

BEING AGENTS OF GOD'S KINGDOM



PA CAMP V8
boys.brigadeaustralia.org

Contents

1 New identities in the Kingdom	3
2 Spreading the Kingdom	7
3 Cleansing the Kingdom	11
4 Expanding the Kingdom	15
5 Committing to the Kingdom	19
6 Cost of the Kingdom.....	23
7 Close to the Kingdom	27
8 Denying the Kingdom	31
9 Confirming the Kingdom	35



Email: achua@brigadeaustralia.org

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All graphics by Andrew Chua except for The Last Supper by Bernard Buffet on page 2.

Movies referenced

Harry Potter & the Philosopher's Stone (2001). Warner Brothers. Rated: PG.
Ice Age (2002). 20th Century Fox. Rated: PG.
James Bond - Die another Day (2002). Eon Productions. Rated: M.
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DANGER

What you are about to discover will put your life in danger. People have been killed and have killed because of it. It has divided families, completely overturned economies and toppled governments. When you understand fully what it is about, your life and how you see the world will never be the same again.

Throughout history countless attempts have been made to ban it, destroy it, and yet it continues to exist. So those against it took a different strategy, and promoted the ideas but changed the focus a little to make it sound 'nice': good teaching that will make you a nice bloke, someone everybody likes and looks up to, someone successful and most importantly, someone 'safe'.

The truth about God and Jesus is not safe.

Take it seriously and you will face danger, opposition, and risks that can threaten your life and life as you know it. Jesus and almost every one of his closest mates were killed because of it. There are still people who take Jesus seriously today being killed every day all around the world.

God, through the Bible, spoke of a different way of life, a better way that looked after everyone, great news for every single individual around the world.

Jesus described it as a new 'Kingdom', his later followers used the term a new 'way', or maybe today we might call it a new 'reality'. This new Kingdom was for everyone, whether they believed in one God or many or none at all. It was for everyone no matter where they live, come from or what they were about. But a new 'Kingdom' or a new 'reality' is a threat, especially to those with power in the existing Kingdom, or anyone who likes the way things are right now.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to **become an agent**, an operative, even a conspirator to make **God's kingdom** the only reality, and **to be active right now**, no matter what age you are, or what abilities you think you do or do not have. Start your engines, buckle up, cause where you're going, there's no return ticket.



jesus' life according to mark

this week you will explore with others some stories about the life of Jesus written by Mark (probably the first recorded stalker in history, and was described, at one stage by one of the big church leaders, as being unreliable and too interested in other things in life than God). Mark's account of Jesus' life was the first written down of all recognised biographies on Jesus. As Mark spent a fair amount of time with Peter, one of Jesus' closest mates, we can be sure that it's pretty true to what happened - so true, that Pete comes across as an idiot a few times! Mark was absolutely convinced that Jesus is the son of God, and his stories provided all the evidence to back that up. But that wasn't his main focus... the more important thing was the "Kingdom of God" and our role in making it real.

There are many ways to make sure you take in what the Bible is saying. "Lectio divina" was one method proposed in 220 AD. A modern-day variation is called "SOAP". This can be done with others (which was how most Christians in history worked through the Bible) or by yourself.

Scripture - Read and re-read the passage in context a few times. Don't rush it.

Observation - What do you notice about the passage? Think about the original speaker, the listeners and the circumstances going on.

Application - What did it mean for them? What does it mean for me?

Prayer - What do I need from God in order to live out what it means? Who do I need to think of also?

Although we generally think of the stuff in the Bible as printed books today, that's not how people originally got this knowledge. They were passed on between people through conversations and questions, and through poetry and singing (sometimes with accompanying loud music). Emotions were stirred, and thoughts about the world and themselves were shaped and reshaped. Lifestyles and behaviours were radically improved. Lives were restarted, reformatted and "converted" into a whole new way of understanding what life was about and for. It was about God and from God - but not written so much to tell us objectively about something away from us, but about **how God personally affects and relates to our world, to us and those around us, and the exciting possibilities for how we should think, feel and act in our lives with those around us.**

When you read the Bible, or the words and ideas about God and from God, try to imagine the original tellers or speakers - their emotions on their faces and the actions of their hands and bodies - and how often they risked their very lives just to pass on this information to others.

Also imagine the original hearers, some initially sceptical of someone claiming to say 'God' was speaking through them, the stuff they had to deal with in their lives, the change in their moods and thinking as they heard magical and mysterious ideas about how life could be and should be different. Even by people who don't believe in one God or gods, the Bible has always been recognised as containing great wisdom and mystery.

These ideas are not meant to just be 'school learned facts' - stuff to be regurgitated for tests or trivia quizzes. These ideas are meant to be thought about for a while, like life-changing events, tough obstacles faced in virtual or real life, or "deep and meaning" chats at night.

Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?

Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'?

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." He said to the paralytic, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

New identities in the Kingdom

Why on earth would Jesus look at a man who cannot walk and say to him "Son, your sins are forgiven."? With Jesus' reputation for healing, everyone (including the man) expected Jesus to touch his back and make him well. Instead, Jesus talks about sin and forgiveness. Huh?

The reaction of the community leaders shows they know something else is going on - a "kingdom of God" moment!

In those times, there were clear rules about who were 'in' and who were 'out' - who were the celebrities and who were the outcasts. Even today, the thought "If you have something wrong - you (or your parents) probably did something to deserve it" is part of every culture in the world. The laws of the society the paralytic was in, not only made people look down on him, but also claimed that he wasn't worthy enough to get close to God either.

To have your sins forgiven, is to mean there is nothing separating you from God and others. To be clean means to be exactly what God created you to be.

By declaring this man free of sin, Jesus has overruled the laws that stopped him from having full access to the community and to God. Jesus wiped away a whole lifetime of exclusion and rejection and, for the first time, welcomed him as an equal. Where others thought he was a mistake and unworthy, Jesus said "You are created in God's image and I love you as you are."

*The healing miracle is important, but **the whole story is about the 'forgiveness of sins'**. It tells us that when the kingdom of God breaks into our world everything and everyone that excludes, cheapens, or lessens us as people created in the image of God, is totally wiped out.*

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out? - maybe about the setting, crowd, Jesus, forgiveness):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you? - maybe the society's rules, the paralytic's friends, Jesus' actions or words, the crowd's response):

Describe our culture's idea of perfection (you may wish to draw this on a big sheet of paper).

In our culture, our disabilities, shortcomings and imperfections has a similar effect on making us 'unclean' and unfit for society. We hear constantly that we are too fat, too thin, too many pimples, too ugly, too dumb – whatever. Like the paralytic, we think the best thing for us is to 'fix' whatever is 'wrong' with us.

