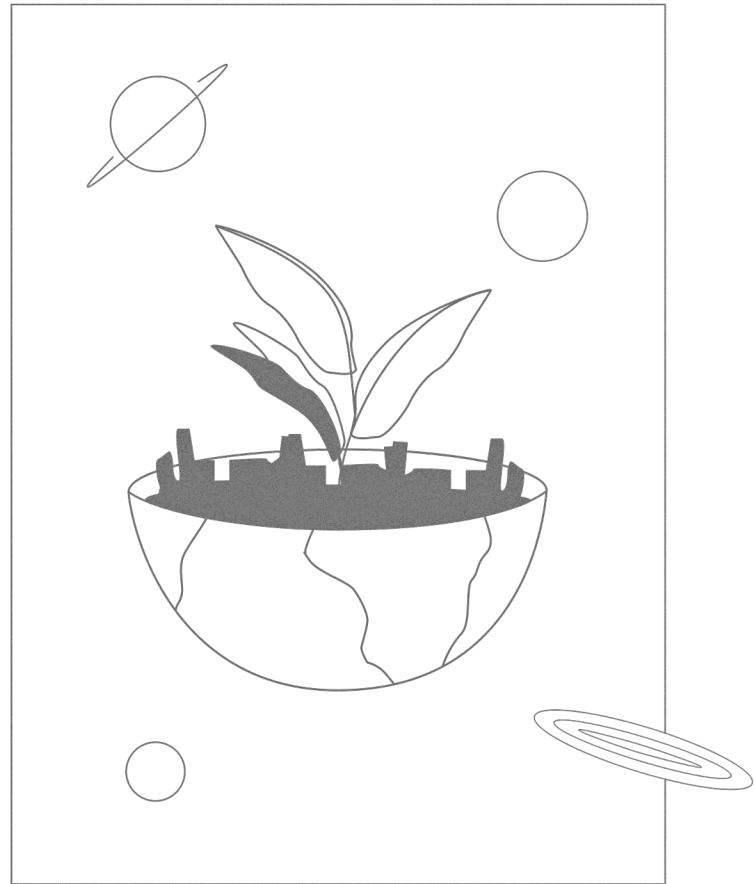
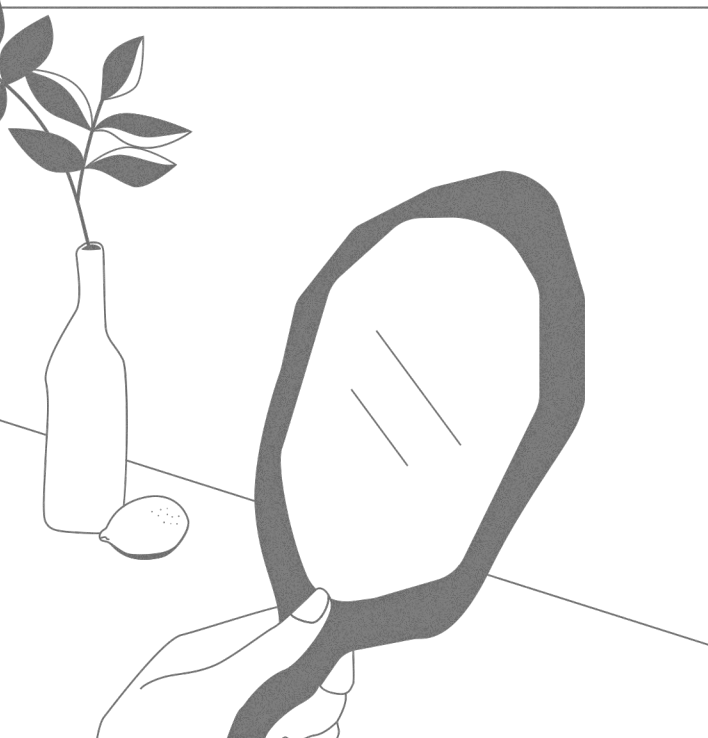


A four week study exploring how the kingdom of God meets us in our deepest longings.

Kingdom Longings



By: Josh Chen

Introduction

We all have longings, and we all meet them in different ways. What we may not realize is that some of these longings go much deeper than a simple desire to get a decent job, or find a partner. Our longings reflect the gap between our reality and the Kingdom of God to come. When we dig a little deeper, we can see our “Kingdom Longings,” which are the deep desires of our hearts that the Kingdom of God will one day fulfill. In every cycle of this material, our focus is not simply retaining cognitive information, but changing the lens in which we see the world. We will explore how longings are displayed in the Bible, our culture’s narratives, our own lives, and the world.

