

a guided  
EXPERIENCE  
through  
*scripture*

 I live the  
JOURNEY

*changing the world* STARTING WITH ME



Father, show me what  
step of faith I can take as  
I Live the Journey.

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GOD'S SPIRIT BECKONS.  
There are **things to do**  
and **places to go!**

This **RESURRECTION LIFE**  
you received from God is  
not a TIMID, GRAVE-TENDING LIFE.

It's **adventurously**  
**expectant...**

Romans 8:14-15

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MAY 4 - MAY 29

*created for the journey community by*  
BRIAN C. BERRY

# about THIS GUIDE

*thanks* for taking the time to dive in with us in this portion of "I Live the Journey: changing the world starting with me." Our prayer is that God will speak specifically to you through these brief reading and response times in ways that change you and impact others around you as a result. Practically speaking, as you go through these next four weeks, you'll discover that each day has the same four elements:

**THEMED READINGS:** There's a Scripture and devotional reading for each day, Monday through Friday, that is on the same main subject we'll be talking about the following weekend in our services. They are a great way to prepare your heart for what God might want to say to you in this series. So set a daily time that works for you to read, pray, interact with and respond to God's leading.

**SOME PROMPTS FOR "ME" TO THINK ABOUT:** These are some thoughts to get you personally thinking about this topic and your own life. In addition, our daily prayer for this series: "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey" is a great prayer to pray as you reflect on these readings during the week.

**QUESTIONS FOR "ME" TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR MY GROUP:** These questions are designed for you to talk about with a friend or two, your spouse, your life group, your teens... really anyone who is reading this Journal and wants to make this more than just a private experience you do alone.

## AN ACTIVITY TO DO (ESPECIALLY IF YOU HAVE YOUNG CHILDREN)

These are family friendly ways to empower you as a spiritual leader in your home and to get your kids to join you in conversation about the impact this series can have on your entire home.

As you dive into this Journal, know you're part of a much larger community doing this with you. So let's all agree with this reminder from Paul as if he were giving it our Journey community directly: "God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant..." (Romans 8:14-15) Now, let's live it!

*Week 1 - (May 4 - May 8)*

WE LIVE THE JOURNEY TOGETHER. THE POWER OF EVERYONE.

Monday – This is a “we” thing . . . . . 4  
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 Wednesday – Two are better than one. . . . . 8  
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*Week 2 - (May 11 - May 15)*

I LIVE THE JOURNEY BY FAITH.

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*Week 3 - (May 18 - May 22)*

I SACRIFICED TO LIVE THE JOURNEY, AND IT WAS WORTH IT!

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 Wednesday – When all I have is all that matters . . . . . 28  
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*Week 4 - (May 25 - May 29)*

WE HAVE A VISION TO LIVE THE JOURNEY

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# together: THIS IS A "WE" THING

(Genesis 1:26–27)

*"Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness..."*

*So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."*

*did you notice* that powerful and unexpected set of pronouns on page one of the Bible? "Let US make human beings in OUR image, in OUR likeness." Those are not typos against the backdrop of the singular "he" in the second sentence. The plural pronouns are also not because the Bible says we were created in the image of multiple gods either. It's plain and simply this: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are at the very core of who God is and they are the ultimate "we" thing. They work together as a unit, and when God set out to make human beings, he set out to make them part of a community. Not just a community of people made in the likeness of A God, but made in the likeness of THE God who is three persons in one. It's the mysterious and beautifully complex doctrine that theologians call the "Trinity." It's not only all over the Bible, but it's written all over the soul of every human being on the planet too.

*the truth is,* we are all created to be a "we" thing. You. Me. Us. Them. Him. Her. God. We. We all are meant to do life in a way that runs against the grain of the "I got this" mindset that our culture pushes. It flies in the face of the "you can do anything you want" motivational speeches we tell each other. In fact, in John 15:5, Jesus actually said, "Apart from me, you can do nothing." Let that sink in. Literally, when your life is a reflection of what you can do on your own, it doesn't amount to much worth bragging about. But the minute you take your life and connect it to God, you become a piece of the most powerful "we" in the universe.