How does the image of perfection from our culture make you feel about your own body or appearance? How do you match up to this image?

What does Jesus see when he sees you?

I grew up with a friend who had downs-syndrome. He looked different and could not do many things that most other kids could. I was quite mean to him when I was younger until in grade 6 God convicted me of this and I decided to be his friend. We spent a lot of time together and we were eventually baptised on the same day. When he was being baptised I prayed that he would be healed.

I really believed that God was doing something and was quite disappointed when he came out of the water exactly as he had gone in.

It was several years later when I realised that a miracle had actually occurred that day. My friend had not needed to be healed.

God had made him who he was for a reason, and loved him just the way he was.

I had been judging him according to the standards of perfection that the world had given me. A miracle had occurred that day. I was given a new set of eyes.

Now I could see my friend the way that God saw him. Praise be to God! My friend became one of the most influential people in my life and I have been freed from judging people according to how they look.

media reflection > **Harry Potter 1**

In the story "Harry Potter & the Philosopher's Stone" for ten years, the orphan Harry lived in a cupboard under the stairs, bullied and neglected by his uncle, aunty and cousin. He had no friends, people laughed at him at school, he was constantly being punished for things out of his control and he didn't think there was anything special about him at all. Then on his eleventh birthday a visitor tells him: "Harry - yer a wizard."

After getting over the initial disbelief, how do you think that new knowledge changed how Harry thought about himself? Did he change physically when he found this out?

Application: *In a similar way, Jesus changed how the person saw himself initially by forgiving his sins.*

How should we treat people who don't live up to our idea of perfection?

Prayer: Help us to truly see each person around us as you see them. Help me to look past their imperfections, their problems and to see someone worthy of being a friend. The Kingdom of God "is good news for anyone who is judged by others as being unworthy".

AU



personal reflection

Application: *To be a follower of Jesus is to be like Jesus in how we live every day and in all the things we do and how we interact with others. What difference does it make to how you think of yourself if you believe truly that you are completely clean in his sight and able to serve as an agent in Kingdom with no faults or weaknesses?*

Think of a friend (or someone you know) who needs to be made clean in the eyes of others and God. What would it mean for you to 'dig a hole in the roof for a friend'?

Prayer: *Creator God we lay ourselves at your feet and ask you to heal us (pause for a minute to listen to anything that God brings to mind). Heal us from anything that is stopping us from living life to the full. Help me to see myself with your eyes and to stop judging myself according to the standards of the world. Help me to see others with your eyes too. Let me see all people as created in your image and loved by you. Amen.*

Au



Andy's 5 actions for the day



Get to know 5 basic facts of one person you normally wouldn't talk to or approach.



Everytime you see your reflection say to yourself "I am created in the image of God. God loves me as I am."



Eat only healthy food and drinks today.



Laugh out loud whenever you see unrealistic images of people in magazines or on TV, or any other advertising.



Wear something dagggy to dinner tonight to show that you and others shouldn't care what you dress like

Spreading the Kingdom

Mark 4:1-20

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.

He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.

He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, "they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"

Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?"

The farmer sows the word.

Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them.

Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy.

But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop — thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."

Jesus loved to tell stories to pass on ideas. A lot of the stories were about tangible practical things that everyone could see in life. Although he doesn't always explain his parables (stories with hidden meanings), this is one of the very few that he does.

Anyone who has tried to grow things, will notice at the end of the story something truly incredible... the seeds planted produces a lot more plants than you would expect from the amount of seeds planted. It is as if you bought a packet of chips and emptied it out and it seems like it takes up at least a hundred chip packets worth!

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

Jesus encourages his followers, or agents, to think of themselves as seed. When we accept God's teachings and in the right circumstances, not only does growth happen, unbelievable results occur in regards to God's Kingdom. When we are good soil, we can't help but bear good fruit. Unfortunately this parable suggests that not everyone who hears what God is about will be good soil and fully embrace it. It's not our responsibility to 'convert' people, what people do with that message is up to them.

What is the 'fruit' produced by 'good soil' of God's Kingdom?

What is your experience of sharing your faith and the good news of God's kingdom with others?

In the year 2000 I wrote an article for The Age newspaper. It was my response, as a Christian, to a writer who had rejected the church. My basic argument was that,

just because Christians have done some really stupid things, you don't need to write off the whole church.

It drew a good response, most of it really positive.

Emboldened by my first effort, I wrote another article about a year later, this time in response to a person complaining about the influence of Christians in public life. The writer felt that atheists and agnostics were not getting a fair run and I responded with a critique of atheism. This time the reaction was not so positive. Two days after my article was published the whole letters section was dedicated to me – and it was all negative. I had really caused a stir in the atheist world! To be quite honest, I was quite shaken up by this and it took me some time to get over the negative reaction I had caused.

As I look back, however, I realise that my opinions have not changed a bit. What I wrote was well thought out and appropriate. The reactions of others are completely out of my control. I no longer expect to get a good reaction to everything I say or write about God.

'Sowing in hard soil' is very difficult, and any gardener will tell you change needs to happen before any new planting can be attempted.