Module 01

Kingdom Longing in the Bible

Discussion

- ▶ How would you describe longings? What are a few things you long for today?

Big Idea: Sin

Every week, we will touch on a big idea that will lead our discussion for our time together. Today we will talk about our longings and how our sin is connected to it.

Our coping mechanisms to meet our longings are often what we traditionally think of as “sin behavior.” However, our sin behavior is often meeting our legitimate needs or longings in an illegitimate way. Sin is ultimately finding life where there is no life.

- ▶ How does this definition of sin change how you think about sin?

GOING DEEPER

Longings exist because of the gap between the Kingdom of God and our current reality. The bigger the gap is, the bigger the longing (see Fig. A).

Our coping mechanisms to meet these longings are what we traditionally think of as “sin behavior.” However, our sin behavior is simply meeting our legitimate needs or longings in an illegitimate way. We must dig deeper to understand our sin and longings. Sin is ultimately finding life where there is no life.

Even as we look back to the first act of disobedience from the first humans, they took fruit that was forbidden, but it wasn't simply about moving from a position of righteousness to unrighteousness. The fruit was the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. They became judges in their own minds, deciding what was right and wrong and best for their own lives.

Sin is not simply missing the mark of perfection, but is a symptom of a bigger problem. It's not just about the sin behavior, but the root issue that leads to that behavior.

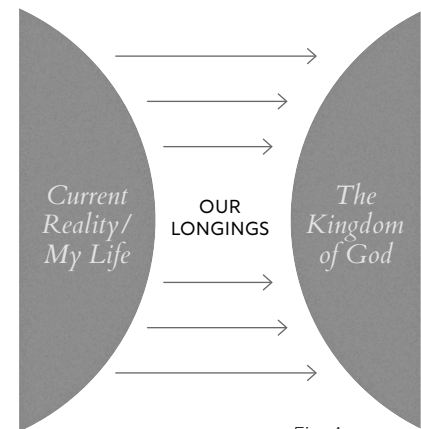


Fig. A

If we were to compare our sin to a tree (Fig. B), the roots are what we worship, the trunk are the lies that we believe, the branches are where we find life where there is no life, and the fruit is the sin behavior. Therefore sin behavior is only what we see at the surface, but much deeper are lies that we believe, finding life where there is no life, and worshiping things we were never meant to worship.

Focusing on sin behavior can leave us feeling guilty and hopeless.

The solution isn't simply focusing on the behavior that makes us believe God to be a stodgy old man with a list of rules, but rather focusing on Jesus who makes all "the things of earth grow strangely dim in the light of [God's] glory and grace," as the hymnist wrote.

Activity

Today we will look at a story in the Bible and walk through a few questions that will help us to practice seeing the world through this lens of longing. See the next page for an example passage.

- ▶ Read Chosen Passage

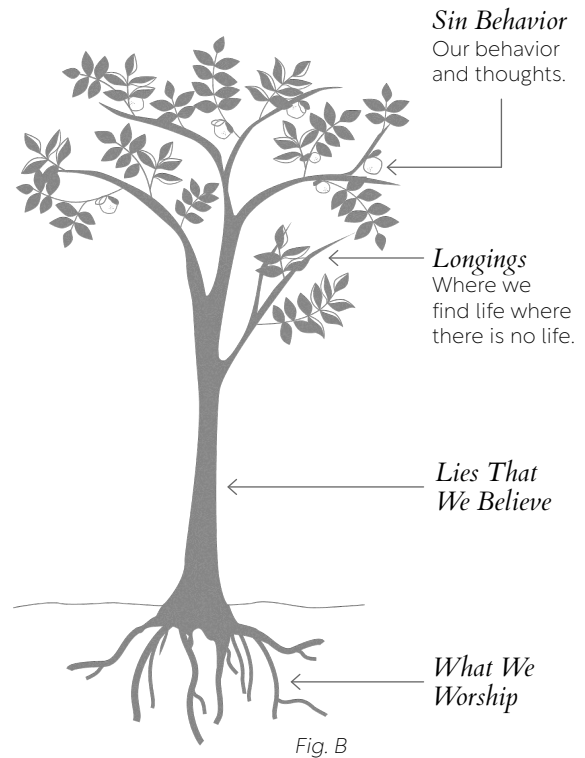
LONGING

We want to understand what the person longs for, but the text might not come right out and say it. We must look at the clues.