*that's why* we are embarking on a journey together over this next four weeks. It will stretch OUR faith. It will move US to greater connection with God. It will move us to be the "WE" that we were all created to be. How exciting is that?

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Confess to God the places you've pushed God away as if life was truly a "me" thing and not a "we" thing you were doing. Invite God to be present in you today. Notice the times throughout your day when you were tempted to say "I got this" and instead, replace it with "God, let's do this."

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

In what ways have you learned to be a "me" instead of a "we"? How deeply ingrained in you is the idea that you can do life on your own? How quickly do you seek out God or a community of believers when life gets tough?

What is the role of this group in our calling of being a "we" community?

What are you hoping that God will do in "us" these next four weeks of *I Live the Journey*?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Take a single piece of paper and cut or tear it into as many pieces as you have people in your family. If you have a big ol' family, you might need a big ol' piece of paper. Then have each person decorate their piece of the family puzzle. If you have an infant in your home, don't leave them out; decorate one for them. Each person can use words that describe them, draw pictures, or simply color them, but it should be something they felt represented them well. Once you're all done, give each person a chance to share why they decorated their piece of this family puzzle the way they did.

Now, get some tape and reassemble your family back into one single piece of paper. Remind each other that God has made you a "we" thing and that everyone is needed. You could even point out that God is like the tape that turns us from a group of people, into a beautiful Imago Dei family unit.

# together: FOR THE COMMON GOOD

(1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

*"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*

*Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*

*what an awesome truth it is* that God has made everyone unique and has gifted each of us to make a unique contribution, too. Think about it. Not only is your DNA and fingerprint uniquely yours, but it's as true of you as it is of some 7 billion people on the planet; and that's just the people that are alive! It's not like you share them with someone in the past either. Make no mistake: none of us are the source of random misguided accidents! We are all, regardless of our current connection with God, created on purpose and for a purpose.

In this text, the Apostle Paul is reminding a community of Jesus followers in the city of Corinth that there are two things that uniquely set them apart. First, we have the Holy Spirit living in us, and when the Spirit of God dwells in you, it changes you. There's no way it cannot. While the Imago Dei stamp on every soul means that God has gifted all people with life, it is also true that God has uniquely touched the lives of those who have invited his Holy Spirit to live in them. That makes sense. Inviting God into our story might not change our physical fingerprint, but it should change our lives in some really profound ways.

Secondly, while God may reveal to you new strengths or even give you a set of supernatural abilities that you never have had in the past, the truth is, God's presence changes even how we use the very same strengths we've had for years for His Kingdom. The primary reason that God blesses you is so that you can be a blessing to others for the "common good."

So, as one who wants to Live the Journey together with us, we are counting on you to be all that God made you to be. Go ahead and crush it for Jesus. We can't wait to witness the work God is going to do in and through you today!

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Ask God to reveal to you the ways that God is changing you. Invite the Holy Spirit to put his stamp on your life in ways that are not only affecting you, but the world around you. Prayerfully ask and act on the answer to this question today: "God, how do you want to uniquely use me for the common good today?"

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Take some time to share how you've noticed the stamp of the Holy Spirit in each other's lives. What are the moments you recall when someone did or said something in your community where you thought, "That's a God thing"?

If you're doing this with your life group, have you observed a way in which God has uniquely gifted your community to make a contribution for the common good? Has God collectively wired your group in a way that you are called to serve, reach out, or live out your faith together?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* This would be a great day to do the classic encouragement circle. Turn off your TV, your cell phones, and other distractions and sit in a group. You could do this after dinner at the table or in your front room. (Now, go around the circle, giving each family member 3 minutes. No, it doesn't have to be exactly 3 minutes, but yup, you should actually time it no matter what amount of time you choose. This will make sure no one person gets showered with encouragement above another.) In that time, the rest of the family simply tells them all the awesome ways they make a godly contribution to our family. Point out the God moments where you've seen God in one another. End by thanking God for making each of you unique and using each of you to make your family awesome.