media reflection > Ice Age

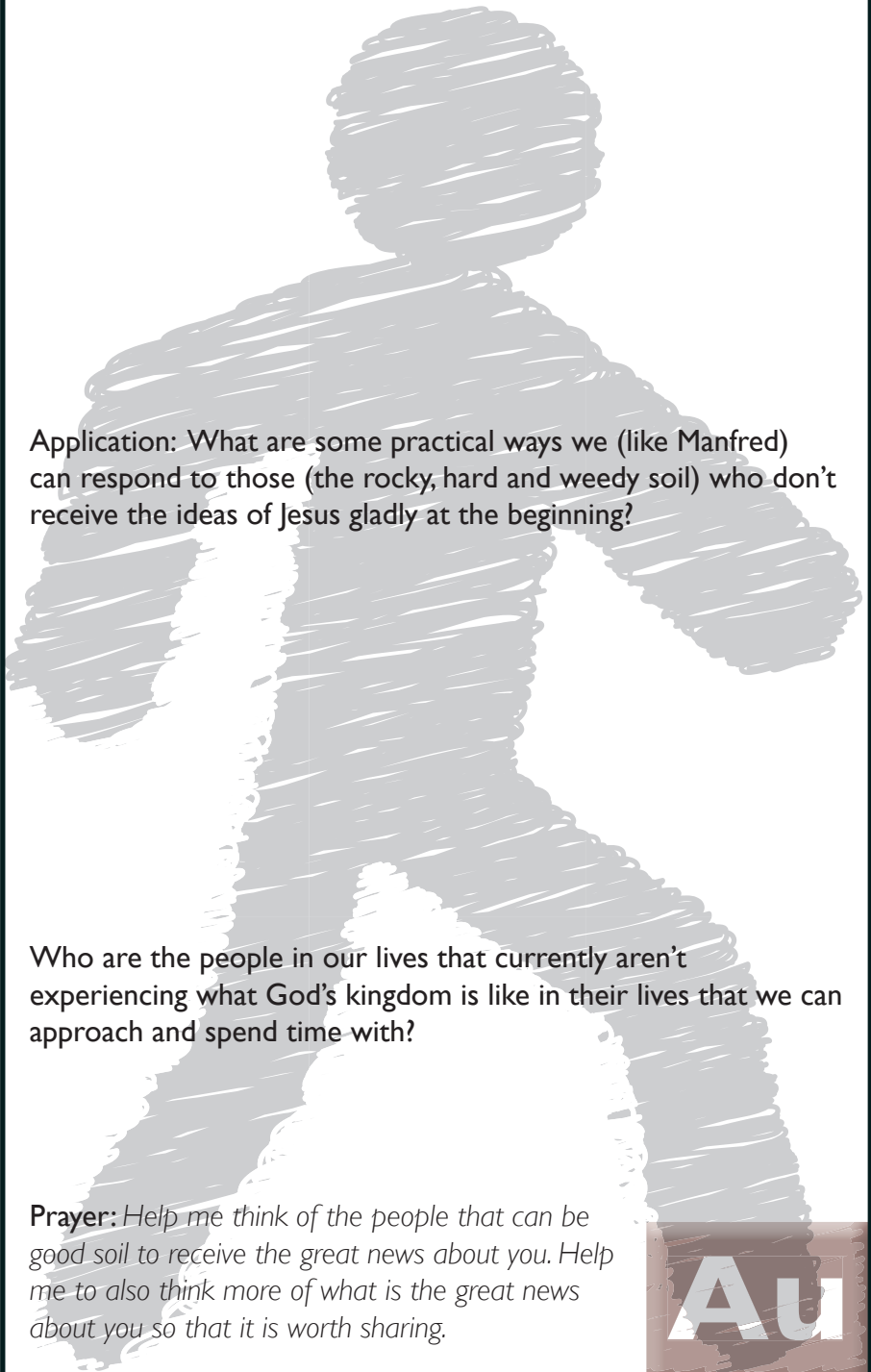
When Diego first appears, he is a sabre tooth tiger who wants revenge on a group of humans that wiped out half his pack. Although initially skeptical, Manfred the mammoth allows Diego to help Sid and him return a lost human baby. Despite the fact that humans killed his wife and son, Manfred is committed to making sure the human is returned. After spending some time with the two, including having Manfred save his life, gradually Diego's attitudes and heart changes to be more like Manfred's. In the same way, Jesus can take the thorniest, rockiest, hardest ground and turn it into good soil if we are willing to spend more time with him, open our heart and let him change us.

How did Manfred help Diego change?

Application: What are some practical ways we (like Manfred) can respond to those (the rocky, hard and weedy soil) who don't receive the ideas of Jesus gladly at the beginning?

Who are the people in our lives that currently aren't experiencing what God's kingdom is like in their lives that we can approach and spend time with?

Prayer: Help me think of the people that can be good soil to receive the great news about you. Help me to also think more of what is the great news about you so that it is worth sharing.



AU



personal reflection

Application:

The Path - Draw or name some of the 'birds' (people or ideas that would come and steal your faith away)



The rocky ground - Draw or name some of the 'sun's rays' (trials and difficulties in life that would put the heat on your faith)

The weeds - Draw or name some of the weeds (activities, people and events that might distract you from your faith)

The good soil - Draw or name some of the worms (things that help you to be good soil)

Prayer: Please protect us from the negative things above and help us live out the positives, as I can only do it with your strength.

Au

Andy's 5 actions for the day



Tell someone about a movie or an experience you enjoyed and you think they will too - just to practice sharing good news!



Ask a leader to explain what the good news of Jesus actually is to someone who doesn't go to church.



Ask 5 people about good books they have read and take note of any interesting books for yourself.



Give a dollar away to charity today. Money has spiritual power and can distract us from God. Giving it away takes away its power.



Tell someone that you will pray for them, and do it. Those who are 'good soil' will appreciate it, and it will drive the others nuts!

Cleansing the Kingdom

Mark 5:1-20

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!"

For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them."

He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened.

When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man — and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

As God's agents in the world, we have been entrusted with the authority to cast out demons. It's our job to name them and cast them out into the pigs for their utter destruction.

Our culture is not generally familiar or comfortable with talk of 'demons' or 'evil powers' - though there are many cultures around the world (and in Australia) that see the spirit world as very real. When we think of demons today we often think of little red men with pitch-forks and horns. Unfortunately this kind of imagery can distract us from the spiritual realities that confront and torment so many people and communities. Demonic power is at work in our world; people are possessed by such power and the dangers are real.

The wonderful, liberating news of this Kingdom story of Jesus however, is that Jesus has the final authority over all spiritual powers. By the power of Jesus in us, we too are able to name and cast out these demons.

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

What do you think of when you hear talk of 'demons' and 'possession'?

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Naming demons

The man who was demon-possessed had real power - he was 'too strong for anyone to control him'. But Jesus confronted him directly and commanded the evil spirits to come out of him. The man seemed to be both drawn to Jesus and wary of him. "Swear to God that you won't torture me", he cried. And Jesus asked him "What is your name?"

The first step in conquering demons is to name them. Alcoholics Anonymous, an organisation that has enabled millions of people to overcome the curse of alcoholism, has recognised that until people are able to name themselves as alcoholics they are unable to do anything about the problem. It's the same with any other demon. Whilst they remain un-named, un-identified, un-acknowledged they are free to wreak havoc. Once they are named we are able to stand back, look intelligently at them, and find a way to overcome them.

Spiritual powers are named in a number of ways, including:

As addictions: alcohol, drugs, gambling, sex

As 'isms': hedonism, consumerism, nihilism, fundamentalism

As 'sins': anger, greed, hatred, lust, jealousy, murder etc.

As 'movements': religious, social or 'for a cause'

Or they may have more specific, personal names.

Whatever the case, until we name them for ourselves we have no authority to 'cast them out'.

