



Expected Arrival Times

Sanctuary First Connect Bible Study

August 2024

Welcome to Connect!

A Connect Bible Study is a small group who meet regularly to explore faith and Godly responses to life issues, growing in the things of God together as we go. Anyone can host one using these materials and contact us for support and guidance. Online or in-person, our heart is that they offer a relaxed space for faith, friendship and fun.

We hope the resources and discussion points encourage, inspire, and invigorate you on your walk with God.

It might be the conversation follows the discussion as laid out or heads in a different direction, both are wonderful and we hope the outline we offer here is flexible and supportive to engage with the Bible and our faith in fresh and vibrant ways as we make our way in the world as 21st century disciples exploring the wonders of life with Jesus!

What is involved?

Each week begins with an introduction and a 'seed to sow' conversation starter. These are open-ended prompts to inspire creative responses to the themes. Perhaps they will inspire you to write a song or a poem, or to paint, draw, move or explore! We imagine the material for each week would work for 90 minute sessions but feel free to adapt to your group!

Additional Resources

This booklet includes a poem and prayer that explore the wildness of Jesus to reflect upon.

We have a **Resource Pack PDF** for this month's theme with daily Bible readings and prompts.

There are more songs, videos, podcasts and blogs linked to this theme on our **website** and **App**, have fun exploring it all!

Expected Arrival Times...

The Kingdom — God's reign, God's project of restoration for humanity, for life in all its fullness — has come... is here... is soon... is being realised... will come... and is already in the process of becoming! All at the same time! The Kingdom is God's vision for a renewed world of reconciled relationships — how things are meant to be, how they can be, and how they actually are here and now as the Kingdom is being built for us and with us! One of the ways the Kingdom is revealed to us is through divine compassion, glory and wonder. Indeed we get a taste of it at Communion! While we still live in a world of fractured relationships — between one another and with our planet — we also live in one that has witnessed the redemptive and restorative love of Christ who loved us to the cross and beyond!

Jesus said the Kingdom is already at hand, in fact it's already in our midst, and yet it's simultaneously something we deeply long for — the way we long for home, for belonging, for meaning. The Kingdom is not so much a matter of an Arrival Time, but of Arrival *Times*, as God's grace finds us exactly when and where we are.

Yes, the Kingdom can be a hard thing to define and date and tie down, BUT it's not hard to be a part of, or contribute to! In fact it's quite a welcoming place... by design. It's hard to get our head around in the same way concepts like love and happiness can become complicated once you put them under the microscope. But just like love and happiness that doesn't stop them making sense in everyday life, or being instantly recognisable. You don't need to be able to pin down the exact dimensions of love to love someone. You just love them! The Kingdom can be like that — it is the rightness of God in action. And it's at hand!

Weekly overview

- **Now and Not Yet!** — *How the Kingdom has arrived and is still arriving!*
- **Eyes Open!** — *What the Kingdom is like...*
- **On time!** — *How the Kingdom arrives in our lives.*
- **The time is now!** — *What it means to be citizens of heaven, in the here and now.*



Poem

Expected Arrival Times

Apparently it's here
Yet I still wait
All the signs point to presence
All within me yearns for more

I strain to put a finger on it
But I know it without signpost

I listen for sounds of its coming
Even while the small voice whispers on

It's a wow in the now
While I wonder when it will come

And yet in my impatience
And in my embracing the already,
The King makes his home certain through his
Spirit

And my citizenship
Of his kingdom
Is a now
And a not yet
Which stirs me to move.

Jo Black

Prayer

Let us pray

Father God – we pray to you as our Lord, and
as our King

Your kingdom is the home that we yearn for
And also the reality we can live in through
you.

Make us fit ambassadors of your reign
And shape our citizenship to reflect Jesus.

Protect us from homesickness
By building your kingdom in our hearts and
your world

Amen

Jo Black

Week 1: Now and Not Yet!

Introduction:

The Kingdom — God's vision for a renewed world of reconciled relationships — is both here *and* on its way. The same way that loving someone isn't a static thing frozen time — it's a living thing that continues to grow. When we love one another it is something that we enact each day, something we realise and witness moment by moment as it comes into fruition, new every day. The Kingdom is both here and continuing to arrive!

Seeds to sow:

When you look at your neighbourhood, what do you want to 'arrive' that hasn't arrived yet?

Read Luke 17: 20-21

The Kingdom is already here!

One of the theological tensions of the New Testament (and our lives today) is that the Kingdom is *both* something we long for and something that has already come! We yearn to see it realised — and yet it's already among us, weaving us together. In a sense it has arrived and is continuing to arrive.

What do you think that Jesus is saying here in this passage? And what does it mean for us in our day-to-day lives that the Kingdom — God's project of restoration for humanity — is already here in our midst? How do we notice the kingdom in action?

Read 1 Peter 1: 3-9

Living hope

What does this passage say to you about how we can have kingdom hope even when life is tough?

You might want to take time to share examples of how and when this living hope in the Kingdom has helped you (or someone you know or have heard of). Spend some time in prayer together as a group praying for any situations needing more kingdom hope at this time.

