingdom, will be ready since they have surrendered their lives to Jesus, the Messianic king, have joined him in the work of his kingdom and are eagerly waiting for his return!
Kingdom Architecture: *Defining The Kingdom Of God*

In our study last week we read about the dimensions of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. John says it measures 600 miles high and as long and wide as it is high. Today we could probably care less about the dimensions. We are really more concerned about the quality of life in the city.

Which raises the question – what does the kingdom of God look like now? Some Pharisees once asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come – more like *where is the kingdom you keep talking about?* Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God will not come with our careful observation, nor will people say, “here it is” or, “there it is, because *the kingdom of God is among you.*” Jesus very own presence constituted the reign of God on earth, Luke 17:20, 21. Jesus also described the kingdom in its present form as a mustard seed – the tiniest of seeds – Mark 4:30-32. In another private description to his disciples Jesus actually referred to the inauguration of his kingdom as a secret that only a few were beginning to recognize – Mark 4:10, 11.

This means that the kingdom of God could actually be all around us yet invisible to those not spiritually in tune (as portrayed in the C. S. Lewis children’s book series about the land of Narnia). Jesus in fact once told a Pharisee named Nicodemus that he would never see the kingdom without being born again. God’s kingdom is apparently a spiritual dimension that can only be spiritually discerned.

**Journey Together:**

1). Share one of the best surprises you have ever had.

2). What is one of your earliest childhood memories?

**Road Map:**

Spirituality, unfortunately, can be rather vague. What else did Jesus say about the nature of his kingdom already growing and taking shape on earth? Tonight we are going to look at three very important and tangible aspects of the kingdom life that is even now sprouting and growing through the ministry of Jesus.

**Authority:**

In Luke 10:17-20 Jesus talks of how the establishment of his kingdom is bringing down the rule of Satan. We see this very thing happening in many peoples lives, but perhaps none more clearly than in the life of the demon possessed man in Mark 1:21-28.

1). Have you ever seen someone that you thought might be possessed by a demon? How would you describe this person?

2). Have you ever been enslaved to a bad habit that you just can’t seem to kick? What is the worst part about addiction – the habit itself or the frustration and impotency of knowing you just can’t quit?

3). Jesus came to deliver us from sin and painful addictions. Has Jesus ever helped set you free from a bad habit? Describe how it happened and share a bit about the freedom you have experienced through him.
Forgiveness:

In John 8:1-11 Jesus forgives a woman brought to him caught in the very act of adultery. Jesus is launching his new kingdom where every citizen will know and enjoy the blessing of God's forgiving love.

4). What is an important thing you remember being forgiven for?

5). What is the hardest act of forgiveness you have ever had to offer?

6). When and how did you finally accept God's forgiveness in your life?

Justice:

Justice is an often-repeated theme in the Old Testament. It was because of Pharaoh's unjust treatment of the Israelite slaves that God intervened for their deliverance. Jesus also demonstrated God's justice on many occasions but perhaps none more dramatically than with the cleansing of the temple - John 2: 12-17.

7). Why was Jesus so angry here?

8). In another story about caring for the poor and imprisoned in Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus links acts of justice for the oppressed with caring for him. How does this parable help you understand justice and mercy and their relationship to Jesus' mission?

9). In the ancient story of Robin Hood, Robin steals from the rich and returns money back to the poor. How is this story a helpful comparison of the work of God's kingdom in the ministry of Jesus?

Note: When Jesus says that his kingdom is at hand we should expect some tangible evidence. As we embrace his kingdom we discover a new authority in our life, forgiving grace and a realization of God's justice. Extending these to others opens the door of his kingdom to them and us. These are some of the visible aspects of God's kingdom.

10). Which of these aspects of God's kingdom rule do you need most in your life today?

11). How can this group pray for you this evening?

My Journey:

1). How has God been using Journey in your life and witness this week?

2). Where have you seen the kingdom of God at work this week?

3). In the light of this week's study, what does it mean to seek first the kingdom?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?
**Back Story:** In this week’s journey we focus on the more tangible aspects of the kingdom Jesus came to establish. If the kingdom of God has already come as Jesus proclaimed, then where is it and what does it look like? John the Baptist once asked Jesus the same thing. “When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”” Matthew 11: 2, 3.

As we have already seen, people were expecting great things with the coming kingdom of God. They believed that the Messiah would rise up on their behalf and help them defeat the Romans. They were looking for action and political change, but Jesus seemed to have a different agenda. Still, as Jesus answered John’s disciples – “The blind were receiving their sight, the lame were walking, lepers were being cured, the deaf were hearing again, the dead were being raised and the poor had good news brought to them.” Politically or militarily, Rome was not being overturned, but the powers of darkness were being shaken. Jesus said this was the evidence that the kingdom of God was at hand – Satan’s kingdom was being overturned.

The good news of God’s kingdom began to take on new expectations as the disciples began to comprehend Jesus’ message. In this Journey study we are looking at three very tangible ways that the kingdom of God has begun.

1). **The authority of God in our lives** – an authority that Jesus has extended to his followers. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, therefore go and make disciples…” Matthew 28:18. It is only in the authority of Jesus that we can dare advance against the Prince of Darkness. We operate under the authority of Christ and the nature of his kingdom is the exact opposite of the world’s way of doing things. Power is manifested in weakness in Jesus’ economy. We operate from the authority of the cross where Jesus gave up his life for others instead of destroying his oppressors. The first evidence we have of the presence of God’s kingdom in our own lives is the presence of God’s peace ruling in our hearts and taking authority over our own troubled spirits.

2). **Forgiveness is another real life aspect of God’s kingdom.** God’s kingdom is manifested when God does not hold our sins against us, and forgives us. Forgiveness is ours right now. We do not have to wait to know that God has forgiven us. We live in a new state or relationship with God while we await his glorious return. We also know the wonderful favor of God. God not only loves and forgives us he is completely for us. This is the wonderful condition of the forgiven child of God. God has freely loved us and forgiven us in his beloved Son. All debts have been cancelled in his forgiving love.

3). **Justice is another clear and tangible aspect of the present reality of God’s kingdom.** Jesus spoke up for the lost and the hurting – those most damaged by the dominion of sin. He opened his arms to little children, to prostitutes, tax collectors and the poor. God’s kingdom was for the poor in spirit, the ones who had been forgotten and put down. Whenever we see people acting in compassion, we can be sure that they are not far from the kingdom. Jesus even once told a lawyer that when he understood that loving God first and loving others as he loved himself, he was not far from the kingdom. Mark 12:34.

One day the skies will split open and Jesus will return with the host of heaven. This world will be over and all that will live on is God’s eternal kingdom. Until then, the kingdom of God has begun and we, who believe Jesus, accept his message and his ministry and have entered into the kingdom he has prepared for us. We are waiting for the culmination of that kingdom in his return. But for now, we are experiencing a new authority in our lives, the forgiving grace of God for all.
that we have done in opposition to his government. We also work for justice along with him as we pray for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. We are strangers here and we have embraced a new and beautiful empire of God’s forgiving grace and love.

