

The background is a dense, vibrant green jungle scene with various types of leaves, including some with prominent veins and others that are more rounded. A white speech bubble with a pointed tail at the top left is centered in the upper half of the image. Inside the bubble, the text "WORDS OF LIFE" is displayed. "WORDS OF" is in a smaller, bold, dark green sans-serif font. "LIFE" is in a much larger, bold, white sans-serif font, with the letters of "LIFE" filled with a pattern of the same jungle foliage seen in the background.

# WORDS OF LIFE

WEEK 1 DEVOTIONAL



## WEEK 1

### The Kingdom of God is at Hand; Repent!

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

*Mark 1:14-15*



repent—change your hearts and lives

The Old Testament prophet Joel called the people of his day to change direction (cf. Joel 2:12- 13). Joel urges people to make sincere and lasting changes and not simply outward signs. That was also a key to the message Jesus, John the Baptist and the apostles preached. **?** In your experience, what's the difference between simply trying to sound sorry and genuinely choosing to change? What are some of the chief ways Jesus has led you to change your heart and life?

Scholar N. T. Wright described the people who first heard John's and Jesus' preaching: "Many had wanted a Messiah to lead them against the Romans, but they weren't anticipating a prophet telling them to repent.... It was time to turn around and go the right way (that's what 'repentance' means). It was time to stop dreaming and wake up to God's reality." **❓ In what ways does honouring God as king lead you to let God, not your own wishes, direct your life?**

## Mark 1:4, 14-15

Lord God, if I try to fool myself  
(or you) with fine words while  
my heart remains unchanged,  
you see right through me. By  
your Spirit, move me to yearn  
for a new heart and a faithful  
spirit deep inside me. Amen.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# the unexpected kingdom

Jesus was not the kind of Messiah John expected (cf. Luke 3:17). To answer John's question, Jesus pointed to parts of the prophet Isaiah's message that many (then and now) ignored. Jesus' reply... was inviting John to recognize that the things that were happening in Jesus' ministry were the sorts of things the prophet said would accompany God's coming to rule. 🧐 Do you ever struggle to accept God's ways, rather than demanding what you wish God would do?

read

pray

Lord Jesus Christ, at times I can identify with your struggling forerunner. Thank you that even when I'm filled with questions, I always find in you the merciful person who truly was "the one." Amen.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal green ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

# WEDNESDAY

what Jesus' "kingdom" is like

Jesus told his disciples they should forgive “even if Jesus’ parables were never just fun stories—they creatively called his hearers to turn around and change their lives to follow him. Using the tiny mustard seed as an illustration, Jesus showed that the glorious future kingdom was already active in a hidden way in Jesus’ ministry. From humble yeast to fabulous treasure, Jesus’ stories invited people to “trade in” their old way of life for what he offered.

Yeast—really? The whole point of the parable lies in one thing—the transforming power of the leaven. Leaven changed the character of a whole baking... The introduction of the leaven causes a transformation in the dough, and the coming of the Kingdom causes a transformation in life. 🍞 In what ways has your choice to be a citizen of Jesus' kingdom transformed your life? In what parts of your life is the yeast at work now leading you to positive change?

These stories made a bold claim. The gospel of the kingdom isn't a pleasant religious idea that you might like to explore sometime when you've got an hour or two to spare.... It's like a fabulous hoard of treasure, yours for the taking—if you'll sell everything else to buy the field where it's hidden. 🕒 In what ways has Jesus called you to give up any ideas or activities you valued to gain Jesus' kingdom? Has it been worth it?

read

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

pray

Lord Jesus, make me a “yeasty” Christian who can change the world around me for the good. Make me willing to give up anything else to receive your gift of eternal life. Amen.

[illegible]

## THURSDAY

## Jesus' kingdom: out of this world

Pontius Pilate, a hardened Roman bureaucrat, found himself facing a prisoner unlike any he had ever met. He'd seen lots of anger and defiance, but this calm sense that it was really Jesus, not Pilate, who had the ultimate authority—no, he'd never seen that. Jaded as he was, he even wondered if something otherworldly was at work, and asked Jesus, “Where do you come from?” (John 19:9)

British scholar William Barclay wrote of John 18, “[Jesus] makes it quite clear that he claims to be a king and equally clear that his kingdom is not based on force but is a kingdom in the hearts of men. He would never deny that he aimed at conquest, but it was the conquest of love.” To Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and at times even to his disciples, Jesus’ aim looked naïve and unrealistic.