Jimmy was a great friend. He had a warm personality and was liked by just about everyone. Musically gifted, he would raise the roof with his trumpet playing in church. He would go out of his way to help people. But Jimmy had one problem – he was addicted to drugs. I can only describe this as a spiritual power, because when he fell into his addictive life, he changed completely. Over several years he stole his father's life-savings, he rejected his friends, he neglected his health and, eventually, he took an overdose and was dead at thirty five. Whatever the reason, we did not have the authority to cast out this demon of addiction. Every time Jimmy seemed to be released from it he would bump into someone who had drugs available and he would fall straight back in.

It seems that many demons, including the one that killed Jimmy, are not just personal, but they infest whole communities. We need agents of God's kingdom who will stand up to these demons too.



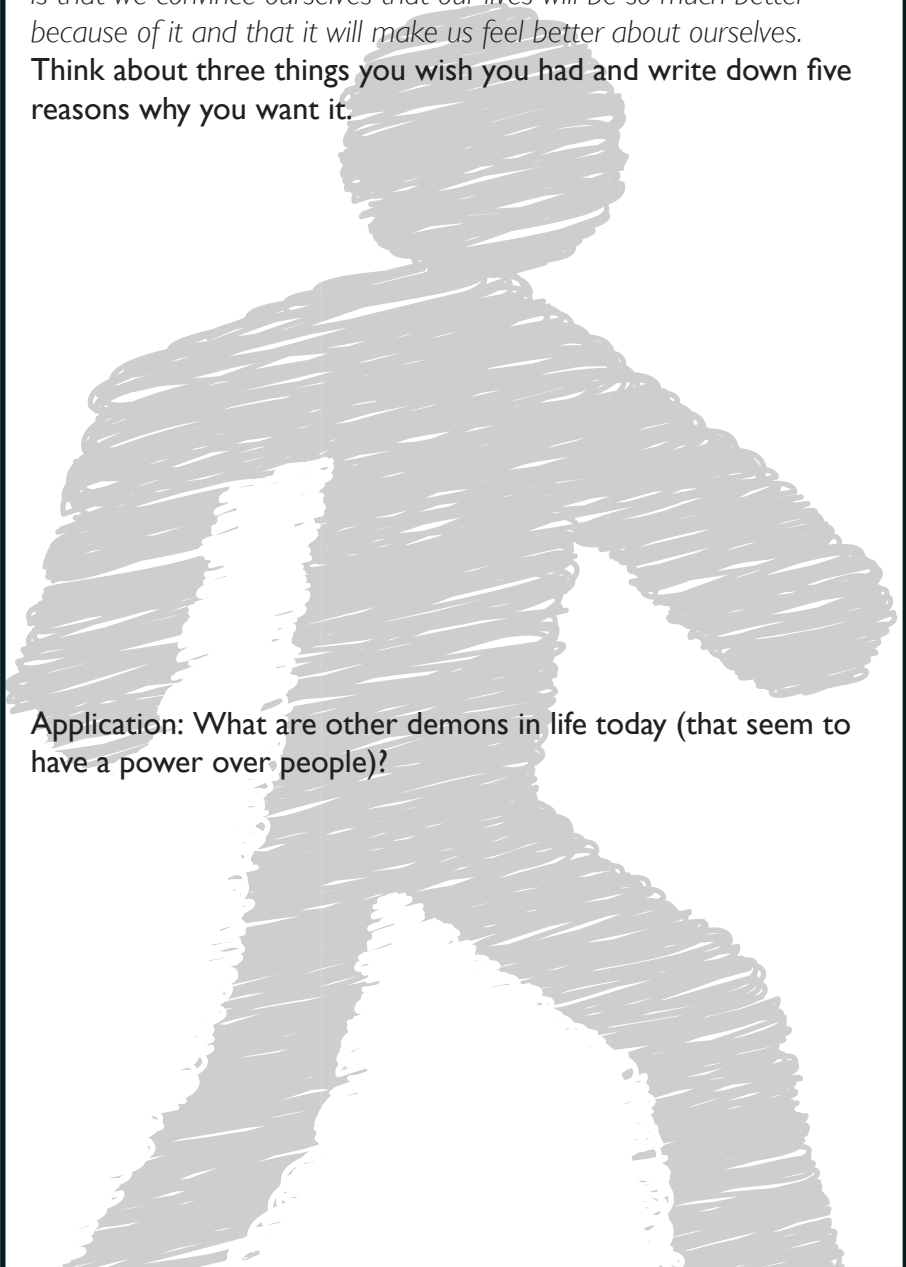
media reflection > Advertising



In 2006, big brands spent \$3.07 billion collectively on paid placements in movies, television, radio and video games. The record holder is the James Bond film 'Die Another Day' which has been described as one long advert - for vodka, watches and cars. Twenty companies paid a total of \$70m to have their products strategically used in the film. Either this form of advertising works, or these companies are really dumb! Simply naming this power can have a liberating effect. Once you name it, you'll be amazed at how often you notice the strategic can of beer, mobile phone or computer.

It is not evil or wrong to want things, but we need to think about why we want what we want. Often a large reason for wanting some stuff is that we convince ourselves that our lives will be so much better because of it and that it will make us feel better about ourselves.

Think about three things you wish you had and write down five reasons why you want it.



Application: What are other demons in life today (that seem to have a power over people)?

Prayer: Help me recognise the negative things in life that prevent me from seeing myself for who I am in you and distract me from being more like you in the world as your agent.

AU



personal reflection

Once the demons were named, they begged Jesus “not to send them out of the area”. Anyone who has seen or experience addiction will understand this cry. We don’t want to be held captive by the addictive material... but neither do we want to have it completely removed from us! We like to think we can have it there **and** keep it under **our** control. A cigarette in the top drawer ‘just in case’; pornography hidden in the shed ‘where it won’t do any harm’; hatred buried in our hearts ‘not that I am going to do anything about it’. But this is nowhere near good enough for Jesus. The demons seem to have an ‘out’ when Jesus gives them permission to go into the pigs (the dirtiest place the people could imagine – I mean, who would go near them if it meant hanging around with pigs?). But they don’t last long as the pigs charge into the lake and are drowned. The spiritual power is completely and utterly destroyed by Jesus. There is no other way.

Application: What are the negative things that you find hard to stay away from?

What can we do practically to destroy or stay away from spiritual powers (addictive substances, excess advertising, gambling opportunities, sexual temptation, or real demons)?

Prayer: *Ephesians 6, in describing the armour of God tells us to “take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Pray for God to arm you with this shield.*

Au



Andy's 5 actions for the day



Spend five minutes in silence and ‘name the powers’ that influence you negatively. Write them down and invite Jesus to take authority over them.



Wear something without labels (or turn your clothing inside out if the label is on the outside) for the whole day (or if you’re more adventurous – cut off or cover any labels or logos on your clothes).