For more insight into the nature of God’s economy Jesus gave us a detailed account in his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7. This is what it means to have moved from a citizen of this world into the glorious reign of God as we await the final consummation of his kingdom reign! We are learning to do what Jesus says by building on the stone kingdom “Rock” instead of the shifting sand of the crumbling world all around us.
Dressed In Royalty: New Clothes From The King

When I was 17 I helped lead a group of early teens spelunking in a cave in northern Alabama. We spent the entire weekend living in this cave that went for miles under ground with some vast 280 feet high rooms, narrow passages and a small stream. It was completely dark except for the light we brought in with us. We had a lantern comically named the “sun”, which was only lit during daylight hours and another the “moon”, which of course was only lit at night. These lanterns were the only way of telling the difference between day and night in the cave.

We had a blast exploring the underground caverns and mysteries of the cave, but when we finally popped out again on Sunday none of us realized how filthy we were until visible in the naked light of day. With hundreds of miles to travel before arriving back home we began looking for a way to clean up before the long trek back. Someone got the bright idea of renting a motel room so we could all take a shower and put on fresh clothes. We left an extra tip for the maid, but I cannot remember appreciating a shower more in my life. Clods of red Alabama mud washed off our bodies and down the drain leaving us fresh and clean for the first time in three days.

The message of John the Baptist was that everyone in comparison to Jesus is dirty. John called everyone – high and low to baptism, a kind of ritual bath in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus continued John’s theme when he pressed a well respected, notable Pharisee named Nicodemus that he too must be washed or immersed in order to enter God’s kingdom. In fact Jesus said he needed a “new birth” of water and Spirit before seeing the kingdom.

Journeying Together:

1). Describe the dirtiest you have ever been.

2). What is the best part about being clean?

3). Imagine being washed in the Spirit. What would that feel like?

Road Map: John 3:1-15

4). What does baptism by water and Spirit have to do with God’s kingdom? Why does Jesus say that Nicodemus will never “see” the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit?

5). Why is the new birth of the Spirit so difficult for Nicodemus to understand and accept? What might water and Spirit represent in Jesus’ message to the Pharisee?

6). How would you describe your own “new birth?” How does it feel to be washed clean by baptism and the Spirit’s indwelling? What does baptism and new birth in the Spirit reveal to you about life in God’s kingdom?

Read: Revelation 21:1-8. Revelation 21 talks about a new heaven and earth filled with new people. The key word here of course is “new.” God is making everything new by introducing the principles of his government – his authority, forgiveness and justice like we read and studied together last week. These principles are working their way in the world like leaven rising in the dough and changing the world from the inside out. But now he talks about birth – a new life in
him cleansed by water and Spirit. New people transformed by his Spirit are the way Jesus kingdom is at hand.

7). What do these additional scripture references tell you about living clean in God’s kingdom?

8). What is the relationship between being washed, new birth and God making all things new in his kingdom? How do the realities of God’s new authority, forgiveness, justice and new birth in our lives help clarify the kingdom of God in real and practical terms for us today? How is God making these things real in your life right now?

Note: In John Bunyan’s famous book Pilgrims Progress, Pilgrim is on a journey away from the “City Of Destruction” to the “Celestial City.” Pilgrim goes through many experiences and life-transforming events that help him better understand his journey and his new life under the lordship of Christ.

9). We are going to look more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth in and through Jesus is how our life in Christ begins. How is Jesus washing and making you new every day – in your heart, your mind and in your relationships with others?

10). What questions do you still have about being “born again?” How would you explain what being born again is like to others?

11). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading and discussion?

12). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

1). How has God used this weeks fellowship discussion on being washed clean in your life this week?

2). We are looking more into the process of entering God’s kingdom and how the life of Jesus becomes ours. Still, new birth is the beginning of our life in Christ. How is Jesus washing and making you new every day – in your thought’s, in your heart, in your relationships with others?

3). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Back Story: Preparation for Jesus’ kingdom comes in the form of a bath. The message to Nicodemus and for all of us is – that no matter who we are, what pedigree we come from or even how religious, as in the case of this dignified Pharisee – in comparison with Jesus we are all unfit for the kingdom. This was not an easy message for Nicodemus to hear. The entire conversation get’s turned upside down since it begins with what Nicodemus knows – “We know you are - a teacher sent from God or how else would you be able to be doing the miraculous things you are doing,” to “How can this be?” The Micah, or ceremonial bath was for converts and those who had defiled themselves by touching blood or anything unclean. The Pharisees kept themselves clean
by refraining from contact with unclean things and through constant washings. Suggesting that Nicodemus needed a Mikvah was out of the question.

There are a couple of word associations with water, spirit and new birth here. The first is the obvious connection between John the Baptist and Jesus. The baptism/repentance ministry of John, preceded the baptism of the spirit through Jesus - thus, the water & Spirit connection. We might also see a birth analogy that Nicodemus picks up on. All of us come from a watery state in the mother’s amniotic fluid as we burst into life. When Nicodemus questions how to get back to our mothers womb, Jesus responds with “we must be born of water and the spirit”. The normal human/physical birth is not enough. We must be born physically, but we must also be born spiritually. This is a recurring theme in John’s writings. We find it right from the beginning in John 1:12, 13.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

We see it again in I John 5:6-8 where we read:

“This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”

Baptism becomes the way into the kingdom – baptism first of water which leads to baptism of the Spirit. This is so important that an issue in the book of Acts (Acts 18, 19), concerning Apollos’ practice of baptizing new converts in water, after the manner of John the Baptist, but with no reference to the Spirit demands clarification and correction. Paul meets new converts that have only received baptism by water without being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 19:1-7). Consequently, Paul lays hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Here baptism of the Spirit is a kind of bathing of the Spirit as John was washing people in water.

The point is – in the fall of Adam, the human race lost its connection with God and we became “flesh” devoid of “Spirit”. Before the fall we were made in God’s image and were spiritual beings robed in a garment of light that may have been the “physical” or tangible presence of the Spirit. When Adam and Eve sinned their first realization was nakedness. All that was left after the fall was flesh. The Spirit had left them. Since the fall the Spirit works upon man, but does not inhabit us. The Spirit comes upon people, but does not dwell within them. This was the hope of the new covenant spoken of in the prophet Jeremiah where God would write his laws in our hearts and we would all “know” the Lord (Jeremiah 31:33).

Jesus is a brand new species – a new order of humanity. Our humanity in Adam has been deformed. We are a mutation from God’s original creation. We were made in the image of God, but that image has been marred by sin. This is why at Jesus’ baptism the heavens open up and the Father proclaims, “You are my Son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11). The last time God said that about anyone or anything was in Genesis 1:31 where we read, “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.”