- ▶ What are some clues that might point to the person's longings?
- ▶ Their longings are probably complex, but if you could sum up their longings in one word, what word would you pick?

LIES

- ▶ What are the lies that the person believes about themselves, about other people, or about God that causes them to find life where there is no life?



COPING MECHANISM

- ▶ How do they cope?

KINGDOM SOLUTION

- ▶ What is the truth and good news that Jesus reveals to them that meets their longings?
- ▶ What change do we see in the person's life as a result of believing this truth?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- ▶ How do you relate with this person's longings?

Next Week

- ▶ Pick a movie as a group and watch it before next week's discussion.

Choose a movie with good character development. Consider movies that have deeply impacted someone in the group, or a movie someone has been wanting to watch!

Example Passage

For your group, pick a passage for your group to go through where Jesus interacts with a person and draws out their longing. You can use John 4 in the first cycle, then different passages of your choice in the later cycles.

- ▶ Read John 4:4-26
- ▶ What do you know about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans?

Context: (Optional to add context for your passages)
There had been hundreds of years of hostility between the Jews and Samaritans. 300 years earlier, the Greeks had used Samaria as a base for their invasion of Jewish territories. The Jews retaliated by destroying the Samaritan temple on the summit of Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans responded by penetrating the temple area of Jerusalem and scattering bones of dead people across the area on the eve of the Passover making it impossible for the Jews to have their feast. This happened a few years before Jesus was born. Jews wouldn't even drink out of the same cup as a Samaritan because of their hatred for one another.

LONGING

We want to understand what this woman longs for but it might be challenging since the text doesn't come right out and say it. We have no idea what is going on in her head, but there are lots of clues

- ▶ What are some clues that tell us what she may be longing for?
- ▶ Of course her longings are probably fairly complex, but if you could sum up her longings in one word, what word would you pick?

LIES

- ▶ What are the lies that she believes about herself, about other people or about God that causes her to find life where there is no life?

COPING MECHANISM

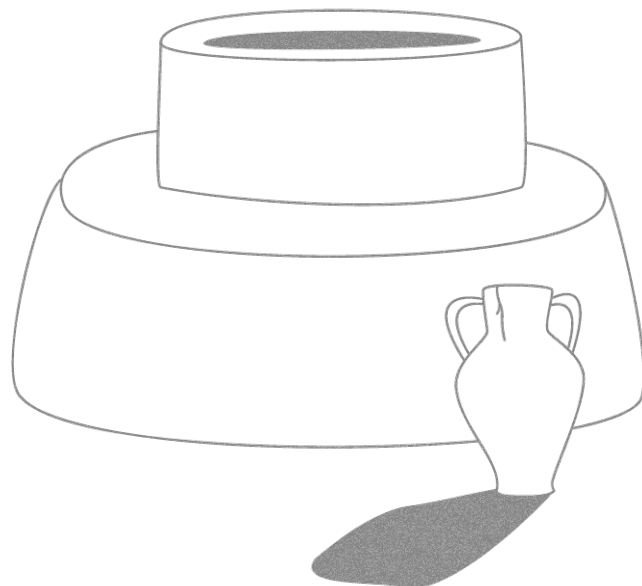
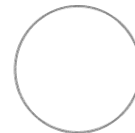
- ▶ How does she cope?

KINGDOM SOLUTION:

- ▶ What is the truth that Jesus reveals to her that meets her longings and feels like such good news?
- ▶ What change do we see in this woman's life as a result of believing this truth?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- ▶ How do you relate with this woman's longings?



Module 02

Kingdom Longing in a Movie

Discussion

- ▶ What is the Kingdom of God? What do you imagine it is like?

Big Idea: *The Kingdom of God*

Jesus prayed, “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10, NIV) He invites us to bring the reality of the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth. The best way to know what the Kingdom of Heaven is like is to look at the life of Jesus. He is the intersection of where heaven and earth overlap. His teachings, miracles, and relationships were designed to show us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

In Jesus’s teaching, he makes it clear that Kingdom Citizens are poor in spirit, pure in heart, meek, and they represent the salt and light of the world. He then describes how they deal with things like anger and lust. (Matthew 5-7). Through this sermon, Jesus laid out the difference between the Kingdom Citizens and those who seem religious on the outside but lack transformation on the inside.

