

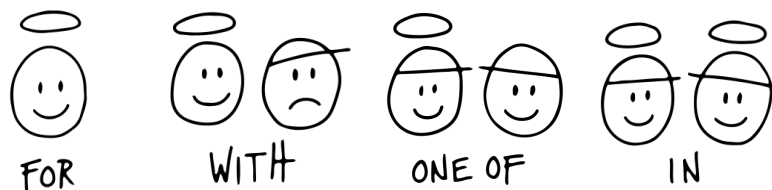
“Jesus was committed to crossing cultural, social, political and religious ‘either/or’ waters, engaging in many ‘and also’ activities. He comforted the disturbed and also disturbed the comfortable. He was too religious for the pagans and also too pagan for the religious elites. [Jesus] is inviting us to life off the paved road of tamed religiosity and into something greater, more adventurous, and more uncertain than I imagined.”

J.R. Briggs, The Sacred Overlap

The term “evangelism” tends to bring to mind hokey tracts, shouting with signs on street corners, or awkward conversations with relative strangers. Discipleship, on the other hand, brings to mind quietly working through a series of Biblical learning objectives until one reaches the point of being “fully disciplined.” Jesus, however, seemed to have a different perspective when He called us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” There seemed to be an active and engaging component to it. Rather than the *us/them* that we so often feel as an undertone in the church, it seems to be an incredibly inclusive call.

Maybe that’s because Jesus’ version of the gospel wasn’t simply a set of propositions about the payment for sin, but a much more robust concept that He termed “the Kingdom of heaven.”

Robust, but not complicated. Too often in evangelism and discipleship we tend to overcomplicate. The gospel is deep and incredibly multi-faceted. But it’s also simple. As simple as:



The goal over the next four weeks is to journey through this simple and paradigm shifting model of proclaiming the Kingdom. (You can find the teachings at www.yorkalliance.org/sermons) The ideal way to engage these truths is within a small community who can journey with you as well as in discussion with friends, neighbors, and co-workers who are looking for hope. For many of us this season has brought on a sense of

imbalance and recognition that something just isn’t right. For those of us who have tasted what Jesus called the “Kingdom of Heaven,” our desire for it has only increased. But for those who have never experienced it, there is a deep longing for something more.

We believe that it is impossible to gain the life of Jesus without practicing the lifestyle of Jesus; and Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom all the time, both through word and deed. We need to engage our lives in the same way! We also believe that real change doesn’t simply happen through more knowledge, but through practices and habits, in community, under the power and direction of the Holy Spirit. That’s the heart of this guidebook.

This guidebook has been developed in heavy reliance on the short e-book “One Of” by Greg Nettle and our friend Alex Absalom. I’ve also pulled from a variety of other sources, citing them wherever possible. However, for ongoing study, I would recommend “Just Walk Across the Room” by Bill Hybels, “Permission Evangelism” by Michael Simpson, and the new book “The Sacred Overlap” by J.R. Briggs.

The challenge of Kingdom proclamation is only partially about the message. The bulk of the challenge is about making space. Our lives are packed full of “stuff” and we often don’t have time to truly engage the people around us. One of the disarming qualities of Jesus was how He made time for the people around Him—He truly saw those who we can often look “past” or even “through.” So, in conjunction with shifting the way that we see God, the world around us, and what it means to follow Him, we also need to be willing to shift our schedules and priorities to make space for the people around us.

C.S. Lewis in his essay “The Weight of Glory” gives us a great reminder as we engage this practice:

“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror such as you now meet only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations.”



God is FOR us!

When most people think about God and how He feels about them, they don't imagine happy feelings. Even for those who don't have a strong sense of the God of the Bible or a theology of sin, we all have a nagging sense of guilt knowing that we are broken.

If that's how most of us tend to think about God and His position towards us, is it any wonder that we're not really excited about having spiritual conversations? Who wants to talk about an angry God?

However, in spite of popular belief to the contrary, God is not against us. He's not mad and sulking in a corner of heaven somewhere waiting for us to shape up. Instead, like a bridegroom completely taken by his bride, despite her imperfections, God is FOR us! His position toward us is not one of judgment, but one of love and grace. Jesus makes this statement clearly in John 3:16-17:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

We might picture the posture of God as one of condemnation, but in reality, the posture that God takes toward ALL of us is one of love! His love was so great that He sent Jesus into our world, taking on flesh and blood, suffering in poverty and under oppression, and ultimately being killed by those He created in order to bring us back to God. As Paul later wrote in Romans 8:32: *"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"*

Talk about a paradigm shift! From the ancients onward, humanity has thought about the gods as powerful deities that were angry, capricious,

and difficult to please. But when Jesus came and revealed the all-powerful Creator God to us, He revealed Him to be FOR us!

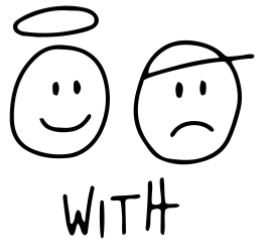
Why does the world so often struggle to believe that God is FOR them? I'm sure there are many reasons, but could it be because they sense that Christians aren't for them? For too long the church has been known by what we're against, without any clear indication of what we're FOR... and, like God Himself, we should be FOR broken people.

