

Small Group Guide

"Let the Church Be the Church: The Church as God's Visible Kingdom"

Based on a sermon by Chris Irwin of Intermission

Overview

This guide is designed to help your group explore a fuller understanding of the Gospel — one that goes beyond a "ticket to heaven" framework and embraces the reality that Jesus brought the Kingdom of God to earth. Through discussion, reflection, and practical application, your group will be challenged to see themselves as active participants in God's ongoing mission of renewal and restoration.

Before You Begin

Ask someone in the group to open in prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your conversation and to open your eyes to a fuller vision of what the Good News truly is.

Key Takeaways

- The Gospel is not primarily about us going somewhere — it is about God coming here. Jesus did not simply offer a pathway to escape the world; He brought the Kingdom of Heaven into the world.
- The word "Gospel" means good news. When Jesus proclaimed it in Mark 1, He had not yet died, been buried, or risen — which means the Good News is bigger than any single event. It encompasses the entire mission of God to reunite heaven and earth.
- The story of Scripture begins with heaven and earth united in Genesis, torn apart by sin, and moving toward full reunion — culminating in Revelation's vision of the holy city descending to earth. The cross and resurrection are the pivotal turning point in that larger story.
- The church is not a waiting room. It is the visible expression of God's Kingdom on earth today. Through acts of forgiveness, generosity, justice, service, and love, the church makes the reign of King Jesus visible.
- The way Christians talk about the world — especially in front of younger generations — shapes how those younger believers understand the Gospel and their place in it. Words and emotions communicated at home and in church carry significant weight.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Getting to Know Each Other's Starting Points)

1. How would you have answered the question "What is the Gospel?" before hearing this sermon? How might your answer be different now?
2. Chris described showing high schoolers a list of words and emotions they associated with how older generations talk about the world. Words like "evil," "corrupted," and "destroyed" came up, alongside emotions like "fearful," "angry," and "judgmental." Does any of that resonate with your own experience — either as someone who has communicated those things or as someone who received them?

Going Deeper (Engaging the Sermon's Core Ideas)

3. Chris used the image of a person in a room with only a doorway to look through — seeing real things, but not the full picture. In what ways has your understanding of the Gospel been like that doorway view? What might the fuller picture include?
4. In Mark 1, Jesus announces the Kingdom of God before His death and resurrection. What does it mean to you that the Good News is tied to the Kingdom arriving, not just to a future destination? How does that change the way you think about your everyday life?
5. Chris described the traditional Gospel diagram — God on one side, humanity on the other, separated by sin, with Jesus as the bridge — as true but incomplete, even "flattened." Do you agree? What is missing from that picture, and what does a fuller picture add?
6. The sermon describes the Bible's overarching story as heaven and earth being united, torn apart, and ultimately reunited. How does seeing the Gospel within that larger story change how you read Scripture or how you understand your own faith journey?
7. Chris said, "The church is God's chosen way of making His kingdom visible. Forgiveness becomes visible here on earth today. Reconciliation becomes visible. Justice becomes visible. Generosity becomes visible." What does that mean for the specific community your church serves? What does the Kingdom look like in your neighborhood?
8. Acts 1 says Luke's Gospel recorded what Jesus "began" to do and teach — implying that Jesus continues His work through the church by the Holy Spirit. How does that reframe your sense of purpose as a believer? Does it feel like an invitation or a burden? Why?

Personal Reflection (Making It Real)

9. Chris challenged his students to "engage in the heaven that is on earth right now" and to "celebrate all that is good." Where do you see glimpses of God's Kingdom already present in your daily life — in your relationships, your work, your community?
10. Think about the people you interact with most regularly — family members, coworkers, neighbors. In what specific ways could you be, as Chris put it, "a bringer of the kingdom to them through being kind, through sacrifice, through service, through love"?
11. One of the high schoolers said the message he had received was essentially: "The world's terrible. Stay away from it. Believe in Jesus and one day you might get to go to heaven." Have you ever felt that way about the Christian life? What would change about how you live if you truly believed the Kingdom is already here and you are part of it?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting:

1. Audit Your Language Pay attention this week to how you talk about the world — especially around children or younger believers. Notice when your words communicate fear, disgust, or hopelessness, and practice replacing them with language that acknowledges brokenness while affirming God's active presence and renewal.

2. Kingdom Spotting Each day this week, look for one specific sign that God's Kingdom is already present in the world around you — an act of kindness, a moment of reconciliation, beauty in creation, justice being done. Write it down. Share what you found with your group next week.

3. Read the Kingdom Do a focused reading of one Gospel this week — Mark is a good choice given the sermon's focus. Every time you see the phrase "Kingdom of God" or "Kingdom of Heaven," pause and ask: What does this tell me about what God is doing here and now?

4. Pray the Lord's Prayer Differently This week, when you pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," stop and sit with that phrase. Ask God to show you one specific area of your life or community where you can actively participate in bringing His will to earth.

5. Have a Conversation Find a younger person in your life — a teenager, a college student, a young adult — and ask them what they think the Gospel is and how it makes them feel about their life. Listen without correcting. Let their answer inform how you pray for and engage with them going forward.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying through the themes of the sermon. You may use this as a guide:

Father, thank You for not waiting for us to find our way to You — but for coming to us. Thank You that the Good News is not simply a future hope but a present reality. Forgive us for the times we have reduced the Gospel to a ticket out of this world and missed the invitation to participate in Your Kingdom here and now. Open our eyes to see where Your Kingdom is already breaking through. Give us the courage to be Your visible Kingdom in our homes, our workplaces, and our community. May we be bringers of Your good news — not just in words, but in the way we live. Amen.

For Further Study

- Read through the Gospel of Mark with a focus on every mention of the Kingdom of God.
- Explore Acts 1 and 28 together, noting how the book begins and ends with the theme of the Kingdom.
- Consider reading N.T. Wright's work on the Gospel and the Kingdom, which Chris referenced in the sermon.
- Look into the Bible Project's resources on the Kingdom of God, also referenced in the sermon.