Through Jesus’s miracles, we get a glimpse into the way things are supposed to be. Jesus knew that a man with leprosy would never be on the side of the road or sick at all in the Kingdom of God, and to reflect that truth, he healed the man (Matthew 8:1-4). Similarly, Jesus knew a party would never end early in heaven, so he turned water into wine (John 2:1-11).

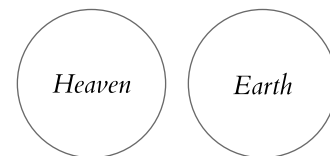
Jesus’s relationships reflect how Kingdom Citizens should interact with others. Jesus invites and empowers his followers to seek out “your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” He created space for belonging, stood up for people, and humbled the self-righteous.

The kingdom of God is what this world was created to be, what it will one day be and what God is working towards bringing into existence in our current reality.

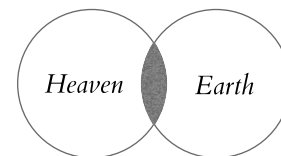
- ▶ In considering how Jesus brought heaven to earth, how can we bring the Kingdom of God into this world?



CREATION



FALL



RESTORATION



CONSUMMATION

The FOUR CHAPTER GOSPEL is a great way to understand the Kingdom of God. Imagine that Heaven and Earth are like a venn diagram. In Creation, heaven and earth are the same place—the garden of Eden. It is the place that God reigns and rules. In Fall, heaven and earth become two distinct places. In Restoration, they overlap with Jesus being the overlap between heaven and earth. In Consummation, heaven and earth become one once again.

Activity

LONGING

- ▶ What does the character (or characters) long for? (e.g. family, belonging, safety, to be valued, to do something significant)
- ▶ Does the movie give any background for why the character is longing for that?

LIES

- ▶ What lies does the character believe?

COPING MECHANISM

- ▶ How does the character cope?

KINGDOM SOLUTION

- ▶ What is the Kingdom truth solution to the character's longing?
- ▶ What does the producer suggest as the solution? (often portrayed as character development)
- ▶ What difference does it make in the character's life?