# together: TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If they fall down, they can help each other up. But pity those who fall and have no one to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

*Have you ever watched* a really long train go by you? You know, like as a kid while your parents were driving you somewhere and you started counting cars. If you did, chances are you might have noticed a couple of things. Maybe you thought, "Wow, those graffiti artists are amazing" or maybe you noticed they never had a cool red caboose like in the movies. But, you might have also noticed that the longer the train, the more engines they put on it. This is not simple math though. For example, assuming a single engine could pull 50 cars down the track, you might naturally assume that 2 engines could pull 100 cars and 3 could pull 150. However, that's not true. Because of the physics principle of synergy, where the sum is greater than its parts, the truth is that if one engine can pull 50 cars, two engines might be able to pull 150. Together, they can do a lot more!

But that's not just true of trains, *it's true of us.* The word synergy comes from the Greek word "synergeia" - meaning working together, and it's a game changer in the way we do life. It's why Solomon reminded his readers in Ecclesiastes that we all are better together. Together we are stronger, more resilient, more helpful, more powerful, and we share more energy. When we synergize our efforts with the efforts of those around us, we exponentially increase our impact on the world. That's what it means to Live the Journey together. It means that together, we can make a massive impact for God's Kingdom because, instead of just doing our part, we increase our impact by doing it in tandem with God and the community around us.

Now that's a synergy worth joining. So go ahead, do something today in partnership with God and his people and watch your impact increase.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

In a famous book by Henry Blackaby called "Experiencing God," he reminds his readers that they should stop praying the prayer, "God, please bless what I'm doing" and instead, start praying the prayer, "God, where are you at work around me already and how can I join you in what you're already doing?" Try it today and look for ways that you can join God and others around you in doing things that God is already blessing. That synergy could really change your day in some powerful ways.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Share some examples of where you've seen synergy. Where have you discovered that your life is better and your impact more significant when joining a team to accomplish something together? Where have you discovered the reverse, where perhaps a lack of synergy has made everything seem like you're pushing a ball uphill by yourself?

What are you doing to increase your synergy with God these days? What is helping you and God work together, instead of against one another? Share some insights on connecting with God and maybe even try something new this week.

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* get some string, dental floss, or light fishing line. Now, invite your kids to do a tug o' war with you or one another. How hard was it to get the string to break? Now, do it again, but this time with two layers of the string. Again, ask how much harder that was to break? Finally, actually braid or have your kids braid some of the string into a triple chord. Now try and break it again. This time, depending on your string, you might not actually be able to do it.

Now, use your learning to talk about synergy and how, when your family works together, you can make a greater impact. You could talk about chores at home, saving money, or even conserving energy. When everyone works together, the impact is so much more significant. Ask if there are some things that God might be calling your family to work on together for a greater impact.

# together: WE ARE ONE IN JESUS

(John 17:20–23)

*"My prayer is not for [my twelve disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

*those are words* from Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just before he was betrayed and then crucified. Jesus, knowing what is ahead, stops to pray and has a conversation with the Father about US! Notice his prayer for those who would become Jesus followers in the days and years ahead is that we would be united. And not just a little bit. He prays that we would be completely united. In fact, he uses the beauty of the Trinity that we looked at on Monday as his model. He prayed, "Just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us." What an amazing thought. On Jesus' final days, he was praying that those who claim to follow Jesus would be so tight with God and with the community of believers that they would be beautifully and complexly united together in ways that would be as hard to separate as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are.

So that begs some questions: How united are we? Are we rejoicing with those who rejoice? Are we mourning with those who mourn? Are we serving with those who serve? Are we, together with God and His people, doing life in ways that the world around us is taking notice?

That last question is a kicker too. It's a chief motivation in the *I live the Journey* hopes and dreams we have for our community, and it was the punch line of Jesus' prayer. When God's people work together, it changes the world in such a profound way that those who are far from God stop and take note. Let's join Jesus in making this prayer a reality. "May the world around us know we are together in Jesus and we wouldn't want it any other way."