Decide on a week where you will watch no television, and make sure you put it in your school planner.



Read Ephesians 6: 10-18 (the armour of God)



Next time you watch a film, count the number of product placements (or recognisable brands) in the film.

Expanding the Kingdom

Mark 7:24-30

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

“First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”

She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

A central idea in Jewish religion was that the Jews were God’s chosen people; that is, out of all the other nations, the Jews would be the main focus of God’s love. People who were not Jews were regarded as undeserving of God’s love, and not even worthy to be in God’s presence. This non-Jewish woman appears to argue with Jesus as to why God should care about her daughter.

As all the disciples were Jews, what do you think the disciples were feeling and thinking hearing this conversation between Jesus and this non-Jewish woman?



Marlin (Nemo's dad) has generally tried to keep to himself for most of his life, hanging around largely with people just like himself. But when Nemo is kidnapped and taken away, Marlin finds the only way to save his son is to get help from a lot of creatures that he would never have wanted to deal with or expect to get help from. Not only does he get the help he needs but he makes a lot of new friends that helps him also see the world is much bigger than he ever imagined.

Application: Why didn't Marlin want to interact with creatures he never even met?

At the start of the film Marlin was constantly worried about the dangers in the world. What did he think about the world at the end?

God is not just interested in making people in our town/city feel good about themselves, but is more interested in all of humanity - across the world. Apart from white Australian culture, what other cultures can you personally name and talk more than a minute about?

Prayer: "Help me to see the world as a bigger place and that there are so many different people out there that not only need your love, but can help me learn from them what you are about."

Au

Chris, has recently been challenged by the phrase 'Make poverty personal.' Hearing all his life at church that Jesus cares for the poor, the outcasts and the culturally different - he found it strange that practically all the urban churches he visited or got involved with were filled largely with white middle- to upper-class people.

A few years ago he got involved with a Christian Jewish church through a friend at uni and was an active youth leader there, despite not having any biological Jewish heritage. He really values their love and care for him, as well as the different ways they experience and grow in Jesus.

In addition, he recently got involved with helping in a Sunday School through another uni friend with another congregation for almost all African migrant kids living in housing commission flats. As he spends more time with them, the needs of the African families he has been in contact with become things that are also important to him, as the people become his friends and people that he feels responsible for.

Australia claims to be a multicultural country and encourages everyone to celebrate the different foods, music and other cultural arts of different groups. But it is **only when we**

get personally involved with the lives of people from different cultures or subcultures like Jesus does do we then really start to value others as brother and sisters in Christ and see and love them as God does.



personal reflection

When we think about all of Jesus' life on earth, we see he showed love and grace to everyone, no matter what their social standing, race, gender, background, etc. It is so easy to ignore or not get involved with people who are even a little different to us. However, when we spend more time with people seeing them as God sees them, surprisingly we often start to see God more in them, and also experience more of "Kingdom of God" for ourselves.

Application: Write down some categories of people that you don't personally have a friend in (eg Muslim, African, gay, special ed). Then think of how God sees each of those people, and write down how you can be more like Jesus with them.



Prayer: Our God in heaven, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank you that despite our ugliness, you love us. We saw that when your Son Jesus was on earth, He showed us how to love those who we tend not to love. May your Holy Spirit change our hearts to love each person as you love them. Amen.



Andy's 5 actions for the day

- Write a short note to 3 mates that says: 'I want to love all people as God loves me.'
- Choose a country that you think is poor and pray that the people there will find some food today.
- Learn how to say 'hello' in two other languages apart from English.
- Pray for a person you know from school/ work who you find hard to love and ask that God will help you love them.
- Introduce yourself to and invite someone outside your usual circle of friends to eat a meal with you and try and find something in common.

Personal reflections, notes & other thoughts

Mark **8:27-30**

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi.

On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "You are the Christ."

Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

Committing to the Kingdom

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

The Jews knew there was something wrong with their world. Although they lived in their own country, someone else with more power had control over their lives. So they were waiting for a powerful warrior king (the Messiah or Christ) who would fight and defeat the current authorities and save their country. This discussion shows there were many opinions about who Jesus was and what he was about. To name Jesus as 'the Christ' is to say you're committed to being a fellow freedom fighter - to no longer accept the world as it is.

How would you answer Jesus' question if he asked it to you?



A young peasant squire William Thatcher wants to enter the jousting competitions, which only men of noble birth can compete in. Posing as a foreign knight, and with the help of his friends he manages to do well in the competition but also consistently displayed great respect and honour to those around him and those he competed against. On the eve of the final round, he is exposed as a peasant and arrested. The Prince of Wales, who William had competed against, makes William a knight, as he already showed the qualities of a knight.

What qualities do you think a knight should have? Which of those qualities do you think William showed?

Application: To be a Christian is to be “little Christ” or “Christ-like”. In what ways can people look at you, your life and what is important to you and think only of Jesus?

Prayer: Help me to be more practical with my faith and actually serve people.

In today's society there is generally a huge gap between how people outside the church think of Jesus and what they think of Christians.

Jesus is always thought of as a good guy - loves everyone without any strings, doesn't care about money, totally honest & against rules & regulations.

Christians on the other hand are seen as hating certain types of people, obsessed with money, hypocrites, and all about rules. But we know there are Christians that live and love like Christ.

In 1999, 14 year old Hugh Evans went to the Philippines to see World Vision's work first hand. Hugh witnessed an entire community living around a garbage dump where children would scavenge food daily.

Easily treatable diseases (in Australia) were taking the lives of people daily. Five years later he established Australia's first youth-run and youth-driven aid and development agency, The Oak Tree Foundation, which currently has over 250 volunteers.

The Foundation assists with educating developing countries to improve living standards and raising funds for community projects; particularly through the Make Poverty History Campaign which The Oak Tree Foundation is a substantial supporter of.

Wouldn't it be great if everytime someone thought of a Christian they thought of someone just like Christ? Wouldn't it be fantastic everytime people thought about you they thought you're just like Jesus?

Au



personal reflection

If we're serious about who Jesus is, then we need to be committed to everything he was about.

Application: Write down some practical things that hold you back from being fully committed to being like Jesus in every single aspect of your life (eg school, home, work, BB).

Jesus warns his disciples not to tell people the truth about him. One way of looking at why he might have said this was when the followers of John the Baptist asked Jesus 'are you the Christ?', Jesus doesn't give him a yes or no answer, but instead points to the things that are going on to show the 'Kingdom of God' is now real - healings and freedoms, contentment to the poor and outcasts. As the song goes: "a little less conversation, a little more action."