Jesus is the new creation, new humanity. In Him, we all begin again. This is why we must put our old life in Adam to death (water baptism) and be raised in our new life in Christ (Baptism of the Spirit). We must see ourselves as “spiritual beings” in the light of the new life we have in the
Spirit through Christ. As God is making a new heaven and new earth, he is populating it with new people – people that have died to their life in Adam and are now living in their new life in Christ. God has given us every illustration and metaphor available to let us know that we have already passed from death to life in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-10). He wants us to see ourselves as God sees us - as new creatures in Christ. We are to live no longer in the mutated form of sin, but in the newly formed life of the Spirit. The best summation of this new life in Christ is Romans 8 where Paul goes into great detail about life in the Spirit – but that’s for next week! For now, let’s enjoy the new birth process of being formed in the image of God’s Son!
Kingdom Transactions: Passports To Freedom

I recently purchased a new car and there were a bunch of papers and loan documents I had to sign before I could actually say it was mine and drive it off the lot. The same was true when we purchased our first home. In fact, when you buy a house you have to go to a completely different organization called the “title” company where all the important papers are signed. The title company reviews all documents and guarantees that everything is in order to protect the buyer, the seller and the loan company in a legal binding agreement.

Our goal in *The Christian Life & Journey* has been to walk with Jesus learn first hand about Him and his mission. One thing we’ve learned is how much Jesus emphasized his kingdom and how it has already begun. “The kingdom of God has come”, was his main message.

If God’s kingdom has already begun, then the most important issue is signing up and getting involved. The apostle Paul actually goes through, step by step, some very important transactions God has designed to take place in our lives as we take up residence in his kingdom both now and on into the future.

**Journey Together**

1). What are some important legal transactions you have negotiated in your life?

2). What do you love/hate most about signing a binding document?

**Road Map**

Romans 5 – 8: moves us through these kingdom transactions and reveals how the life of God becomes our own. For a brief overview:

Romans 5 – *Free from wrath* – The transition from condemnation (Adam) to justification (Christ).

Romans 6 – *Free from sin* – The transition from the dominion of sin to freedom in righteousness.

Romans 7 – *Free from law* – The transition from being married to the law to being married to Christ.

Romans 8 – *Free from death* – The transition from death (flesh) to life (Spirit).

1). In our flesh or in Adam we live under the tyranny of sin, condemnation and death and are under the (Wrath of God). But through our new life in Christ Jesus we live in righteousness, justification and life standing freely in the (Grace of God). We have a *super abounding* life in Christ that overcomes the curse from the fall in Adam. In Christ we are living in the “jet stream” of God’s kingdom life. In Romans 5 Paul describes this new life as “standing in grace.” How would you describe your experience of being at peace with God and standing in abundant grace and life through Jesus Christ? What is the difference of being ‘under’ God’s wrath and condemnation and ‘standing’ in the free grace of God?

2). If our old life in Adam was already buried in Jesus death on the cross why is it necessary that we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God? Why is it so important that we understand our solidarity with Christ and his cross and move from death to life?
3). How does the law figure in to our new life? What relationship does the law have with sin and disobedience to God? Why is the law no help in living this new life of victory? How does the burial of our old life in Adam or the flesh free us from the endless cycle of sin, condemnation and death in our dysfunctional relationship in the law and allow for a new rhythm of righteousness, justification and life in marriage to Christ?

4). Jesus came that we might have life in Him. This life is new in that it is through him and it is a life lived by the Holy Spirit’s indwelling. The fruits of the Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22, 23. These are some of the best tangible evidences of Christ’s life taking shape in us.

Characteristics of the new life in Christ through the Spirit:
- a).
- b).
- c).
- d).

**Note:** Signing legal documents for owning a car or a house can be complicated and difficult to understand.

5). How do these 4 chapters in Romans help explain the intricate transactions from our life in the old age to living the new life of the Spirit in the kingdom of God?

6). What transactions still need to take place in your life for the kingdom to be real for you? How can this group pray for you?

**My Journey:**

1). How is God using Journey in your life and witness to others this week?

2). The gospel of Jesus is about freedom. We have been freed of God’s wrath, sin, law and death. Which of these freedoms are the most meaningful to you right now and why?

3). Which fruit of the Spirit are you most grateful for right now and which one would you most like to see bearing fruit in your life?

4). What questions do you still have from this weeks study?

5). How can this group pray for you right now?

**Backstory:** In this week’s Journey we begin to understand some important steps in trading in the old life we inherited in the fall of Adam and Eve for a new life in Christ. Our study this week is both complex and simple depending on how deeply people choose to go in Romans 5-8. Lesson 10 is not meant to be any kind of exhaustive study on what many have declared as the foundational core of Paul’s gospel. Steering people back to the broader reading of chapters 5-8 and staying close to the questions in our lesson will help participants get more of a birds eye view of these chapters and hopefully see the bigger overarching questions that Paul is dealing with here.

For starters, it is helpful to realize Paul’s beginning argument in the letter to the Romans. By his own admission, he has never been to Rome and he is anxious to learn how the gospel is
advancing in the capital of the empire. He is also eager to share his understanding of the gospel as God has revealed it to him.

Many commentators hold that Paul’s entire premise is summed up in chapter 1, verse 16 & 17 where we read:

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

Paul understands the gospel to be the power of God unleashed for our salvation – for Jew and Gentile alike. He says that in the gospel a righteousness from God has been revealed by faith and for faith and then quotes an old testament verse from Habakkuk 2:4.

Unfortunately, Habakkuk 2:4 is not such a simple correlation with Paul’s reference in Romans 1:17. The issue in Habakkuk is that the wicked go unpunished while God appears to stand idly by. The prophet registers a complaint against God for allowing evil to go on unchecked. But God informs Habakkuk that the slide of evil will not continue or go on forever. The kingdom of Babylon will be the hand of God’s judgment for rebellious Judah. But even in the midst of this punishment – the righteous will live by his faith in God. This is a word of promise and hope for Habakkuk and all those who are being overcome by evil.

Paul picks this verse up both to show how God has again stepped in to interrupt evil through the good news of Christ. But – and this is very important, Paul very skillfully twists the verse in Habakkuk to reinforce what he is going to share about the gospel here in the letter to the Romans.

In Habakkuk the verse reads: “The righteous will live by his faith,” but in the original Greek of the Romans verse, Paul intentionally turns the Habakkuk quote around to read: “By Faith the righteous will live.” Modern translations miss the nuance in their attempt to render the verse less cumbersome – but the switch in the original is for affect. Romans 1:18 – 4:25 will deal with the first part of the verse by demonstrating that it is only by faith that anyone can become righteous. He will end this half of the argument by referencing it with two important Old Testament characters as examples. Abraham is introduced as the father of faith and King David is forgiven and justified by faith. In both cases being declared righteous before God came in the form of something God did instead of any effort on Abraham or David’s part.

Chapters 5-8 of Romans continues the argument of Romans 1:17. If it is by faith that people are declared righteous and not by their own efforts to keep and observe the law – then how will they go on to live their lives in faith? Chapters 5-8 show how “the righteous by faith will live.” And how will they live? In freedom!

The righteous by faith will live free from the wrath of God, free from the power of sin, free from the dysfunction of trying to live according to a spiritual reality like the law when the fall and sin has rendered us unspiritual and finally free from the flesh or death since we have died to the flesh (Adam) and moved on to a new life in the Spirit (Christ).

Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it the power of God to bring us from death to life. Colossians 1:11-14 sums it up well:
“Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Colossians 1:11-14
Giving Away The Kingdom: Sharing The Good News

I was so happy when Panera Bread a pastry, sandwich and coffee shop opened a restaurant in Knoxville, Tennessee where I was a chaplain at the time. I could literally walk down the hill in the morning to a scrumptious Danish, or bagel, latte and good conversation with a friend. Imagine my delight when I noticed these large garbage bags of discarded Panera morsels early one morning waiting to be carted off to the dumpster. Having gotten to know the manager a bit I asked about the bags and he told me they were day old bagels and pastries slated for the trash.

This formed an idea of how we could make these day old delicacies available for our students. I quickly loaded the bags into my van and carted them up to our student center to be enjoyed by all. Thus began a daily pick up of day old pastries from Panera bread. I was quickly becoming the best-loved pastor on campus. However, I soon discovered that my rescue was even more than our students could handle so I began looking for other places where I could share. Next I was driving up to married student housing and dropping garbage bags full of day old delights to graduates and international students. This of course brought me into contact with lots of people I would never have met without the Panera freebees.

What if sharing the story of Jesus was really as easy as giving away sweet rolls? What if this is what Jesus meant when he sent out the disciples two by two with the instructions to drive out evil spirit’s, anoint the sick and proclaim good news to the poor? Is this what it means to evangelize – announce the good news of Christ and his kingdom by introducing others to his new authority in their lives, God’s forgiving grace, perfect justice and a new birth?

Journey Together

1). What are some good gifts you have received in your life?

2). What are some great gifts you have given in your life?

3). Who would you most like to share the story of Jesus with and why?


1). Jesus instruction to the seventy disciples in verse 9 was “Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.” How does care for others translate into a taste of the kingdom? What have you learned about the benefits of God’s kingdom that are revealed in acts of kindness and justice?

2). Why are the disciples so excited that even the demons are subject to them? What does this victory over evil reveal about the over all-purpose of Christ? Why did Jesus caution them to be more grateful that their own names were written in heaven than the trampling down of Satan’s kingdom? Why does Jesus express such joy in the disciples experience here?

3). What benefits of God’s kingdom have you received or been blessed with that you can happily share with others? When has giving away the kingdom produced great joy in your life?

Surprised By The Kingdom: One day while walking our dogs a woman with a black mid-sized dog stopped me and asked me to share a treat with her dog. It seemed a rather strange request so I questioned her. She explained how this was part of the dogs rehabilitation therapy after being
used as bait in attack dog training and indicating where the dog was missing one ear. Getting the
dog out on walks was helping her overcome her fear of other dogs – a fear that was now being
transferred to men the real cause of her terror. Having different men stop and give her a treat
was helping the dog realize that all men were not so cruel.

I stooped down and offered the dog a treat from my hand while gently stroking her head as she
would allow. As I walked on I could have sworn hearing the whisper of God in my ear that I had
just witnessed the presence of the kingdom. Maybe acts of compassion are the subtle gentle
workings of the mustard seed kingdom – a mustard seed that will one day as a large a large bush
offering nest and shade for all the birds of the air. If so, I want to belong to that kingdom - where
the hurts and abuse from the fall are being transformed by acts of tender compassion in missions
of mercy and grace.

Advancing The Kingdom: Matthew 25:14-30

4). What is the relationship between investing God’s property and giving away the kingdom?

5). What is a talent? Why does the third manager hide his talent? What does hiding our talent
translate into in this story? What great investments have you already made or can you make for
advancing God’s kingdom?

6). What excites you most about giving away God’s property?

7). What further questions do you have from this weeks reading?

8). How can this group pray for you right now?

My Journey:

1). How is God using Journey in your life and witness to others this week?

2). We have all been affected by the fall and injustice of Satan’s rule in our lives. Talk about a
hurt or painful experience in your own life that helps you appreciate the coming of the kingdom.

3). How has the simplicity of advancing the kingdom changed your perspective on sharing the
good news?

4). How can this group pray for you right now?

Back Story: So far in our journey with Jesus we have seen that Jesus is more than a personal
savior from sin. He is the messianic king re-establishing God’s rule on earth. Bringing glory to
God on earth was His mission. “The kingdom of God is at hand!” (Mark 1:15), was His message.
He came to invert the fall by calling us to repent of our smaller self-serving lives and to proclaim
the good news about a kingdom order where God is now at the center of everything. In this
government God is our king and we are His people. A kingdom is wherever a king or queen’s
dominion extends and the subjects over which they rule. In this government God rules from the
throne of our hearts. When God becomes the center of our lives, everything else begins to fall into place. Jesus came to turn everything back to God!

In ancient and medieval times the birth of a son and heir to the throne was good news. The birth of a son was especially good news if the king was a good king and the kingdom was prospering under his government. This is where the term “gospel” comes from. The good news or gospel, was about the extension of a king’s rule. The “evangel” was the one sent on the mission of announcing the heir to the throne. Evangelists were specially commissioned agents of the empire announcing the good news that the king and queen had given birth to a son and thereby extending their dynasty. The term “long live the king” meant the king would continue his rule through a rightful heir.

The mission and message of Jesus is that God’s rule has been extended! The king has given birth to a son and God’s rule has been re-established on earth. As citizens of God’s kingdom we have the privileged role of the evangel – announcing the good news that the government of God has been established on earth in the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of God’s son. Long Live Our King!

Our role is not to pressure anyone, cajole anyone or guilt them into following God. Our primary role is to announce the good news of God’s government. Our message is a call to hear the good news about God, recognize the opportunity to join in this new life under God’s rule, repent of a life centered on ourselves and turn to a full life where God is the center and priority in all that we do.

The mission is larger than our own personal salvation since it has to do with the renewal of all things. It involves a renewal of the earth so it has an environmental impact. It affects our relationships with one another and how we view others as people made in God’s image and the image of God being restored in us. It has to do with the economy of all things since God is interested in all that we do – the way we spend our money, what we value – the way we spend our time and the larger issues of injustice, poverty and human suffering.

All these issues are important to God and part of his kingdom rule. We see this as we study the message of the Old Testament prophets and why God was bringing judgment on a people who were exploiting their neighbors and had no concern for the poor. When Israel began acting and behaving in such careless and inhumane ways they had ceased representing God to the nations around them.

It was also central to the mission and message of Jesus since the disciples were appointed “that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” (Mark 3:14, 15). Jesus instructed them saying, “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near! Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.’” (Matthew 10:7, 8).

His mission must become our mission and his message our message. It has been said that people will never care how much we know until they know how much we care. The focus in lesson 11 is to change the way students think of evangelism from teaching and explaining doctrine and convincing people to join a church to giving away the kingdom. Church affiliation will come. Our primary role is to be the evangel declaring God’s kingdom rule now by being the eyes, ears, hearts and hands of Jesus on campus. It is to announce that the kingdom of God has already begun. The change begins right here and right now in us! We have been given the real estate of
the kingdom and God is calling us to open the doors to others! This is our mission and the good news of God’s kingdom rule is our message. “Repent,” Jesus said, “and take hold of the good news!”
The Main Thing Is Keeping The Main Thing, The Main Thing!