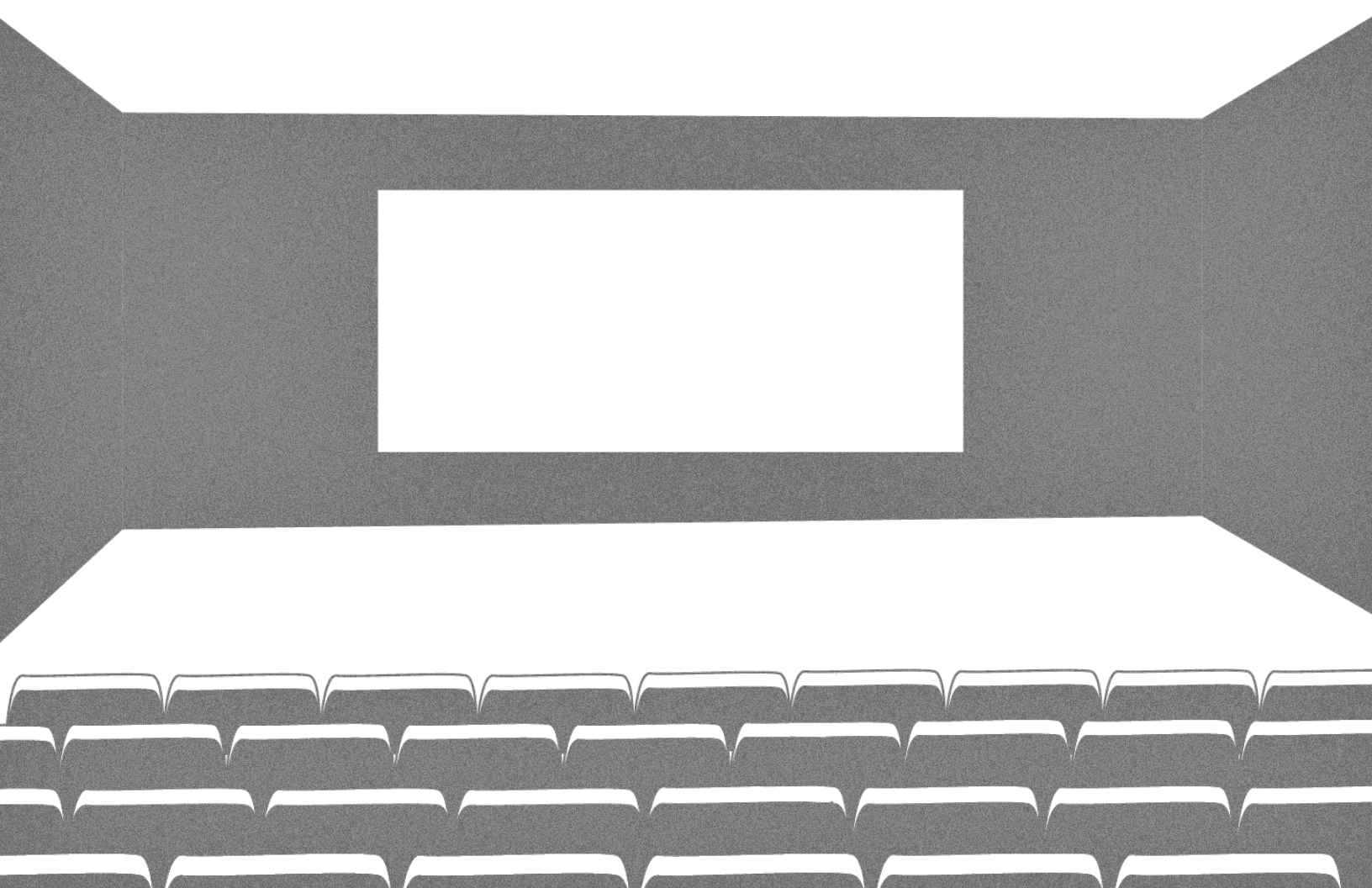
PERSONAL REFLECTION

- ▶ How do you relate to the character's longing?

Next Week

- ▶ Spend some time this week preparing your own micro-testimonies to share with the group next week!
- ▶ Reflect on the questions, then write it down!

Make sure your group works through the Micro-Testimony Worksheet and prepares before sharing next week! Keep the testimonies to 5 minutes and choose one that has a clear resolution (Kingdom Solution).



Module 03

Kingdom Longing in Ourselves

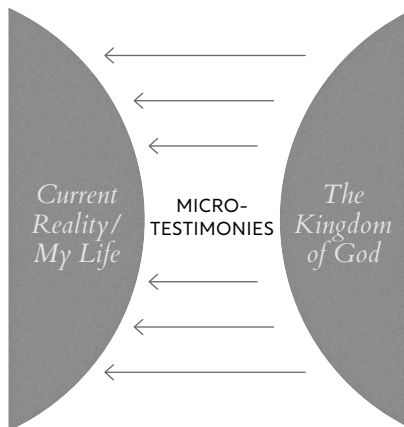
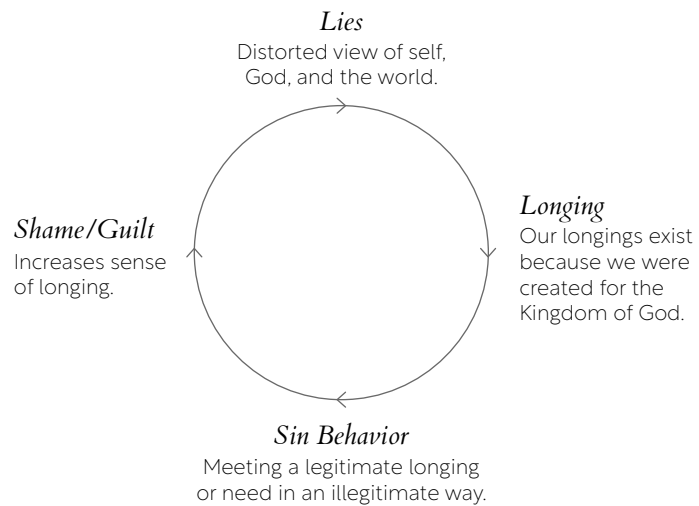
Discussion

- ▶ What do you think are differences between the way God sees you and how you see yourself?