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Take time to pray that you would be united with God and others today. If there's someone you need to forgive or a relationship in your life that you need God to heal so there can be unity, then invite God to do just that.

Pray that Journey Community Church would not just be a bunch of individuals, but that we would be a united front for the Kingdom of God. Ask God to reveal to you ways that you can put actions to those convictions.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Talk about unity. Where have you experienced the joy of it? In what ways has it blessed you and those around you?

Talk about division. Where have you experienced pain in life because of it? In what ways have you seen it turn people away from Jesus?

Talk about Jesus. How has the unique call of God united you with others and given evidence that God is answering Jesus' garden prayer through you?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* write the word "Unity" on a piece of paper like this:

U  
N  
I  
T  
Y

Now, as a family, use the word "Unity" to become an acrostic and use each letter as the starting point to come up with a set of characteristics or statements that make up a united family. For example: **U**nderstanding. **N**ever give up. **I**nvested. **T**ogether. **Y**es we can. OR **U**nconditional. **N**ot divided. **I** got your back. **T**ake it to God in prayer. **Y**ou can count on me.

Put your list on your fridge and use it as a reminder of what it means for your family to work together as a unit for Jesus.

# together: THE JOY OF UNITY

(Psalms 133:1–3)

*“How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!*

*It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”*

*did you know* that the text above is not just the first 3 verses of Psalm 133; it is the entirety of Psalm 133. That’s right, this Psalm is a single observation followed by two similes and a conclusion.

*the observation is this:* When God’s people live together in unity, it’s the ultimate good. It’s joyful. It’s fun. It’s life giving. It’s inspiring. It’s peaceful. It’s the best thing you could ever experience.

Then David offers us two word pictures to give this truth some depth. First, he writes that it’s like the sacred oil of the temple flowing all over an anointed man of God. The unity of God’s people is so good that it conjured up images in David of God’s blessing overflowing all over the place. It’s all over Aaron’s beard and robe. It’s everywhere and in everything. Secondly, he writes that it’s like morning dew of the highlands of Mt. Hermon falling in the desert landscape of Mt. Zion. In this case, the image it brought to mind is one of life-giving water in a parched ecosystem. When God’s people do life together, it brings life to places that seemed hopeless. It’s literally providing the potential for life to exist where before there was only rocks and dirt.

*his conclusion?* When God’s people are united, God blesses and gives us eternal life. No wonder he was inspired to write it down, and how awesome would it be if that’s what we were known for at JCC? What if we, God’s people, were so united and together in what we were doing that people trying to describe it started searching for pictures of anointing and blessing? What if God’s presence was so powerfully working among us, that people wrote poetry about it? That would be amazing. Let’s live that journey together!!

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Read Psalm 133 a couple more times. Use it as a prayer, even adding your own word picture that it brings up in for you how great unity is. Consider writing it down on a piece of paper and praying Psalm 133 all day. Meditate on it and ask God to bless your day with an amazing, God only, kind of unity.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Read Psalm 133 as a group. Then have each of you share a word picture of "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity." What images of blessing does people doing life in unity bring up in you?

Take some time to celebrate the places where God has brought even a little unity to your story. Act like David and shout it from the mountaintops in praise! Brag about how awesome unity is and the joy you get when you truly experience it! Thank God for that tremendous gift and commit to pursuing more of it this week.

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* As a family, talk about unity. Talk about how awesome it is when things work together. Talk about baking a cake or making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich or having cookies and milk. Talk about the beauty of things that are better together like sunshine and the beach.

Now, give everyone a piece of paper and have family drawing time. Each person gets to make their own personal art piece of a picture of unity. It could be the sunshine and the beach or your family all holding hands or a giant PB and J sandwich.

When you're done, share your art, display it in your home, and celebrate how much more awesome life and family is when we invite God to bring His unity to our family.