Discipline has never come easy for me. I was the first in my family to enter a four-year degree granting institution and never considered myself an academic. By the first mid-term semester of my freshman year I had a .075 GPA. I suddenly woke to the reality that unless I made some drastic changes I was going to be a college drop out. How important was it that I attend college? Learning and making the grade had to become a greater priority if I was ever going to make it.

Obviously things had to be different. At the time I was working a part time job and living off campus with my brother and his wife who were not yet relocated to the area. Basically I was living alone with few boundaries or accountability. I was also busy making new friends and becoming more and more involved with a charming young freshman. However, after the startling GPA I assessed my priorities and decided that I did feel called to ministry and wanted to pursue a college degree that would lead into full time service for Christ so I found a stable balanced roommate, moved into the dorm, quit my job and actually stopped seeing the girl friend – for awhile anyway.

Jesus said we have to know our priorities. On many occasions he reminded the disciples that the kingdom of God was the most important thing of all. In Luke 14 Jesus emphasized the cost of being a disciple. He never made discipleship seem easy, just full of grace. In Luke 9 he talked about gaining the whole world while loosing our soul. He said the kingdom was the greatest priority – that it was like finding treasure hidden in a field that upon discovery a person sells all he has to own the field and the treasure in it - or like a man in search of fine pearls and when he finds the precious pearl sells all to have it. The emphasis is on selling all because the treasure or pearl is worth more than the sum total of all he possesses.

Journey Together

1). List three important things in your life.

2). Which two of the three would you be willing to give up to have the other?

3). What important sacrifice has someone made for you or you for someone else?

Road Map: Matthew 19:16-30

1). What did the rich man have? What did he want? Why was he coming to Jesus? What did Jesus have that he wanted?

2). Why did Jesus quiz the man about goodness and refer him back to the law? Why did he question him about calling him “good?” What were the man’s assumptions about Jesus?

3). How did Jesus turn this man away? What did the man miss about the greatness of Jesus kingdom? What keeps us from selling all for the kingdom today?

4). Why were the disciples now fearful of loosing out on the kingdom as well? How can anyone obtain the kingdom?

5). Who are you most like in this story: The rich man, Jesus, or the disciples and why?
6). What is your main priority in life?

7). How can this group pray for you?

My Journey: For further study read Matthew 6:33.

Note: Have you ever wanted someone or something so bad that you go to bed and wake up thinking about them. You can’t get it out of your mind. You imagine what it would be like to be with that person or to have that thing. Maybe it’s a new car, a new outfit or a special person you are falling in love with. Jesus likens the kingdom to our most prized possession – the greatest dream or desire we could have for ourselves. In Matthew here, he advises us – no commands us to seek the kingdom first and in finding the kingdom we will find everything else along with it. So you see the kingdom is not a replacement of our basic needs. It is the key to them and everything we need. For when we possess the kingdom, we become a king, and the king lacks for nothing. In giving us the kingdom, Jesus is reinstating us with the dominion lost in Adam’s fall that we learn to rule our lives again in Jesus name.

1). Where have you seen evidence of God’s kingdom this week?

2). In what way has the kingdom become the main thing in your life?

3). What is your greatest distraction in seeking first the kingdom?

4). How do you see yourself advancing the kingdom among your friends, at work or at home?

5). How has God used the Journey in your life over the past few months?

Back Story: We have come a long way since the start of our journey with Jesus. The invitation to “come and see” has taken us on quite a ride. One of the most impressive things about Jesus is how sure He is of Himself. He is so confident of who He is and certain of His mission that He is completely comfortable with us seeing for ourselves and coming to our own conclusions. Besides, He seems to know us better than we know ourselves.

Another surprising thing is how much of His teaching and preaching center around the main theme of reestablishing God’s rule on earth. The mission of our personal salvation is secondary to the broader purpose of overcoming evil and victory over sin and the Devil. Personal salvation is almost a by-product to this larger mission and message of Jesus. Jesus’ vision for the world and humanity in general is breathtaking. He will stop at nothing less than a complete and total reversal of the Prince of This World and the glory of his Father. Jesus is committed to the kingdom of God because Jesus is committed to God. He knows that only complete surrender to God’s will and purpose will effect the change and transformation needed in the world. He is committed to the point of Roman crucifixion to accomplish this mission.

Following Jesus and surrendering our lives to Jesus will mean the end of our own will and way. Embracing the kingdom of God involves a cross of our own. It means that nothing will keep us from the mission and message of Jesus. It is our last and final hope for ourselves and the world. It means that like Jesus, we will lay down our life in His death and resurrection to embrace God’s vision for ourselves and the world. We want nothing less than what Jesus wants. We aspire to the same hopes and dreams that Jesus has. We long and pray for the glory of God on earth, for God’s love in our hearts and for unity between ourselves, God, and one another. It means that we have
embraced the forgiveness of Jesus first for ourselves and for others. We seek His justice for the oppressed and we claim the authority of God that has already been given to Him. In fact we live our lives under this new authority announcing the end of the present evil age in the freedom and victory of the cross of Christ. Jesus has brought about a new world order and we are a part of this new thing that God is doing through Him.

The victory of Jesus over death gives us a whole new perspective of the world and for everyone in it. We now know that no one is beyond the hope that springs from Jesus resurrection life. Paul reflects on this in his second letter to the Corinthians,

“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.”

II Corinthians 5:14-16

In Jesus victory and His vision of the world we see endless possibilities. No one is beyond hope and we are limited only by our own confidence in Jesus victory over sin and death. We know without a doubt that God is for us and because of Jesus nothing will be able to separate us from God’s infinite love for us. Even death itself is not strong enough to keep us apart from God since Jesus broke the chains of death. Through Jesus life we live in a whole new paradigm of God’s forgiving grace. We live in the truth of eternal life. We live in the assurance of God’s authority over every power and dominion. There is no sin that He has not forgiven. No weakness He has not overcome. No sickness He has not cured. No fear He has not vanquished. No death He has not restored to life. This is the greatest message of hope and life the world will ever know and we have the privilege of not only of swimming in it and drinking it in ourselves. We have the joy of proclaiming it to others. Continuing Paul’s delight in II Corinthians 5,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 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. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

II Corinthians 5:17-21

The challenge in this final weeks Journey is to clarify what we have seen in our journey with Jesus. The back story here will help you, the leader, reflect again on all we have seen and heard in our journey along with the disciples to see what they have seen and to embrace what they have embraced. But, it is important to draw out the observations and lessons that each one has gained in their own discovery of Jesus mission and message. Here is where the five S’s of Seek, Soak, Script, Sign and Share will be most important. Have participants take the time to look over what they have written in their own journey with Jesus to reflect on how God has used Journey in their own life. The closing questions of lesson 12 will be most important to draw out the message of God to each one.