What are more actions you can do to show you are serious about the things Jesus was serious about?

Prayer: Let my actions speak louder than words. Let it be absolutely clear that I am an agent for Christ.

Au



Andy's 5 actions for the day



At meals today, offer to serve someone - eg pour drinks for them, get their meal or dessert for them, or clean up after them.



Write an SMS to 3 mates that says: 'I want to be a servant that makes a difference in this world.'



Do something nice for someone in your cabin in a way that they will not find out it was you who did it.



Buy something today that you will give to your parents as a gift.



Pray for a person you know from school/ work who you can serve and put it into action.

Personal reflections, notes & other thoughts

Cost of the Kingdom

Mark 10:17-31

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him.

“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.”

Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

This rich young man felt that he was doing everything necessary to be a good follower of God. The cost of entering the Kingdom of God was not about achieving a right standing with God by the law, but it was about placing trust and faith in God in all things.

How would the rich young man have felt hearing this from Jesus?



The city is in danger and rather than fight against the man responsible for the threat, Peter Parker reasons with the scientist Octavia, repeating words that his Aunt said to him when he had given up wanting to make a difference on the world around him: "Sometimes to do what is right we have to be steady and give up the things we want the most - even our dreams."

In this case, dreams are the things that are really important to us and control what our life is about. What dreams might you have to let go of to be agents fully committed to achieving your mission for God?

Application: They say the most dangerous people to deal with are those with nothing to lose. Why do you think this is so?

List three risky things you want to do.

Prayer:

Help us to have only you as our source of security. Help us to be men who have nothing to lose. Help us to only be about the "Kingdom of God."

Au

I arranged to have lunch with two mates recently at restaurant in St Kilda called "Lentil as Anything".

The food was great, but the reason I wanted to go there was because each of these restaurants have a "no set prices" policy - where you pay whatever you think you should.

It opened in 2000 and now has 3 other restaurants in other locations in Melbourne. Shanaka Fernando, the 38-year founder, was awarded in 2007 the Australian of the Year "Australia's Local Hero" Award.

A lot of times I've shared with these two mates have to do with ensuring money or things do not become too important to us. We've shared so much of what we have with each other - not just because we trust each other, but because we want to make sure we don't hold on to any thing we have too much. Sometimes we've just given each other stuff because we knew the other needed it more than we did.

In one of the shared houses I lived in we had one requirement that all potential house mates had to agree to: they had to contribute to an open house party every month. Each month we would host a party where we would supply all the food and soft drinks, have a theme, and invite as many people as we could. No one would be turned away and no one was allowed to give us money or anything in return personally. This was important because we believed Jesus was into parties and that people were more important than the costs. If people insisted they wanted to give something, we encouraged they gave it to a local charity.



personal reflection

In our culture, it is almost impossible to imagine ourselves living without money. The biggest thing people associate with money is security - the reassurance that if you have enough money, you're going to be okay, no matter what happens. If we don't have enough money, people worry how will we cope? For other people, money isn't that important, they have something else that is their security - the thing that gives them assurance and hope.

Application: What gives you security in your life that you think you would struggle in life without?



They say the most dangerous people to deal with are those with nothing to lose. Why do you think this is so?

If you had absolutely no fear, write down 3 things you would do in your life right now to be more like Jesus:

Prayer:

Help us to have only you as our source of security. Help us to be men who have nothing to lose. Help us to only be about the "Kingdom of God."

Au

Andy's 5 actions for the day



Try to live today like you have nothing to lose or nothing to fear - if you get worried at any time - say to yourself "All things are possible".



Give away something of yours to someone who needs it (and no asking back later!)



Don't buy anything at all today for yourself.



Write a short note to 3 mates that says: 'I want to let go of the things in this world that make me feel secure, and find my true security in God.'



Pray for a person you know from school/ work who is finding life really challenging, that they will know about the security found in God.

Personal reflections, notes & other thoughts

Mark | 12:28-34

One of the teachers of the law came and heard [Jesus and other religious leaders] debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked [Jesus], “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Close to the Kingdom

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

It's sometimes easy to see Jesus as a peace-loving hippie as he talks quite a bit about love, and especially loving others. But whenever you find Jesus and religious leaders together, there's often a fair amount of conflict and Jesus ends up getting frustrated or insulting them. This is an unusual scene as Jesus not only ends up being impressed with a religious leader. Now Jesus compliments many people for their faith in what God can do, but this is the only time he personally says to an individual 'you are so close to the Kingdom.'

What do you think Jesus meant by the phrase “You are not far from the kingdom of God?”

Ag



The idea is to do something big for another person - something they can't do by themselves. After you've helped them, rather than get them to pay it back, tell them to pay it forward to three other people - that is do something big for three other people they can't do themselves. And again don't get them to pay it back, but to pay it forward.

What do you think of this idea? What would stop this idea from working?

In those times, people believed good God-followers had to give "burnt offerings and sacrifices," that is, to not only avoid evil stuff, but to give up on what some others thought were good.

What are some things these days a good God-follower are expected to do, or not do (that aren't necessarily evil or bad):

Replace the word "love" with the phrase "think about and do something for" so that you have "Think about God and do something for him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and think about and do something for others as much as you do that for yourself."

Application: Using "think about..." what are some new things you would do today (and soon):

Prayer: Help me think of others and do for others what I would want for myself.

Au

Love. Talk about love surrounds us constantly - in music, TV, movies, and the 'net. But most of the love we hear about is like getting dicked in the change-room or finding a rotten chip in your chip packet. Love seems to be something that happens to us, out of our control, it either finds us or it doesn't. And even when it finds us, it can just as easily fade away like waking up from a dream. My friend Jas has been married to Trace for 7 years. They wouldn't have it any other way but they say being married is hard work because they are such self-focussed individuals. She would rather stay curled up in bed reading or outside changing the world for the better by getting people to think more about the bad things that are happening. Jas would quite happily be riding his bike, or playing on his playstation. Their marriage works because they force themselves to think about the other person when they spend too much time thinking about themselves. And when they do something that they didn't want to, but know the other person would want them to, they end up sharing stuff that they look back on and laugh about.

"So much of our memorable times are when we did stuff one of us didn't want.

And the more we think of the other, the more we think and act like them."

Love for God is like that too.



personal reflection

Why was Jesus so impressed with this man's answer (another teacher who gave a similar answer got in trouble in Luke 10)?



Replace the word "love" with the phrase "think about and do something for" so that you have "Think about God and do something for him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and think about and do something for others as much as you do that for yourself."