Throughout the course of the next week, engage this simple exercise:

1. Before you leave the house each day, pray this simple prayer: *"Jesus, help me to actually see people today. Help me not to look past people, but to truly recognize who You have made them to be. Save me from seeing categories or stereotypes. Instead, help me to see each person with Your eyes. Amen."*
2. As you see and engage people, ask God to show you people that you could show His love to in practical ways. Most of the time this will be a simple conversation, an intentional recognition of them, or even a wave and a smile. But don't settle for a wave and a smile if God is calling you to a conversation!
3. Make it your goal that at least once each day you will ask someone the simple question: "Can I pray for you?" Most people would be thrilled for you to pray for them, even if you've just met them. Don't underestimate the power of this simple question! If they are willing, pray a SHORT and SIMPLE prayer of blessing, indicating how much God loves them and desires to bless them.
4. Finally, take a few moments to journal your experiences each evening. Note your increasing awareness of others, the process of praying for people, and how your heart is impacted through these times of prayer.

Questions for Community:

- What is your immediate reaction toward people who seem, by their appearance or behavior, to be far from God?
- How has this practice challenged you this week?
- What stops you from regularly asking people if you can pray blessing into their lives?



God is
WITH US!

One of the most disarming passages of Scripture is found in the majestic poetry of John 1. He begins in meditation on the presence of God expressed through His Trinitarian being: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”* Beautiful, but expected. This is an expression of the constancy of the presence of God within Himself. But then, a few verses later, we should be rightly shocked. Eugene Peterson, in *“The Message”* translation, gets at the heart of it: *“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.”*

God WITH us. The Holy One living amongst the dirt. The Creator taking on the form of the created. God WITH us.

We wrongly relegate this mystery to Christmas, but it’s a year-round reality. And it doesn’t just begin with Jesus! God was WITH the Israelites in the desert. He was WITH Moses at the burning bush. God is WITH Elijah on the mountain. He is WITH Daniel in the lion’s den, and WITH the three Hebrew teens in the fiery furnace. He was WITH His people in the temple, and He was still WITH them as He spoke through the prophets in the exile. But now, through Jesus, He’s moved into the neighborhood!

When we think about proclaiming the Kingdom of God, we need to first understand the incredible power of His presence with His people. This is evident in the beginning of the story: God walks in the garden with the man and woman in the cool of the day and longs to rule over creation with them. It’s also the culmination of the story: *“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”* (Revelation 21:3)

But God with us also exposes a problem. When we are faced with the holiness of God, we recognize our own sinfulness. We can see clearly our

lack of power and ability. We expose our bad attitudes and selfish ways of thinking. In short, when God is WITH us, we realize that we aren’t like Him. Which is why it’s vital for us to first understand that God is FOR us!

God doesn’t back away from our brokenness. In fact, being with us is the only way for Him to heal our brokenness! For many of us who have spent some time in church, that makes sense... But do we also believe that we are called to be WITH those around us? To not back away from *their* brokenness? To, as Jesus prayed for us, be in the world but not of it? (John 17:14-16) The only way for us to be people who proclaim a Kingdom that is built on *presence* is from a position of *presence*. We need to be WITH people who need Jesus just as Jesus came to be WITH us.

Take some time this week to consider this short exercise:

1. Who are some of the people, or types of people, that I regularly spend time with? These could be specific people, or could be groups of people such as those in the gym, at the golf course, in your neighborhood, at your kids’ activities, etc. Make a list.
2. Now, honestly thinking about that list, rate how you think those people/groups might perceive you on the following scales:

Disinterested Engaged
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

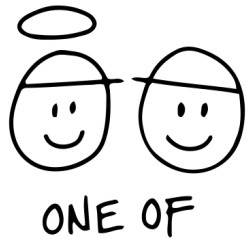
Judgmental Accepting
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Self-Interested Interested in Them
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. What are some things that you could do to move those numbers to the right a few places?

Questions for Community:

- Is this practice challenging the way that you think?
- Who are some of the people/groups that you naturally find yourself being with?
- How might you deepen your engagement of those people?
- In what ways is the presence of God a joyous reality for you?



God becomes
ONE OF US!

“I know God loves me. But I’m not sure that He *likes* me.”

While I often heard this confession during my time in youth ministry, it is far from simply an expression of teenage angst. This is a daily wrestling for many of us. If we have any sort of church background, it almost feels obligatory that God loves us. He doesn’t really seem to get a choice in the matter—it is His character, after all! (1 John 7:8) But does He *like* us?

For many, this question can be the turning point in our understanding of God. Or it can be the barricade.

Colossians 1 tells us that if we want to know anything about God, we can just look at Jesus because He is the complete image of God. (Colossians 1:15) So what does the life of Jesus tell us?

In the Greek language there are four different words that we translate into the English word “love.” *Storge* is the love that we have for our family. *Eros* is a sensual love. *Philos* is love between friends. And *agape* is unconditional love.