In the end, Journey is a precursor to an even deeper walk of discipleship with Jesus. Journey only asks us to come and see, and to make up our own minds about what we see and hear. The next step that Jesus took to invite those who understood His mission and message was to invite them to follow. Greater Things bible study is a lesson on discipleship from the gospel of Matthew
that invites us to a whole new level of relationship and commitment to Jesus. For those who understand the mission and message of Jesus and want to follow Him, you are invited to pick up your cross and follow Jesus in the new life of discipleship where we learn as Eugene Petersen phrased the words of Jesus own description of “doing life” with Him by “learning the unforced rhythms of grace.” Matthew 11:28.

We have come so far with Jesus. We have seen too much now to ever be happy with the world again outside of Jesus’ own vision and purpose for it and ourselves. Like the disciples in John 6 when many of those in the crowd who had been following Him turned and walked away - “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. But, Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” John 6:67-69

And we too have come to see and know that He is the Christ – the Savior of the world. All there is left to do, like Peter and the rest of the twelve is to follow!
• **Soak** – Read the passage each day and write down any observations, thoughts, questions, connections or anything God speaks to you about the passage.

• **Seal** – Seal God’s word to you deep within your heart by taking some time to meditate on the most important truth to you this week. Ask God to open the deeper recesses of your heart to teach you what you need most for your life this week.

• **Script** – Journal or write if even a few lines, noting the ways that God spoke to you from the passage, your meditation, or our group time together. This will help you keep better track of God’s voice and the way He is speaking through scripture.

• **Share** – Share with someone what you are learning from your time with God in Journey. As you share what you are learning, it will help drive God’s word home to you even more and you will notice how God will use what He has revealed to you to bless others.

**Journey Covenant:**

I want to grow in my understanding of Jesus and the life He has for me. I want to participate in Journey to enhance my own relationship with God this year. I will commit to doing the weekly assignments and small group meetings.

My best times of availability are: _____.
Signed: ________________________
My email address: ________________________.
Cell Ph: ________________________.

*Journey*...

is the life we were made for and have always wanted.

Who was Jesus? What was his mission? What can Jesus teach us about ourselves, the meaning of life, and our relationship with others? Journey is an introduction into the life and mission of Jesus. It is a personal journey into the life God has in mind for all of us. The purpose of the Journey bible study is to learn about God through the life and ministry of Jesus and to embrace him fully. If you’re ready for the ultimate adventure—then hold on tight and let’s see where the living Christ and a journey with him will take us over the next few weeks together!

**Titles and Topics Covered In Journey:**

1). *Come And See! The Journey Begins*

2). *Who Am I? Journey To Self Discovery*

3). *Jesus, Our Good Shepherd: Guide For The Journey*

4). *The Hound Of Heaven: Search & Rescue*

5). *Jesus On Message: Where Are We Going?*
6). The Stone Kingdom: Jesus Mission Rooted In History

7). Heaven Now! The Two-Phased Kingdom

8). Kingdom Architecture: Defining The Kingdom Of God

9). Dressed In Royalty: New Clothes From The King

10). Kingdom Transactions: Passports To Freedom

11). Giving Away The Kingdom: Sharing The Good News

12). The Main Thing Is Keeping The Main Thing, The Main Thing

**Breaking Down Journey:**
Journey was created for larger weekly on or off campus meetings in a teaching format and small group discussion. The beginning story or illustration introduces the topic of study. *Journey Together* helps ease participants into the topic through ice-breaker related questions. *Road Map* is the main passage for discussion followed by questions that help draw out the topic. If you are leading Journey, feel free to depart from these as needed and come up with your own questions, while staying on track with the main direction of the study laid out in the leaders guide. *My Story* has been prepared as a continuation of the larger group meetings for smaller groups that meet during the week to check in with one another and reflect on how God is using Journey in their daily life. These groups should be flexible in terms of location and meeting time. Also, the amount of questions are limited in the My Story section, allowing for more personal interactions and life application.

**Getting The Most Out Of Journey**

Here’s what your going to need for the journey.

- Good soil - An open and receptive heart
- Working the soil - Determination and diligence
- Hunger & thirst - Desire For God

**Best Practices: The five S’s of hearing and discerning God’s voice**

- **Seek** – Pray for God to open up the passage for you. Is there a promise for you to claim, a sin to confess, a word for you to follow, an insight to share?
Jessica Kisinzu: 12/5/13

Jessica is a doctoral student at UC Berkeley in Chemical Engineering. She participated in Journey in the 2012 Winter/Spring semester in a closed/committed group of seven additional participants from Berkeley. We met at the ACF Faculty advisors home on Sunday evenings each week until Journey was completed.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

The main point of Journey is the message of the kingdom. This is a major point I continue to come back to in my life. What does it look like to live in the KOG now? The two poems (Hound Of Heaven and Who Am I?) were extremely helpful in making the life of God real to me on campus and among my college world.

- Was the present reality of God’s kingdom a new idea for you and how did it help make the Christian life more relevant?

“I can’t say that considering the KOG now was a completely new thought, but it certainly was drilled in more by going through Journey. It brought the mission and message of Jesus into my everyday life on campus. Slowly, the KOG is seeping into all of life. Journey helps with the tendency to compartmentalize our life into my life on campus and my ‘church’ life. Journey has helped me be more aware of the KOG in what I am doing right now.”

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

- I did more with soak, seek and script. Share was more within our group meeting. Not so much outside our group. Reading and writing things down during the week was also a very good thing for me. It helped me take the thoughts and ideas with me outside our study. Writing is always a good practice for me. Going back to it again during the week helped draw out more from the passage and helped me encounter God throughout the study.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

- My spiritual journey has been kind of up and down anyway over the last few years on campus. It was spiritually enriching to participate in any kind of
consistent study, but also the message of Journey was really helpful by making the KOG more practical to my everyday life. Helped me bridge secular world on campus with my inner life in God. Just going through Journey was a good reminder of God’s presence on campus and with my friends.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

-I have been sitting in on the Journey study during this last semester (fall 2013) as well as the time we had with it last year in our committed small group (Fall 2011). I think that the committed small group is the best way to experience Journey. I got a lot a more out of it during that time, although Sabbath School this fall semester has been a good refresher course. I think the small group setting is the best. It is always the best way for me to learn and process discussion and bible study. I did not participate in the “My Journey” section with an additional small group during the week as Journey was designed. I do think that going over how people responded to the five S’s each week would be a good way to begin each Journey lesson and would provide great feedback and reflection from each participant on their personal encounter with God through the Journey experience.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

-To look for and expect to see God at work all around me.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

-It is very important to be considering and helping students to connect their campus and their spiritual life and I think Journey does a good job in helping students make that connection and yes I would encourage anyone to go through Journey if they have the chance.

-In general my overall understanding and impression of Jesus and my relationship to him is that He is much more real and present in all I do when I understand that Heaven is now and Hell is now depending on our relationship with Jesus!