Application: Using "think about..." what are some new things you would do today (and soon):



When you really love someone or something, you usually find it hard to get them out of your mind.

How different would your life be if you thought about God and each person you come in contact with (as well as anyone you have ever heard about from anywhere in the world) as much as you think about what you want or would like for yourself?

Prayer: *Help me think of others and do for others what I would want for myself.*

Au

Andy's 5 actions for the day



Write on the back of your hand 'Love God. Love others.'



Choose one cabin member and do something for that guy that if done to you would make you happy.



As well as a cabin member, do something good for 2 random people today.



Pray for a person you know from school that has a hard time that something good will happen for them today.



Ask someone today "How do you personally love God with all your strength?"

Personal reflections, notes & other thoughts

Mark | 4:27-32

“You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “today — yes, tonight — before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

But Peter insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the others said the same.

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.”

Denying the Kingdom

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

Pete was a great bloke to have around groups. He was a good talker, and willing to give anything a go even when everyone else thought it was crazy - like trying to walk on water in the middle of the night. He even left his steady full-time job to go with Jesus when Jesus asked him to. So when this happened, everyone thought Pete could be counted on to stand by Jesus no matter what happened. But that's not how the story goes. Not only does Pete allow his tiredness to get in the way and sleeps when Jesus wants him to stay up with him, but after Jesus gets arrested, Pete denies knowing Jesus at all, not wanting anyone to think Pete had anything to do with Jesus at all. However, there was no one to point fingers at Pete as every single one of his closest mates (the 12 disciples) did the same thing - ran away and left Jesus alone when he most needed friends. They were all too afraid to help him.

How do you think Jesus felt knowing that soon all his mates would desert him?

Ag



After running away because he thought he caused his father's death, Simba finds a new home and new friends (Pumbaa & Timon) far away from his home and original kingdom. When he is convinced to return to Pride Rock and to reclaim his kingdom from his evil uncle Scar, his friends initially refuse to help.

Why didn't his friends want to help him initially?

God, reminds us through the Bible, that he recognises that despite our best intentions, we don't always achieve what we hope to. However, this is not meant to make us feel depressed and worry about when we are going to stuff up next. Pete and all his other mates (except for the one who forgot what God was like and ended his own life) eventually were reminded that God is always about second-chances (or more), and that the mission he has for us is more important, and he wants to have active members on his team, rather than people sitting around feeling sorry for themselves or not on his team at all.

Application: Write down some things to help you stay an active member (even if you do stuff up):

Prayer: "Help me remember that you are there for me no matter where I am, what I'm doing and no matter how I feel."

Au

Rob has a free internet program called X3 Watch that emails me and his pastor any questionable websites he visits on the net. He confessed that a week ago he turned off the program so that he could look at some sites that he knows he shouldn't have. He was upset that he just can't break the habit - he always feels so dirty after seeing the sites but he still looks at them. He says it is affecting his relationship with God and makes it hard for him to read his Bible or spend time in prayer. I asked him if he had a really great mate that stuffed up - would he rather have that guy avoid him forever or work out how to become best mates again?

'Good guilt' makes us realise we need God and encourages us to seek him.

'Bad guilt' makes us feel we can't approach God and gets us to avoid him. Which type of guilt does Jesus want us to have? What type of guilt does Satan want us to have?

No matter what we've done, God always wants us to come back to him.

In talking further, Rob discovered it has been a while since he last looked at bad sites, and of course the other difference is that he allowed himself to be accountable to his pastor and myself. Although he did stuff up, he is making progress by being honest with God and others and getting the support of both in his life.



personal reflection

Application: What are things that have made it hard for you in the past or you think will make it hard for you after camp to be active agents for the Kingdom of God? (Some of these may be thoughts, dreams, desires, fears as well as influences from outside you)



For a being who can do everything, God is fairly low key about what he is on about. Considering all the ways to communicate these days, God seems a bit old school in being in touch. And also when he can do anything, God seems to let a lot of stuff happens that makes no sense to us at all (remember what Pete had to go through).

Prayer: Write down some things that will help you remember God is in charge of everything and to trust him even when things seem to be completely stuffed:

Au

Andy's 5 actions for the day



Do something that scares you a little that you know God wants you to do for someone else today.



Write a note to your parents apologising for a time you either upset them or disappointed them.



Ask your cabin leader or Officer, why they are so sure that Jesus is real and active.



Write a short note to 3 mates that says "I need your help to keep me on my mission to save the world."



Pray for a person you know from school/work to be able to feel loved by God and to have something good happen to them.

Personal reflections, notes & other thoughts

Mark 16:15-32

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.

Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Confirming the Kingdom

Scripture (What 3 key phrases jump out?):

Observation (What seems surprising or interesting to you?):

The Bible is full of miracles, signs and wonders to show that God is in control of all things and that the world isn't how it should be right now. But not everyone who saw these miracles suddenly ended up believing in God, in fact, miracles still occur today and not every one believes. Also the Bible warns that not everyone who claims to come from God and does miraculous things should be believed to be of God. We are to be wise. The signs talked about here are signs that the values and experiences of what it means for God's kingdom and original intended dream is now the only reality that matters. It's not about adding God-stuff to your existing life as a luxury add-on or expansion pack, but it is your new game system/ school/ work environment/ friends network. These disciples that were recently so scared for their lives, who abandoned their mate at the time of his greatest need, suddenly within days became freedom fighters and public protesters against the strongest military power in their world and the religious leaders. All but one of them ended up being killed for their passion to only be about what Jesus was about. They gave up all future dreams for their own personal gain, security, success, and for some of them even girlfriends, wives and families to only be about God's dream for the world.



Alex Rider saw himself as an ordinary schoolboy raised by an uncle with an ordinary job. When his uncle unexpectedly died, he discovered that his uncle was a spy who had been training Alex to also be a spy through all the different extra-curricular hobbies and activities he encouraged Alex to do - martial arts, rock climbing, other adventure activities and speaking in other languages. Alex is then sent by the government to complete the mission his uncle was killed on. To succeed Alex has to face very grown-up enemies and dangers. What enemies or obstacles or things are holding you back from your mission to save the world now?

God says you are ready now for the mission he has for you - to make "the Kingdom of God" the main reality.

Application: How does that make you feel?

Prayer: Write down things that remind you that no matter what, you need to fulfil your primary mission.

Teenagers today are making world headlines achieving things even impressive for adults. In 2007 George Hotz at 17 was the first person to crack the code in 500 hours so that users could use the newly released Apple iPhone on any telephone network - ahead of competing professional adult teams.