Read Acts 28: 30-31

Without hindrance

What, if anything, hinders or holds you back from proclaiming and sharing the good news of the Kingdom? What can you do as a group to encourage and equip one another to share 'without hindrance'?

Week 2: Eyes open!

Introduction:

So what is the Kingdom of heaven *like*? To see the Kingdom in action we need to keep our eyes open, to spot the small things that become the wild things, that become the beautiful things. That become the massive things. The things of the Kingdom.

Seeds to sow:

If you could only tell someone one story to tell them about the Kingdom, what would you tell them?

Read Matthew 13: 44-46

A discovery of great worth

The story of the treasure is contained in just one sentence (verse 44) but what do you uncover when you dig into it?

The story of the pearl is similar to the preceding one, but on this occasion, we are told that the merchant is deliberately searching for a fine pearl. Whereas in the first one the protagonist simply finds the treasure, perhaps literally tripping over it in a field.

How do you respond to the contrast between these stories? That the Kingdom is both something that can be found after an arduous search and something that can simply be stumbled across? What does it tell us about God?

Read Matthew 20: 1-16

Payday

How does this story encourage us? And how does it challenge us and make us uncomfortable? Why do you think it was

important for Jesus to challenge his listeners in this way? Do we (and should we) feel uncomfortable about following his example in this respect?

Read Matthew 13: 31-35

The power of story

A story itself can work like a seed — we think we get it on one level, but as it takes root in us it grows and bears fruit in new ways!

Having reflected in 'seeds to sow' about your favourite story to share about the kingdom, it's time to be creative! Jesus used familiar objects and analogies from the world around his listeners to illustrate the kingdom.

What might prove to be helpful contemporary kingdom images for speaking to your families, neighbours and community? Take time to share and develop ideas together, not forgetting to stop and pray for the Spirit's wisdom and inspiration as you do so.

For instance, what could something like a cinema, or an espresso machine, or a wellington boot, or a bag of pick 'n' mix sweets tell us about the kingdom of God?!

You could begin 'The kingdom of heaven is like...'

Example: 'The Kingdom of heaven is like a cinema, that never runs out of seats, anyone who comes finds a place, somehow there's always space to fit someone else in, AND incredibly everyone gets a good view.

Week 3: On time!

Introduction:

We live through time, present moment to present moment linking past to future. But God is not limited by space and time the way we are. God is not constrained by all sorts of dimensions and preconceptions that we are! Jesus once sat on a hill and got into it with a bunch of folk. And we're still unpacking the profound wisdom of the Sermon on the Mount to this day!

Seeds to sow:

How do you picture Jesus when you picture him preaching?

Read Matthew 5: 1-10

For theirs is the Kingdom...

Kingdom values are not always the same as what our societies value. Jesus tells us that those we might overlook, that we might take for granted — that the world takes for granted — are blessed, are special, that they matter, and are significant. The Kingdom is not a talent agency for go-getters — it is a family that cares for each member.

What does success look like in the kingdom?

As a family of God's people, what kingdom efforts do you notice in one another's lives that the world might not recognise? Take time to encourage one another today so you can continue to grow in kingdom values.

Read Luke 12: 27-31

Seek first the Kingdom

Sometimes we try and squeeze the Kingdom into the gaps around the rest of life. Life is full

of pressures and demands that understandably occupy our minds. But Jesus invites us to start with the Kingdom, not compartmentalised as an additional treasure, but something that is part of every aspect of life.

How do we 'seek first the kingdom' practically day-to-day when there are so many other things looking for priority focus? What gets in the way?

Pray now for one another as you seek to put this into action.

Read Romans 14: 13-21

In the Holy Spirit

How does this passage both support and challenge the things you have already discussed in this session?

What is the one thing about kingdom living that you will hold onto this week?

Week 4: The Time is Now!

Introduction:

What time is it? Well the time is now! The present is all we can act in. The Kingdom is closer than we know. With The Holy Spirit's help we can be citizens of this Kingdom right here and right now. And all it takes is God's grace and our acceptance of who we truly are in him.

Seeds to sow:

Looking at your local community and your neighbourhood — what is it time for?!

Read Philippians 3: 17-21

Our citizenship is in heaven!

What does it actually mean to be 'a citizen of heaven' in the here and now? How does it impact our behaviour and the decisions we make?

Read Ephesians 2: 11-14

A Kingdom that Transcends Borders and Divisions

God's Kingdom, God's reign, is not 'might is right' and defending my patch of soil against yours.

What borders can you see the Kingdom transcending in the world today?

How does this passage offer hope to areas in urgent need of reconciliation?

Read Matthew 19:16-30

With God all things are possible

We cannot buy our way into the Kingdom, or make it arrive on our terms, or to our schedule. What we can do is simply love one another with hearts of compassion and have a

childlike openness to the ongoing arrival times of the Kingdom.

Why not finish this time together by praying for each other as you seek to live as citizens with compassionate childlike hearts? Pray for those whom you long to be open to the news of God's kingdom. Pray for God's kingdom to transcend any boundaries you have drawn up in your hearts.

After praying, take time to reflect as to whether God has been using this theme to encourage you as a group to act on some of those urgent local needs you identified in 'Seeds to Sow'...what are you going to do together with His help?