# faith.

## LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

(Hebrews 11:5–6)

*“By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death:*

*“He could not be found, because God had taken him away.” For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

The story of Enoch can be found in Genesis, and while his story is not long and drawn out, it is powerful. Genesis 5:24 reads, “Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.” Imagine that! Here’s a man whose faith is so profound and so completely other that God said, “I think we’ll skip the whole death thing with this guy. I want him with me now.” So he was just here one day, and gone the next. Why? Because God took him.

When writing an entire chapter that famously expands on the impact of a life lived in faith, the author of Hebrews pulls the story of Enoch from the Scriptures and reminds us, “When we talk about faith, this is what we’re talking about.” We’re not talking about religious behavior or believing something that is spiritually true in another realm. We’re also not talking about a sideline issue or something that would be nice to have one day. It’s so essential to the life God has called us to that without it, pleasing God becomes an impossible idea. In other words, when we live by faith, we’re becoming the kind of people who do life with God on such an intimate level that, like Enoch, God rewards.

*it was Jesus* who once said to a crowd gathered around him, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find.” (Matt 7:7) God is not into hiding. He wants to reveal himself to us as we reach out to God by faith. That is the true invitation to Live the Journey. As we lean into God and live by faith today, the promise of God is that you’ll find he was already leaning back. Let’s live that kind of faith. The kind that seeks to please God in all we do and fully experiences God as a result.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Pause and take a few minutes before moving on to ask, mediate on, and explore this question in some depth: “How earnestly am I seeking God?” Be honest with yourself. God is not confused on the answer and has no interest in hiding the truth from you. The answer can’t be “not at all” or you wouldn’t be reading this - so don’t let the devil feed you that lie. But maybe it also isn’t “with all my heart, mind, body, and strength” either. As you think about where you’re seeking God consistently and where you need to make some movement, remember that faith is not a single leap. It’s a series of steps. So take one sustainable step closer to God today and give him another area of your life in faith.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Go ahead and imagine together: What would it have been like to know Enoch? How do you think he treated people, viewed the world, or navigated trials? What do you imagine you might miss most now that God took him? Who in your world has some Enoch characteristics and inspires you to walk more faithfully with God?

Think about some faith risks you’ve taken. As you’ve trusted God and responded to his call on your life, share with one another your experiences. In what ways could you be a witness that God “rewards those who earnestly seek him”?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Go around your house and gather all kinds of shoes. Get a soccer cleat, a flip flop, a hiking boot, a sneaker... maybe like 5 or 6 different types and even sizes. Remind your kids that one of the things we do by faith is to walk with God daily. You can tell them that Enoch was amazing at this, and that no matter what shoes he wore, Enoch walked with God and everybody knew it.

Then have someone pick up a shoe, and one at a time, describe how someone could serve God wearing that shoe. If you have your son’s sports shoes in hand, talk about ways to express a faith in God while playing sports. If you have a parent’s work shoes, then talk about how you do that at work. Have some fun with it and remind each other that as a family, we want to walk with God faithfully everywhere we go, no matter what shoes we wear or don’t wear.

# faith.

## RESPONDING TO GOD'S CALL

(Matthew 14:27-29)

*"But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."*

*by definition*, faith requires that we confront our fears. It is not natural. It doesn't live in the realm of predictable and comfortable or we'd all be doing it all the time. Instead, faith is risky and gutsy and moves us to new connections with God because it calls out parts of us that we otherwise would never tap into. It's the beauty of the story of Peter walking on water.

At first, this seems like a ridiculous idea to Peter and to everyone else. People don't walk on water. That's what Peter thought too. He, along with the other disciples, thought they were seeing a ghost or an evil spirit come toward them. They believed that the deep waters were inhabited by evil. It was dark. They were over the deep. Something or someone is on top of the water walking toward them. This is bad. That is until Jesus speaks and tells them that their assumptions are all wrong. Jesus is not an evil ghost; he is God. He's walking on water and tells the disciples to take courage, trust Jesus, and stop responding in fear.

