

## The Story of Jesus

### Part 9: What if I Feel Far From God?

Mark 4:21-34 - [watch online](#)

#### Summary:

Most people, religious or not, want to experience and even know God. But too often God seems elusive, mystical, unattainable. But maybe we're just trying too hard. Maybe it's so much better, more attainable, and more real than we ever thought.

#### Main Points:

One of the most frustrating parts of Christianity is trying to experience and understand God and finding nothing.

When we see life as a story to live instead of a formula to figure out we discover the life Jesus offers.

To discover the Kingdom of God we have to be willing to search for it.

Once the Kingdom of God is planted it will grow.

The Kingdom of God always starts out looking insignificant.

God uses small beginnings to create huge results.

Instead of trying to get the "right" answers, we need to engage with and enter into the story of Jesus.

We are all invited to participate in the story of Jesus

#### Four Pieces of Advice:

Be honest: Am I willing to see/experience the Kingdom of God?

Keep digging: Ask questions and ask questions with others who are asking questions.

Be patient: Don't compare your story to others'.

Be purposeful: Plant kingdom seeds with your words and your actions.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever felt far from God and/or frustrated in your faith journey? What do you think caused it? What did you do with those feelings?
2. Jon said, "When we see life as a story to live instead of a formula to figure out we discover the life Jesus offers." How would you describe the difference? Out of these two views, how do you think you tend to view your life?
3. Re-read the Parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:26-32). What stands out to you? How would you describe the Kingdom of God based on these examples?
4. Out of the "Four Pieces of Advice" (refer to notes) Jon gave us, which seems like it will be the easiest and which seems like it might be more difficult? Why?
5. As we participate in the story of Jesus this week, how can your group pray with you?

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#### Transcript:

**IN:** Feel far from God? God seem mysterious? Too much to figure out?

Maybe we're trying too hard... maybe instead of a puzzle to solve... this whole thing more a story to live... one line, one chapter at a time... so let's talk about it together.

**WE:** Let's be honest... Sometimes following Jesus is frustrating.

I mean, it's amazing... the joy, peace, comfort, love, purpose, meaning Jesus gives is awesome...

Except when it's not... B/c sometimes it's not... Sometimes it's hard, sometimes it just seems like work, sometimes it's just plain frustrating...

One of the most frustrating parts of Xianity is trying to experience and understand God and finding nothing.

Most of us (xian or not), whether we put it in these words or not... want to understand and, even better, KNOW and EXPERIENCE God... but it seems like some kind of elusive magical existence that we just can't figure out...

Either we feel we should know more, be doing more, or not as far along as we want to be... can't find what works.

Especially when we think we should be feeling/experiencing something that we're not... or worse yet... we're told we're supposed to feel/experience something (and seems like everyone else is) and we don't

And so what do us good modern/westerners do?

Try to figure out the formula...try to find the right way to do it/the right answer... and then just keep trying harder and harder.

- Go to church/bible study/youth group/camp
- Listen to right podcasts/read right books/say right prayers/do right rituals or routines
- Even study the bible or other religious texts harder and harder

Not necessarily bad things, but often still doesn't "work"

So a lot of people either give up or end up faking it... saying they believe something but it doesn't affect their actual life at all.

- One reason why you left?

But why would we think a "spiritual formula" would ever "work"?

- What has affected your life/who you are more... doing your math homework... or reading/listening to/watching that story that captured your imagination and emotions?
- No one ever talks about their love for a certain edition of a math book... but get someone talking about the Hobbit/Star Trek/Star Wars/Top Gun or Stranger Things and there is a passion there.

WHY?

Stories make us think instead of memorize... imagine instead of perform... to become something instead of making us blindly do the same things over and over with no change/growth.

Life is a story to be lived not a math problem to solve... why would experiencing God and discovering the true life he gives be any different?

So when Jesus was trying to explain what God was like/what his kingdom would be like... instead of giving us 7 easy steps to experiencing the KoG... He told stories...

But they aren't nice, cute, safe stories... They are parables designed to challenge what we think about our world, ourselves, and especially the KoG... they are designed to create a change in us if we are willing to truly listen...

And it's at that point we enter into the story ourselves and frustration gives way to discovering, enjoying, and sharing the life Jesus offers...

B/c... When we see life as a story to live instead of a formula to figure out we discover the life Jesus offers...