Lucien-Nahum Isaac: 12/6/13

Lucien participated in the first draft of “The Christian Life and Journey” one on one with Ron as the instructor in the fall of 2008, then shared it with a group of Berkeley ACF students in a small men’s group experience in the 2009 Winter/Spring semester. This first draft of Journey did not include the Five S’s
spiritual disciplines, nor, the My Journey section. It was mainly a bible study through the gospel of John. Lucien also participated in Journey during the ACF INSTITUTE campus ministry training during the summer of 2012, where small groups of approximately 10 shared the Journey experience as a morning bible study. Lucien laments not having completed either of these Journey studies and not having participated in the five S’s spiritual disciplines.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

Journey opened my eyes to the reality of God’s kingdom in our midst and the significance of that truth.

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

-During my interactions with Journey, I didn’t have the opportunity to explore the five S’s, so I was faithful in following them. There’s no question that Journey played an important role in my perspective of living the life in Christ. The challenge was not having a consistent environment/community with which I could work out and live out the truths in Journey.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

-The impact of Journey is more clearly evident in my mind and thought process. It has been instrumental in shaping my worldview.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group study. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

-In a large group setting during an event (weekend training, etc.), Journey
doesn’t reach its full potential. Journey provides provocative food for thought in the moment but the lasting impact may be compromised because there’s isn’t a context that facilitates a continuous “journey” in that direction. The benefits are clearer to me in a small group setting. When there is a clear agreement to walk together, to study together, to submit to one another, then there is a forward motion and growth above and beyond a new approach to seeing God and what He’s doing the world.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

-In my everyday life, seeking first the kingdom of God looks like asking God to grant me a God-conscious/God-awareness all day along. I want to be paying attention to and obeying what Holy Spirit is telling me to do and say in every interaction and circumstance. And as the phrase, I have a greater desire to be actively engaged in "seeking", not just benefiting from or thinking about the Kingdom, but actually making and giving Jesus the pre-imminent place in my life that only He is worthy of.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

-Journey has a great potential to serve college students in their life in Jesus. Because of the nature of the material (theology that isn’t common to the context of most Adventists), the teacher’s guide has to be tailored in a way that the leader of the study is able to facilitate fully immersed in an understanding of the foundations of Journey.

Anthony Rodriguez: 12/10/13

Anthony was an undergraduate history major and currently studying law at Hastings in San Francisco. Anthony completed Journey on two occasions. First with ACF in his sophomore year – 2009-10 with a small men’s group study conducted by his campus minister. He participated again in a committed closed group of eight people not including the instructor in winter/spring of 2012.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?
- Approaching the story of Jesus from a book study instead of proof text study was really helpful. Journey takes the gospel and makes it much more relevant to real life. In the first time through Journey – it was really earth shattering to realize that Jesus message was the KOG and his emphasis was the KOG has already begun!

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S's - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S's for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S's for encountering God in Journey?

-Some of the five S's occurred along with the study. I was familiar with the first 3, but was not so committed to journaling. My sharing took place with roommates and back with our group. Made reference with some of the thoughts I was having from the study with my friend Dixon. The more powerful the idea or concept – the more likely I was in sharing with others. It was more of an automatic response. The connection between seal and share was very important. Not cool to talk about Bible verses, but it is cool to reflect on significant thoughts and ideas. If a college student can be impacted by scripture in such a way that he wants to talk about it with friends then it has made a significant impact on his life. Journey had that affect on me.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

-It would have been easy for my spiritual life to become stagnant – even though being involved in ACF it could still be stagnant. But Journey made me think at a whole new level and gave me pause to think about my faith in a real practical way. Journey challenged me to reconsider Jesus and my faith on more of a college level. It challenges students to real wrestle with who Jesus is. Journey was made for a person like me since it was challenging me with the mission of Jesus as a student.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

-Both of my experiences were a small group context. The first time was a bit more impactful since it was an even smaller group experience. The core will always be a small group experience.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

-When you realize that the KOG is now – that is an earth-shattering concept. If
the KOG is now then there is a pressing urgency to be a part of it. It makes our spiritual life relevant to every day life. Increased knowledge from law school can make you even more cynical because you can give up hope. But knowing the present reality of the KOG continues to give hope and shapes a new perspective on everything. Knowledge without hope breeds cynicism. Journey helps bridge the gap between knowledge and hope. College can sour us on religion or make us cynical – but something like Journey can help us be an even stronger Christian.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

-Yes and I think it is completely necessary for building college faith or at least something like it.

Elissa Morris: 12/10/13

Elissa is a Doctoral student in Chemical Engineering at Texas A & M University, College Station, TX. Elissa was the student leader of her ACF group at Texas A & M at the time in the fall of 2012. Her group was just getting started and they were looking for their ACF group that met on Friday evenings. I agreed to meet with Elissa on the phone each week and go over the Journey study with her since the leaders guide had not yet been written. Elissa then in turn shared it with her ACF group.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

-When we were going through Journey – it really presents Jesus in a way I have never thought of before. Jesus is personal and so cool, available and relevant. People wanted to hang out with Jesus. Someone I never really knew before.

In terms of Jesus mission – I saw that Jesus is much more than an example. I learned about the KOG – something I never knew. It really taught me what Jesus mission was all about. I can actually say that I did not know about the mission of Jesus as I have learned about it in Journey.

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S's - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S's for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S's for encountering God in Journey?

-Did not refer to the five S’s like we should. I wish we would have done more with them. I did the seek, soak and seal for myself. I found myself doing these, but we did not do much with them in our group. I wish we had. I can truly see the difference these disciplines would make in the study and in encountering God.
3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

- The Good Shepherd study was the one that made the most important impact on my life. To see how God is pursuing us was powerful! Jesus is pursuing me! I am not pursuing him – He is pursuing me. He knows me better than I even know myself. Even though He knows all about me, with all my flaws – He still loves me. My strongest realization was how deeply loved by God I am. I had never felt it like this before. Jesus is definitely my very best friend! It made our relationship real. Journey brought Jesus to life for me.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

- Started out in small group context, but wound up doing it all together. People did talk when in a small group where sometimes in a larger group only a few ran the discussion. In the large group setting – a few dominate the conversation. Those not talking zone out. Much better as a small group experience.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

- I have wasted so much time! I want to be involved in the mission of Jesus now. I want to share the mission and message of Jesus. I see now that we have been doing it all wrong. We need to introduce people to the person of Christ. Journey taught me how to go about the mission of Jesus. It has literally changed everything. I am really looking forward to next semester and doing more with our ACF group and with others.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

- Yes – definitely, because it presents Jesus in a totally new way. I feel like I have learned about Jesus and have been incorporated into his mission. It makes Jesus even more appealing. Jesus wants to be with us and make a difference through our lives in the world all around us. That’s what he did when he was here and what he still wants to do.

Lynn Savedra: 12/12/13
Lynn is a retired nursing instructor at UC San Francisco and has served as the faculty advisor for our ACF group at UC Berkeley. Lynn participated in Journey in a committed group at her home, Winter/Spring 2012. She also went through Journey in a one to one study with a searching Christian friend in the fall of 2011.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

-Jesus came to meet the needs of people – showing us more about God and to meet peoples needs. Saw more how important a study like this in the life of students. The committed group did not give pat answers. They shared in an honest and open way. Also showed the importance of a church family in the life of a student.