Now pause in this story to understand long enough that it is at this point, when Peter gets the brilliant idea, "If Jesus can do it, I can do it." No one else in the boat is thinking this. But to make sure he's not totally crazy, Peter asks Jesus for confirmation that this idea of his will work. Essentially, like a curious junior higher kid he asks, "Hey Jesus, can I walk on water too?" Jesus responds to this with one word: Come. Peter responds with one action: Movement by faith into the unknown.

That's a beautiful picture of what faith truly is. When we say, "I Live the Journey," what we're saying to one another is, "I'm listening for the call of God on my life and when I hear it, I respond in faith." It's gutsy. It's what some would call crazy. But bottom line, it's the stuff that people keep talking about for generations to come. It's the kind of life that believes that God is profoundly good and every risk we take in faith toward him is a blessing.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Today would be a great day to lean into our communal prayer for this series. It's essentially the same prayer Peter prayed when he said "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." So as you pray: "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey," imagine that God is calling you out into the deep unknown and promising that your step of courage and the fears you're leaving behind will be met with the very arms of God.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Can you identify some fears that are keeping or have kept you from taking faith risks? How does that play itself out in terms of your relationships, your work place, your finances, your family... or your \_\_\_\_\_?

What faith step are you considering in this series as you Live the Journey? Is there an area where you most need to trust God and risk it for the Kingdom?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Put on your imagination hats and walk through the story of Peter and Jesus walking on the water. You can google Matthew 14 or get a paper Bible and read up on the rest of the story to refresh your memory of the details. Now, as a family, try and relive the experience and then ask yourselves, what risks do you think God is calling our family to take in faith as part of *I Live the Journey*? Here's some questions to help:

- What was the temperature that night?
- What was Jesus wearing? Were his feet getting wet or was he literally on top of the water, not even splashing or leaving footsteps?
- What were the other 11 disciples doing while Peter was walking on the water? Were they saying anything? Were they scared or amazed or shocked?
- How far did peter walk? 2 steps? 20?
- How does Peter get back in the boat after he gets scared? Did Jesus carry him? Did he walk back with Jesus? Did he miraculously just appear in the boat?

# faith.

## A FAITH WORTH REMEMBERING

(Hebrews 11:1-2)

*"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."*

Hmmm... that's a thought we don't often ponder. What do you want to be commended for in life? If the men and women of old were commended for their faith, what do you want to be known for? Maybe we might rephrase that question like this: "What will people say about you at your funeral as they swap stories about the life you led and the experiences they shared with you?" Or perhaps this might get your brain rolling: "If life were a movie and you were the producer, what lifetime achievement award would you really love to receive at the final Grammys?"

The author of Hebrews is lobbying for us to answer those questions with the same word he sees all over the life of those he deeply respects: faith. When it's all said and done, the thing that reflects a life worth living is one that is lived in faith. It's not the kind of thing that what we can easily see and touch and qualitatively define. It's not a life filled with the nicest of things and the accolades of the world. Instead, it's a life that chooses to believe that the unseen realities of life are more important than the visual ones.

*when we go about our day today,* what would be different if we wanted the conclusion to be, "Now that was a day lived by faith"? What if you still went to work or school or the grocery store? What if nothing was different except your perspective and the mindset behind the decisions you made? Maybe the result would be a life that could say, "I Live the Journey. I'm living and breathing and doing life with Jesus everyday. I'm asking God to reveal to me the stuff in my life that's holding me back. I'm taking risks and living by faith. I'm not passively seeking God, but actively yearning for God to be my ultimate reality."

That sounds like the kind of life people write about. That sounds like a journey worth living, and that will change the world. That sounds like the stuff of Hebrews 11. May God be with us as we embrace that kind of life.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

What if you were asked to write the epitaph for your own life? You know, like the paragraph they read about you at your funeral. What if instead of making stuff up you wished your friends and family would say, you actually wrote what is really true of you? As you think about it, thank God for the pieces of your story that are praise worthy and truly connected with God in your life. Now begin to reorient your story this week towards the things you actually want to be commended for, and turn away from the stuff you do not.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Talk about your own faith. Where do you feel like your faith is vibrant and where is it stagnant? What is fueling your faith that is commendable and what is holding it back that needs to be removed?