As we saw last time, Jesus told a parable about different soils... representing people's response to his announcement of the KoG...

Then he tells 3 more parables about the KoG...

Work on a few levels... describing the KoG, what it would look like as it came to earth, how it works in the world, how it works in us, and our role in it...

**GOD: 21-23** More of an object lesson than a story I guess

The point of a lamp is give out as much light as possible

Jesus is saying... though some people/soil don't understand and accept the message of the KoG (God coming to earth to restore his relationship with us and restore our true humanity in his love)... it isn't meant to be kept secret...

Saying... "It might be a secret for now... but that's not what it is designed for... soon God's light will be uncovered and shine in the world so everyone can see it..."

"The whole truth and scope of what this is (rescue invasion/turning point of human history) might not be seen right now... but soon it will all be revealed"

- When? At the most important point in the history of the cosmos... Jesus' resurrection.

From then on... The KoG won't be some secret knowledge for a select few to keep to themselves...

It'll be for every human who is willing to see it.

- And for those who do they will have the role of continuing to shine the light of the KoG

Everyone will have a decision to make... to open their eyes/ears or not...

But how do we open our eyes/ears? This still seems like that frustrating, mysterious thing that makes us feel distant from God, right?

It might be mysterious but it's not secret and it's not out of reach or far from any of us...

**24-25** We can hear Jesus' teaching about the KoG but not actually HEAR. (Me listening to Liz)

The level to which we want to hear, want to be challenged, want to be changed is the level of which we will fully understand what he's talking about.

To discover the KoG we have to be willing to search for it.

Those who are willing to search will be given what they are looking for... but those who simply want nice stories, want a God that already lines up with their own views, who aren't willing to be challenged or changed will lose even what they think they understand.

We like the safe religious formula... Listening to teachings we already agree with, we like asking question after question... reading book after book, doing study after study without really listening to, evaluating, and applying the answers...

But if we really want to experience the KoG and understand God's heart we have to be willing to dig deeper and deeper and then do something with what we discover.

If we are willing to listen, really sit with what Jesus says, what God has revealed about himself in the BW's (maybe even the franciscan reading Aaron showed us last time), be with others doing the same thing...

We will be given more and more but if we won't listen if we think we "know it all already" even what we think we know will be taken from us.

I've seen people who "know all of that already", been Xians for years (even professional theologians)... settle for surface level knowledge... not actually look to find the KoG in their lives...

- And their relationships are dry, fragile (egg shells),
- They are full of anxiety, bitterness, unforgiving, angry...
- b/c they haven't dug and allowed the story of Jesus to affect their own story...

But I've also watched (this is why I do what I do) as people who might not know all the theology, bible stories, don't know who Absalom is, get Peter and Paul mixed up...

- Grow more and more into who Jesus made them to be
- Display the fruit of the Spirit in their everyday life,

B/c they don't just want the formula.

- They want to live to live the story and so they dig, ask questions,
- They aren't afraid of doubts. They use them to dig deeper and the result is discovery, growth, transformation...
- They start to do some of the practices of the Art of following Jesus.

But that type of transformation can be frustrating... and they don't always see it happening... b/c it's slow

That's the nature of the KoG... And Jesus says, "Maybe another story will help."

**26-29** Often in the post-enlightenment western world, we want to pick apart parables and try to get a meaning for each little word... try to chart it out and categorize everything...

You ever have an English teacher ruin a perfectly good story by trying to diagram and categorize and turn it into a test of some sort? (Not you Mrs. Kazas... if you watch)

Can't understand parables that way... meant to be taken as a whole experience...

What Jesus is saying is **once the KoG is planted it will grow**. It's not something we can figure out/create a formula for...

The immediate meaning for the original hearers is Jesus is scattering seed with his message/life and eventually it will produce a crop to be harvested and no one will understand how it happened... the light will suddenly shine from the lamp...

- How did Xianity start from 11 guys and within a few decades spread across the Roman Empire?

And for our context right now... Maybe you don't feel like you are growing enough, not understanding enough, not as far as you think you should be, not seeing the changes you want yet...

But, if we are willing to allow those seeds to be planted in us, willing to explore, question, dig, and willing to find... then those seeds will grow and it will eventually create a crop to be harvested.

Maybe your context is that you've been trying to share the KoG with others with your actions and words... but you're not seeing any difference/growth/change... been asking, "What does Jesus' love look like" in this relationship but nothing is happening...