Big Idea: Repentance

We often view repentance in the same way that we view sin, as a behavior. However, as we discussed earlier, sin is finding life where there is no life. Sin taints the way we understand our identity, receive God's love, and how we interact with others. Repentance therefore, must provide a solution that addresses more than just the behavior.

Some approaches to repentance can create a cycle of shame and guilt which increases the sense of longing and leads to needing even more sin behavior. Over time the never-ending sense of shame and guilt leads to self hatred and resentment towards the Christian faith.



Alan Hirsch translates the Greek word for repentance, "metanoia," to mean "Mind Blown" or "Paradigm Shift." Repentance is the solution to clearing up our view of reality. Repentance is the process of identifying lies that we believe and choosing to trust in God's idea of what reality is (the Kingdom of God). This video by Max Lucado is a great depiction of repentance:

- ▶ You are Special - Max Lucado (Search Youtube for video "You are Special" by Max Lucado)
- ▶ How does this definition change how you think about repentance?

Micro-testimonies often come in the form of sharing how an experience of repentance met you in your longings and what difference it made.

Activity

- ▶ Share micro-testimonies. (Reminder to keep it to 5 minutes each).

If the person who shared is comfortable and willing:

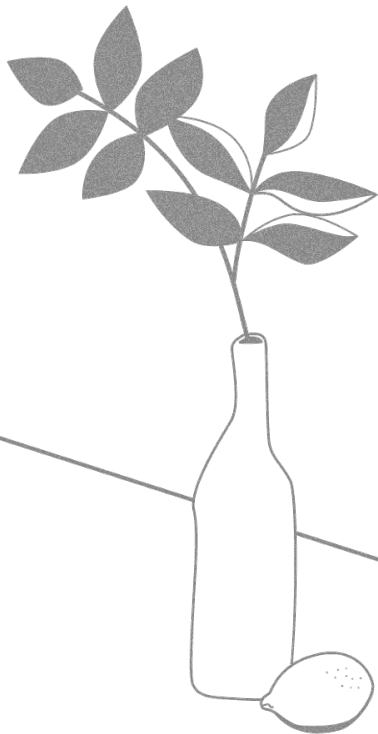
- ▶ As a group, walk through what you can see as their LONGING, LIES, COPING MECHANISM, KINGDOM SOLUTION, and what difference it makes in their life.

It's important to make sure the kingdom solution matches the longing and lie. (ie. If the longing/lie is about value, the solution should be about value)

- ▶ Ask questions for clarification and to produce more understanding if needed.

Next Week

- ▶ What is a world event that is resonating in your mind?
- ▶ As a group, choose one to discuss next week.



Module 04

Kingdom Longing in the World

Discussion

People are created to be amazing and unique! Can you imagine what people would be like in a world where beauty or wealth didn't define value, without pressures to be more like someone else and where everyone lived fully out of who they were created to be?

- ▶ What might your community look like if everyone in it lived that way?

Big Idea: *Imago Dei*

As we can see from our micro-testimonies, we all have different experiences, personalities, and perspectives, yet the image of God (*Imago Dei*) is reflected in us.

Three ways that we reflect God:

1. Value: In the same way that God does not have value because something external has attributed it—God's value is inherent—our value is also inherent, regardless of what external factors say.
2. Belonging: In the same way that the Trinity loves, upholds, and lives in perfect communion with one another, we are to reflect this with each other and with God.
3. Co-creation: In the same way that God created the universe and everything in it, we reflect God when we co-create, taking what God has created and making something new of it.

We as image bearers of God are to treat others like true image bearers of God, because what we do for the least of us, we do for Jesus (Matthew 25:40-45). Whether we feed the hungry, clothe or care for those in need, we do all those things for the person in front of us, and the person of Jesus that they bear the image of. Our evangelism philosophy must be founded in drawing out the *imago dei* in a person.



There are two primary ways that people think about growth: punitive and restorative. To illustrate this, take a look at the difference between an American prison (top) vs. a Norwegian prison (bottom). America has the highest rate of incarcerations per capita and one of the highest rates of recidivism (return to prison after release) of any nation in the world. Norway, on the other hand, has one of the lowest rates of recidivism in the world. This is primarily due to how the prison systems are set up, American prisons are punitive (designed to punish people), Norwegian prisons are restorative (designed to restore and rehabilitate people to be productive citizens). The Christian faith can be thought of as punitive or restorative. Punitive can be thought in terms of heaven and hell, and restorative can be thought of as restoring God's creation and the image of God.