Hebrews 11:1 says faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. What does that mean to you? What if you had to write your own definition of faith? How would you define it and why?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* You could do this with a variety of methods. One option would be sticky notes. Another would be 3x5 cards. Another would be just paper you've cut up. Regardless of your choice, give everyone in your family 3 of them. Now, for each member of the family, ask them to write down one word or phrase per item. (If you have really young kids, you'll have to do this with or even for them as they share) On 2 of them, write down something that our family is known for that is really good. Now, use the remaining card to write one thing that's true of your family, but that maybe we wish wasn't so true. Like maybe we're super busy or we yell a lot or we rarely have dinner together.

Now, talk about how God is in the stuff that you're excited about. Like the stories in Hebrews 11, it's worth being commended for. Also take some time to talk about the stuff that's not so good too. Confess that God is not in that stuff and talk about what needs to happen to remove it. Decide as a family today that what is commendable in our story is what we want to do, because it's the stuff God wants to do in and through us. Recommit to being that kind of family this week.

# faith.

## THE POWER OF FAITH

(Matthew 13:58)

*"And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."*

Matthew did a lot of life with Jesus. For three years he and the other eleven disciples ate together, traveled together, and experienced miracle after miracle with Jesus. He was there when he made the blind see and the lame to walk. He was there when Jesus fed 5000+ people with a few loaves and fishes and when he walked on water across the Sea of Galilee to them later that night. Along the way, Matthew came to realize that while Jesus was eager to bring hope and healing to those who were hurting, it is also totally possible for people to limit the work of God in their lives. That is a frightening truth.

*if you want to start a fire*, you need three elements: fuel, spark, and oxygen. If you have ample supplies of two out of the three, it will sit there dormant forever. For example, you could have a massive pile of dry wood and plenty of oxygen on a cold night, but without a spark, there will be no fire. In the same way, Matthew is telling us that we can have all the elements necessary for God to move, but if we lack faith, a lot of potential God movement goes unrealized. He discovered that while Jesus wanted to do great things, the refusal of those around him to believe in faith that God *could* work limited his ability to work.

*one of the realities of faith* is that while it's presence has the ability to invite God to truly transform our story for the better, the lack of it has the power to limit the movement of God in us too. So, if we want to truly "Live the Journey," then we cannot leave faith as an optional element. The apostle Paul wrote that when life was all said and done, the character traits that would remain are "Faith, Hope and Love." It's his spiritual equivalent of fuel, spark, and oxygen. We need all three to fully experience the life and blessing God has called us to.

*so take some time today* to pray in faith that God would do what only God can do in and through us. Let's believe together that God wants to move. Let's choose to be a people of faith and not limit the work of God around us.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

If your life is the fuel, God is the flame, and your faith is the oxygen... then how steady is the current flow of oxygen to God so he can burn bright in your story? What can you do to open a spiritual window per se and let more air in today? Take a step of faith and pray a prayer of vibrant faith today. Tell God that you believe he can do amazing things. Invite him to burn bright in your life and let your faith fuel it.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What miracle would you really have loved to witness first hand? What do you think witnessing it would have done to inspire your faith in God?

How often do you think Matthew 13:58 could be accurately said of your own life? When has your lack of faith limited God's work, and when has the presence of your faith turned it around for you?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* get a candle, some matches or a lighter, and a glass cup or vase of some kind that is large enough to cover the candle. Tell your kids the three things that fire needs to survive. You could have them imagine that the candle is your family, the flame is God, and the oxygen is our faith. Now turn off the lights (this one would be better to do at night) and ask your kids what needs to happen to light the candle. Then either let them light it or you light the candle for them. Once your candle is lit, ask them what needs to happen to put the fire out? At this point, cover the candle with your cup or vase. It will keep burning until the flame uses up all the oxygen under the glass. Then the fire will go out for lack of oxygen.