- As we scatter the message of the KoG through our words, love, big/small actions it **will** create a crop but it will happen in God's time and speed.

Jesus is saying... "People didn't see anything happening when I started either... but as the seed is scattered God will take care of it growing."

We do our part and leave the rest to God.

Crosscreek... when will we grow?

- Scatter seed and let God worry about the timing and results.

But that just seems so mundane... I want results, I want something big... like this is the KoG... wouldn't you think the whole story would be just like this massive thing... Immediate change, results... taking over governments, etc.

Like a Marvel movie- immediate action and a step by step program to victory!... NOPE.

It's more like reading Tolkien... rich... slow... intricate... lots of songs and relationships and depth... with moments of excitement sprinkled in.

**30-34** **The Kog always starts out looking insignificant.**

- Jesus... nothing to make people think he was God on earth
- Humble birth/parents... kinda ugly and short
- Ministry starts out in wilderness, collects 12 nobodies to lead his movement. Who rarely understood him and one was going to get him killed.

But what happened? Not only changed the ancient mediterranean, it changed the world, changed the course of human history...

And if you believe he is who he said he is and did what he said he did... from those small beginnings, death itself was defeated. It changed eternity.

And it's the same in our story too... big life changes rarely look big when we start... **God uses small beginnings to create huge results...**

Maybe it's a little lingering doubt/question that you have to dig into...

- Asking WHY is so important... why believe this, why would God say this
- Been the springboard for most of my growth (Hell)

Maybe it's one conversation, idea, thought, experience that sends you searching and you find more than you expected

- Mick... Not freedom from doubt. Trusting even if answers are perfectly right there.

One act of love/word of encouragement that makes your friend/neighbor start thinking

And often it comes when we're simply living our life and keeping our minds/hearts open to whatever God wants to show us.

So instead of chasing and waiting for the big life changing moments to happen to us...chasing one spiritual high after another...

Maybe we need to enjoy the small thoughts, questions, whisperings God sends us and see where they go.

- Like a simple detail in a story that turns into a major plot component... Bilbo finding a little ring.

Crosscreek really started with a little thought in a church staff meeting... What if the Church is more than entertaining church people once a week?

- What would it look like if people could have doubts/questions and still belong?

**YOU:** So instead of being frustrated that we aren't where we think we should be... and

**Instead of trying to get the "right" answers... we need to engage with and enter into the story of Jesus**

How do we do that... what does that look like?

Not going to give you a formula... more like advice that can help us discover our story...

4 pieces of advice... **Be honest: Am I willing to see/experience the KoG?**

- How are your ears?
- Are you willing to listen/be receptive/actually listen to understand and apply?
- It won't always be comfortable or comforting... might have to actually change something about ourselves.

But, if we are willing to see it, we will find the KoG

**Keep digging: Ask questions and ask questions with others who are asking questions. ...**

- Chase those doubts/curiosities
- What do you believe? Why? B/c someone told you or you discovered it yourself?

Connect Group... show up/ask your questions... they aren't just for you!

- Discover the KoG together... Best moments when someone has a question that has nothing to do with the prepared set of questions.

But it won't look like how we expect... it will start small... and it will grow... but we have no control over how it grows...

SO... **Be patient: Don't compare your story to others'** There is no "supposed to" schedule...

- Do that all the time with people who are younger with larger ministries.

**Be purposeful: Plant kingdom seeds with your words and your actions**

Talk about Jesus and what you've been discovering, the difference he's made... if you've experienced it you can share it.

- Little things, not long sermons... I'll pray for you. I'm so thankful God made \_\_\_\_\_.

What small acts of love can you do to plant seeds? Service/Encouragement/Forgiveness/Grace

What can we do as a community? Leslie MS.

**WE:** The KoG doesn't look like what we expect... started small but no one could stop it's growth

It's the same now in our own lives and in our community...

It might not always seem monumental and earth shaking... but each seed that we allow to be planted in us and that we plant for others has the potential to not just plant a tree but produce orchards for generations.

We might not always see immediate results/growth, we might not understand exactly how it all "works" but it is growing... and nothing can stop it.

The efforts we make/the seeds we sow for the kingdom, are never wasted... they are growing even when we don't see it (MAP)

We get to do our part and watch as the story unfolds.

**We are all invited to participate in the story of Jesus**