**❓ Did Jesus accomplish “the conquest of love” in our world? Has he conquered your heart?**

To human eyes, it seemed simple: Pilate stood for all of Rome's power and "legal" authority. Yet it wasn't that simple. What's true of Jesus himself is equally true of his kingdom: it's not from this world, but from above (see John 8:23).... Authority: echoes John 10:18, 'I have the right [authority] to give it up, and I have the right [authority] to take it up again.' Jesus' claim and Pilate's are on a collision course. **❓ How do you accept or resist Jesus' life-changing authority in your life?**

read

John 18:33-37, 19:7-12

pray

Lord of all, you came to  
testify to the truth, including  
the truth about who you are  
and where you came from.  
I believe you, and I worship  
and follow you. Amen.

[illegible]

# FRIDAY

Jesus' call to repent is for all of us

As we study Jesus' message of repentance, the great spiritual hazard is the idea (conscious or subconscious) that "those bad people need to repent, but I don't—I'm a good person." As today's readings show, Jesus never encouraged or accepted any version of that idea. It probably shocked many of his hearers to think that that awful tax collector (who worked corruptly with the Romans) went home right with God, and the Pharisee ("I'm not like everyone else") didn't.

The apostle Paul had, at one point, been like the Pharisee in Jesus' story (cf. Philippians 3:4-7). But he trusted Jesus' teaching about repentance so fully that, when he sent his message of good news to Roman Christians he'd never met, he said, "There's no distinction. All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace" (Romans 3:22-24). 🟢 What helps you remember that you need repentance as a regular rhythm in your spiritual life?

Luke made sure his story reflected the irony of the Pharisees grumbling about Jesus eating with “sinners.” The Pharisees refer here to people, like the tax collectors, whom they think disobey God’s laws all the time. But in Luke, Jesus can’t avoid eating with sinners, since all, including Pharisees, are sinners.... He came to call everyone to change. 🟢 **What are some of the most significant, challenging ways in which Jesus has called, and is calling, you to change?**

read

Luke 5:27-32, 18:9-14

pray

Lord Jesus, this isn't abstract, but personal. I put my person, my "self," on the line as a sinner who chooses to be your repentant follower. Thank you for calling me as you did Levi the tax collector. Amen.

[illegible]

# SATURDAY

# Jesus sent his followers to carry on the message

The resurrected Jesus taught his followers to reflect on the big picture of Israel's history from Moses to the Psalms, to see that in the Christ (anointed one) there is salvation and justice. The link between repentance and becoming a member of God's kingdom was there just as it had been at the start of his ministry. But what Jesus shared was far more than just information. It was a job description--he sent them with orders to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. "You are witnesses," he said, promising that God's power would help them spread his message to all nations.

Closed minds had kept Jerusalem's leaders from accepting Jesus. The resurrection called on even Jesus' followers to rethink some of their assumptions. In verse 45, Luke used a great phrase: "He opened their minds to understand the scriptures." Have you ever experienced this kind of "opening" in your Bible study, worship, or prayer? How can you create space for Jesus to open your mind to understand him and his message more fully? Your personal story of a changed heart and life is powerful for the non-religious and nominally religious people you interact with wherever you live, work or play. You, like the disciples, are a witness to God's redemptive work through Jesus Christ. **2** In what ways can you share your personal story of a changed heart and life with those around you?

read

Luke 24:44-49

pray

God, keep me alert for chances  
to faithfully share your story.  
Give me courage when afraid,  
confidence when unsure, passion  
when indifferent. Help me  
share my personal story of a  
changed heart and life. Amen.

This image shows a single page from a notebook or ledger. It features ten horizontal green lines spaced evenly apart, providing a guide for writing. The background is white, and there are no other markings or text on the page.