- ▶ How can we draw out the best in people (their *imago dei*)?

Activity



Based on the world event we chose as a group last week, we will practice seeing it through our lens of Kingdom Longing. As we dive into this conversation, focus on the longing that the event is producing in people. As we engage with one another and share, ask yourself if this conversation creates space for belonging.

LONGING

- ▶ What longing led up to this current event?
Or what longing is this current event producing in people?

LIES

- ▶ What lies are people believing?

COPING MECHANISM

- ▶ How are people coping?

KINGDOM SOLUTION

- ▶ What can we do as Kingdom Citizens to bring God's Kingdom into people's longings?
- ▶ What difference would this make in people's lives?

PERSONAL REFLECTION

- ▶ How do you relate to the world's longings?



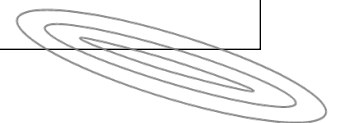
Moving Forward

- ▶ Cycle through again!

In cycling through, the more you practice seeing the world through longings and the Kingdom, the easier and more natural it will become! Choose different passages, movies, personal experiences, and world events to go through.

For the "Big Idea," you do not have to go through the material again unless there are new people. However, a recap might be helpful. Here are the short definitions for each week's big idea:

1. SIN: Sin behavior is often meeting our legitimate needs in an illegitimate way, or finding life where there is no life.
2. KINGDOM OF GOD: The Kingdom of God is what this world was created to be, what it will one day be and what God is working towards bringing into existence in our current reality.
3. REPENTANCE: Paradigm shift, the process of identifying lies that we believe and choosing to trust in God's idea of what reality is.
4. IMAGO DEI: We are Image bearers of God who are called to draw out the imago dei in others.



Develop a Micro-Testimony

A micro-testimony is a story about how you experienced the gospel. You will have many micro-testimonies, as they include but are not limited to your conversion testimony. These are helpful for remembering how God has changed your life, and knowing how to share the good news with others.

Create Your Story

1. Spend a few minutes in prayer and ask God to help you identify a significant moment that he met you in a time of pain/fear/longing in your life. What was that moment? Describe the pain, fear and/or longing you were experiencing.

2. What lies about God, yourself and/or the situation characterized or influenced your thinking? *Try to think of the lie behind the lie. For example, the lie might be "I feel like I'm stupid" and the lie behind the lie is "I believe that in order to be valuable or worthy I have to be smart, but because I feel like I'm stupid, I feel worthless."*

3. Describe the ways you were trying to cope with your pain, fear, or longings:

4. How did God address those lies (from question 3) to bring about a change in your perspective (often through Scripture, experience, people, etc)? What is the truth or good news about God and/or yourself that he showed you?

5. How does believing that truth or good news affect how you walk through fear, pain or longing today?

6. Next you will summarize your time of fear, pain, and/or longing, your encounter with the good news of God, and how it affects your life today. You may use the suggested prompts or your own wording as you utilize this structure:

INTRO - FEAR/PAIN/LONGING (Responses to #2)

A few months ago I was dealing with...

LIES (Responses to #3)

I believed I (or God) was...

COPING MECHANISMS (Responses to #4)

I tried to cope by...

GOD (Responses to #5)

Then God spoke to me through/by (Scripture, experience, people)... and showed me...

GOOD NEWS TODAY (Responses to #6)

Even now when I hear that lie again, I remember that God...

Guess what? You just wrote one of your micro-testimonies! Read through it and enjoy.

Share Your Micro-Testimony

1. LISTEN: While in everyday conversations, listen for emotions people express about a hard situation (pain, fear, or longing), how they might be beating themselves up (lies they may be telling themselves), or ways they are trying to cope with difficulty.
2. CARE: Connecting begins when we enter into someone else's story with the empathy of a fellow struggler.
3. PRAY: Ask the Holy Spirit if or when the appropriate time would be to share part, or all, of your micro testimony.
4. SHARE: Don't be afraid. Your desire is for people to thrive! You might share one section of your micro-testimony, or your short summary of it, or all of it, as the particular conversation flows.