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

-Did not follow the five S’s at all. Lynn’s participation was not so much for her own personal growth, but mainly as a host for others.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

-Moved me into more a personal application of how to share the KOG with other people. Journey is more of a distillation of the emphasis Lynn has heard while Ron has been the pastor at Berkeley SDA. She can see more of the impact Journey has made on students.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

-Only had the small group experience and a single person going through on her own. Small group experience was much better than one on one.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG on campus?

-Small things like starting my day asking what can I do to make an impact for the KOG today. It’s the focus on caring for people around me since God is present in every day life.
6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

-Definitely. Helps students come to their own experience. It is a step in developing their own relationship with Christ – their own journey.

Margret Lumban-Gaol: 12/15/13

Participated in Journey in a closed committed small group Winter/Spring 2012 semester

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

-I only remember two of the lessons – lesson one on ‘Come and See’ and the one about Jesus conversation with Nicodemus. But the main thing that popped out at me is that heaven is now. This was a very new concept for me, especially growing up as an Adventist where there was so much of an emphasis on the second coming of Jesus. Heaven for me was always a long way off. This was important to me as a college student – especially as I think of being a student at UC Berkeley with so much emphasis here on student activism and wanting to make changes now and for my faith to make a real difference. Students can get jaded with heaven in the future – especially when you wonder if heaven even exists. A future goal is not convincing enough to be a Christian. Being a Christian can seem very selfish if the only reason to be involved is to escape the fires of hell. The KOG now has made being a Christian a much more relevant truth – much more alive and active. A future heaven seems kind of boring and only for the distant future.

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

-I didn’t really follow these. I do see the importance of incorporating them and if I were to go through Journey again I would work harder at paying attention to them. I would suggest including some kind of intentional part of Journey that might include a report or sharing our journal entries with the rest of the group at the beginning of each study, which would emphasize the importance and place of the five S’s.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?
4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

-SS is more of a bible study experience and always changing with new people entering and leaving. Experiencing journey in a committed/consistant group is a much better context for learning and experiencing God together. It was great meeting with the same people each week and sharing in the same new concepts together.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG in your life?

-Not sure I know how to answer that question right now as I don't feel that I am seeking the KOG like I feel I should be. Maybe I could have answered it better when I was in college, but I feel like I am working this out in life after college. Being in a part time teaching position kind of makes me feel a bit disconnected. Maybe when I transition into a more permanent position, I will give this more consideration. I also don't really know what it means to seek the KOG. I am still working this out in my own life.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

-I would like it to be more college relevant. The thing that was most important to me was the KOG is now and this was relevant for college life. For instance the lesson on being cared for by God as the Good Shepherd has become more important to me after college than it was during college. I felt cared for in college and the message of God’s shepherding care was not as important to me then as it is now. Any way to make it more relevant or to use examples with the kind of issues that students are wrestling with would be better. I remember the story of purchasing property or buying a car in ‘Kingdom Transactions’ – most of us could not relate because we had not done either of those things. It would be good to keep the context of college life in mind.

Ben Cha: 12/17/13

Ben is currently undergrad biology major at Glendale Community College and participated in Journey on two occasions. First, as a freshman with a small men's group bible study in the Spring of 2009 with five other guy's. This was more of a bible study on the main passages in Journey. It was the first draft of Journey and
at that time it was “The Christian Life and Journey”. At this time there were no five S’s (spiritual disciplines) connected with it and no ‘My Journey” section. The second time he participated in Journey was during his junior year – Fall of 2011 with a committed/consistent UC Berkeley group that met in a home once a week.

1). What did Journey teach you about the mission and message of Jesus?

-My last time in Journey was two years ago so can’t remember much of the individual lessons. The main thing was the message that the KOG is already here and the relevance of the Christian life for the here and now. The KOG was something I was familiar with since Jesus talked about the KOG in his parables. But Journey helped me connect with this message of Jesus in a more practical way. Especially, the video clips that helped drive home the point. These helped make the message even more applicable.

2). Spiritual disciplines are important in faith development. Journey includes the five S’s - seek, soak, seal, script, share. How helpful were the five S’s for your own faith development and how faithful were you in following them? How important were the five S’s for encountering God in Journey?

-I didn’t at first remember the five S’s until I saw these questions, but I did remember them and I really appreciate that you introduced these to us. The ones I was able to incorporate were seek, script and share. Soak and seal were more unfamiliar to me. Now I understand especially soaking in God’s word to me. Through these disciplines that is where people really encounter God. I would suggest that we spend more time in the first study introducing the Five S’s so people can get more familiar with these disciplines.

3). What kind of impact has Journey made on your spiritual life?

-Difficult to say what specific impact, since we are talking about two years ago. The biggest impact has been seeing the KOG as a present reality. Now I see the integration of my spiritual life with all of life. It helped me to strive for more in my everyday life. I think it has helped me expect more from my spiritual development. Without this understanding I would just be expecting to get through life and not embracing the mission of God with my life. I now see the mission of Jesus and see my responsibility and involved in something larger and greater in the mission of God.

4). Journey can be used as both large and small group studies. If you experienced Journey as a large group, please share the benefits in a large group setting. If you experienced Journey as a small group study, please share the benefits of a small group experience.

- Both times were a small group setting. I really appreciated it as an intimate
group together. We shared our journey with God together. I hardly remember anything from the first group in the guys study. There we talked more about us in the group and shared about life. In the later group, I feel I got a lot more out of the bible teaching part of it.

5). If seeking first the KOG is the most important statement from Jesus in Journey – what does it mean to you now to seek first the KOG in your life?

- Seeking first the KOG is taking on a new identity as a citizen of God’s Kingdom now. For me now it is asking what is the best way to minister and serve the mission of God in all that I do.

6). Would you recommend Journey as a resource for college spirituality and why?

- Most definitely! Especially as students just entering into college since its not just about college. Students are forming a new identity. Journey starts off this new identity in a whole new approach with God. Opening our eyes to this larger view of God and the connection with our every day life – this is so important to introduce students to this right away as they begin their college life. It will help them for their own personal faith development. It will also help them see the mission of God on campus.


Main, B. (2002). If Jesus were a sophomore: Discipleship for college students. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.


VITA

Name: Ronald R. Pickell

Date of Birth: November 7, 1956

Place of Birth: Greeneville, MI

Married: December 18, 1977


Education:

2014 Doctor of Ministry, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

1981–1983 Master of Divinity, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

1975–1980 Bachelor of Arts in Theology, Southern Adventist University, Colledale, Tennessee

Ordination:

1985 Ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist Gospel Ministry

Experience:

2008-2013 Senior Pastor, Alameda SDA

2005-Present ACF/NAD Public Campus Volunteer Ministry Coordinator

2001–Present Senior Pastor, Berkeley SDA Church; Campus Minister, UC Berkeley, CA

1985-2001 Advent House Director, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1985-2002- Associate Pastor Knoxville, Adventist Church; 2002-2001- Georgia Cumberland Conference Campus Ministry Coordinator

1983-1985 District Pastor, Elizabethtown and Whiteville SDA churches

1980-1981 Youth Pastor, Myrtle Beach, SC and Burlington, NC churches