We tend to think of Jesus as having *agape* towards us, which is certainly true. But Greg Nettle points out that Jesus wasn’t crucified because of having too much *agape*. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus is accused of *liking* sinners. Specifically, they call Him a “*philos* of tax collectors and sinners.” The Pharisees of Jesus’ day might have tolerated Him having *agape* for tax collectors and sinners—but what they couldn’t handle was that, for Jesus, His *agape* went hand in hand with *philos*. And actually *liking* sinners just couldn’t be tolerated.

It wasn’t enough for Jesus to just be WITH us—He became ONE OF us. In terms of our simple line drawings, He puts on the baseball cap and joins

us in our world. As amazing as it is that God is FOR and WITH us, it’s incredible to think that He became ONE OF us—that He actually likes us!

This is the point where, for many, becoming like Jesus in His proclamation of the Kingdom just gets too messy. Am I willing to invest time, energy, and relationship in people not simply so that I might “win them to Jesus” but because I genuinely like them? Would I choose to limit the time I spend doing “church activities” so that I could hang out with a group of people, not in the hopes of getting to witness to them, but because I could spend an evening being ONE OF them?

“Witnessing” and “winning people to Jesus” are worthwhile pursuits, but when they become the goal, people can quickly feel as though they have a target on their backs. When we have a group of friends that we’re simply willing to be ONE OF because we genuinely like them, there will be plenty of opportunities to disciple them in their journey.

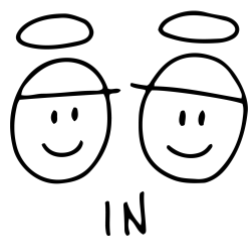
1. Rate what the people around you would say on a scale of 1-10:
 - a. How much would they say that you are FOR them?
 - b. How much would they say that you are WITH them?
 - c. How much would they say that you are ONE OF them?
2. Take some time and meditate on this poem from St. Teresa of Avila:

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

What are some practical ways that Jesus is calling you to be His body in the community around you?

Questions for Community

- What aspects of this practice make you uncomfortable? Why?
- How does the fact that God *likes* you impact the way that you engage others in the world around you?
- How does the fact that you *like* those in the world around you speak to the heart of Jesus for them?



God lives
IN US!

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

The words that Jesus chose, given the way that most of us understand what it means for us to be the church, are fascinating. Consider:

- **“Go”**—It seems that Jesus envisioned a movement where His followers would be engaged in the world around them, not just trying to convince their friends to come to church.
- **“make disciples”**—While the idea of conversion is certainly present throughout the New Testament, that concept doesn’t appear in Jesus’ call to us. Our call is not to convert, but to disciple.
- **“all nations”**—I’m not a Greek scholar, so I needed to check on this one. The word translated “all” is *pas* and it means... you guessed it... “all.” It could also be translated “each, every, any, the whole, and everyone.”

Despite our popular understanding, we are not primarily called to invite people into our territory (the church building or some kind of church event) so that we might convert those who are not yet Christians, and then make disciples of those who have converted while ignoring those who haven’t. Or at least continuing to invite them until they convert. I don’t mean to be either sarcastic or cynical, but simply to point out how far we’ve strayed from the original command of Jesus to the church.

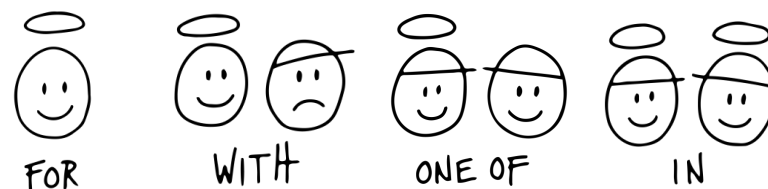
How does this all work?

Remember the practice from the life of Jesus that we are seeking to engage: Proclaiming the Kingdom. What is the Kingdom? Put very simply,

it’s the place where Jesus reigns. In the words of Jesus, as He taught His disciples to pray, it’s the place where God’s “will is done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The job that we’ve been given, as the body of Christ on earth today, is to be *for*, *with*, and *one of* people so that we might help others be with Jesus more and become more like Him. This is, by any definition, discipleship. Then, somewhere along the way, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit does a work of conversion and Jesus comes to live *IN* them. And, at that point, discipleship *continues* and they start to be *for*, *with*, and *one of* others in their community, helping them be with Jesus more and become more like Him by doing the things that Jesus did. As they do, Jesus *IN* them starts to be transferred into the lives of others. And the cycle continues.

The practice of proclaiming the Kingdom can’t be narrowed down to a formula because Jesus modeled it for us wholly through relationship. Every relationship is unique, and so every act of proclamation is a little different. However, if we were to boil down the essentials to their simplest terms, it might look like this:



Take some time to consider some of the relationships in your life. How might you walk them through the truth of the Kingdom of God using these simple terms? Proclaiming the Kingdom isn’t something that can be accomplished in four weeks, but you can begin to see the world around you differently and start a lifelong journey as an ambassador for Christ, proclaiming the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Questions for Community:

- What stuck out to you about this practice?
- How does this understanding of discipleship impact the way that you engage the people around you?
- Are there ways that you think that your life should look different as you live out this practice? What are one or two practical changes that you’d like to make happen?