In 2007 Anna Devathanan and Jenny Suo, two 14 year old NZ students, tested and found that the popular drink Ribena contained almost no vitamin C. In 2006 William Kamkwamba at 14 created a windmill out of spare parts (including a bicycle) that powers his family's home and improves on many existing designs by including pulleys.

But probably more significantly are the ways teens across the world are changing the lives of those around them on a day to day basis by just living and acting like Christ in practically everything they do.

Steve, a guy I knew through BB, felt God wanted him to do something about the poor but felt that because he grew up and lived in a middle-class suburb - there was little opportunity to do anything. So he moved to a shared house in a poor community where he spends his time helping and sharing life with migrants and the unemployed.

Rémy scheduled BB to start 30 mins earlier at the local skate park so that they would play with the local Muslim kids there. Don't worry about what you can't do - just offer yourself to serve with whatever God has given you already. Show them the Kingdom of God is here through you.

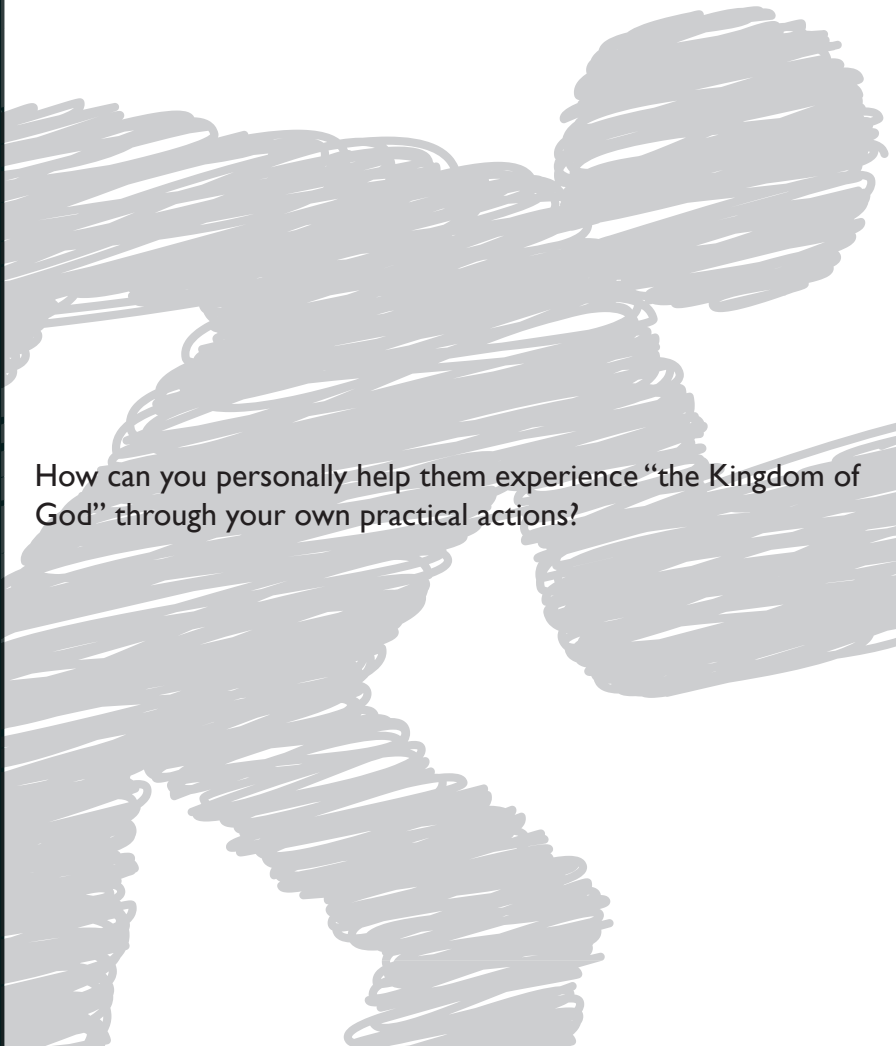


personal reflection

What are the excuses stopping you from being God's agent in the world right now?



Application: Who are the people around you that you feel desperately need "the Kingdom of God" to be real for them now?



How can you personally help them experience "the Kingdom of God" through your own practical actions?

Prayer: All the accounts of Jesus' life (Matthew, Mark, Luke {& Acts} and John) end with Jesus telling us what we should do with our lives. None of them say to sit back and wait for God to change the world himself, or to do nothing until Jesus returns. None of them says to try to be a success in this world. What is God's will for your life? What should you be? How can you serve God? Jesus says it clearly in each final speech - be active agents of God's Kingdom now. Make sure the mission is being done. Let everyone experience God's kingdom through you and your fellow freedom fighters. Amen.

Andy's 5 actions for the day



Write on the back of your hand "I am ready and active. Mission: change my world."



Write down your dream of how the world should be, so that everyone has a fair go and can enjoy life.



Write down how people should think and behave in that world to make the above step happen.



Choose a couple of those behaviours that you personally will start behaving more of.



Keep constantly in touch with others that keep wanting to make a difference right now. As an agent, remember no matter what happens, the mission is more important.

Closing thoughts

- “The Kingdom of God” was the one thing Jesus spoke most about in the accounts of his life by Matthew, Mark & Luke. And although Jesus hints in Revelation 21 about a new life on a new earth after the afterlife (resurrection), his focus is a lot more on how his followers should be in this life - that the Kingdom of God can be, should be and now is active in this life. The Kingdom of God is active whenever God’s will is active - when everything is working the way God originally dreamt it to be, the way that God says it should be. Even the other account of Jesus’ life by John is more interested in this - and so many people seem to miss what John is saying the only time he defines what he means by the term “eternal life” (John 17:3). When Jesus tells us all to pray that “May God’s Will be DONE ON EARTH as it is in heaven” , he isn’t telling his followers to look forward to an afterlife somewhere up above, but to focus on how they live right now on this earth.
- Followers of Jesus are commanded to be agents that “go to all nations and make disciples” - that is to get all people everywhere and in every different circumstance to experience living in “the Kingdom of God” and to recruit them and train them and give them the same mission also. And although it is always good to learn more about God, through the Bible, listening to other Christians, and Christian communities and activities - remember you know enough to be agents right now. Learn more along the way, but be active now - God says you’re already ready for active service now.
- Don’t you hate it when in stories someone has got a primary mission, but then gets distracted or goes off doing something else and messes it all up? Sometimes it looks like God followers do that most of the time. Always check you’re working on and achieving the primary mission. That’s what we were created for and that is what we will be rewarded for. And like playing any game, the most satisfying part isn’t what happens after the game, but just being part of the action (Matt 25:21).
- So agent, get out there and do your mission!