Now, discuss with your kids that following Jesus is like that candle. It needs a faith for it to stay alive. Talk about how you want to keep the fire going by never pushing God out of your story. Talk about how the presence of God is only going to burn bright if we keep faith a part of our story. Talk about practical ways you do that as a family, and even confess ways that tend to remove God from your family and squelch faith.

# *faith.* THE KIND OF FAITH THAT WORKS

(James 2:14–19)

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.*

This is a classic theological question, "Which is more important: faith or works?" It's such an ancient question that it goes all the way back to at least the days of the first century church. In this text, the natural assumption would be that James is arguing that works are more important than faith. However, that's not the whole story. Notice that James does not invite us to do deeds without faith. Instead, he simply says, "It's impossible for someone to have a faith that is not active." Faith and spiritual action are not "either/or" ideas; they are "both/and" necessities.

*in fact*, there are great dangers in the "either/or" mindset. If you have faith that does not lead to actions, what you end up with is a set of nice ideas and beliefs that are like a giant theological bumper sticker you put on your car and then forgot all about. To that James would say, "You believe in God? Good for you. The demons believe in God too." On the other side, one of Jesus' main complaints against the religious rulers of his day was that they were hypocrites. They did a lot of spiritual things that looked godly, but that God had nothing to do with. In their case, they were behaving morally right and yet they were spiritually dead. Both a faith without action and actions without faith are bad.

*so let's not do either.* Instead, as we live the faith journey together, let's be the kind of men and women who don't just believe stuff. Let's be the kind of people who let the stuff we believe forever change the way we do life.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Where in your life have faith and actions become disconnected from one another? Are there habitual actions you do that are disconnected from God? Are there beliefs you hold to that have become merely nice ideas and need to move back into passionate beliefs that you are acting on? How is God beginning to answer this prayer in you: "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey"?

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Share some of your core beliefs. What do you believe about love, money, justice, truth... etc. But don't just share what you believe, share how that belief is actually changing what you do.

Which is your greater tendency? Are you more likely to live a life that acts morally, but is disconnected from God? OR... Are you more likely to live a life that professes a faith in God, but doesn't actually let that change the way you live? Share with one another an example from your story that supports your answer.

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* As a family, use all or part of the following template to create your own unique list of beliefs and actions that you want to be true of your family. When your done, pray that this would be the kind of family you would be and post it somewhere in your house. Read it often and discuss it when it starts to be forgotten.

- We believe that God is \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that \_\_\_\_\_ is the most important character trait of our family, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that all people \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that our stuff and our money is \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that our friends \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that Journey Community Church is \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.
- We believe that as part of *I Live the Journey* God wants to use our family to \_\_\_\_\_, therefore we \_\_\_\_\_.

# sacrifice.

## WHAT MATTERS MOST

(Romans 12:1-2)

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship.*

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

*it has been said* that the problem with a "living sacrifice" is that it keeps crawling off the altar. If you've ever made a New Year's resolution or vowed to God that things were truly going to change only to discover months later that you're back to the exact same pattern, then you know what it's like to "crawl off the altar." You decided, "I kinda want to make this change, but not at this cost." So you go back into what is normal and back into the same routine that got you where you are now.

That's another thing people discover when they try and make a sacrificial move in their life. They quickly discover it's foolish to try and do what you've always done and expect this time to get a different result. Sacrifice, by definition, requires that some patterns be undone and some routines must be broken. It requires that we give up on some things. It requires a transformation.

However, sacrifice is not some masochistic process whereby we beat up ourselves for the life we're living. No, instead, sacrifice is true worship; a natural response to the grace and mercy of God. It's an act of humility and gratitude to look to the work of Jesus on the cross and to see your life as a living sacrifice, too.

Jim Elliot, an American missionary in Ecuador famously wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." When we offer our bodies, our finances, our marriages, our jobs, our homes, our future, and our lives to God, we don't offer them to someone who wants to ruin them. We offer them to someone who has a "Good, pleasing, and perfect will" for our lives. Now that's what we're talking about when we say, "I Live the Journey." Let's be a people who sacrifice everything we have for that kind of God.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

As you start your week, pray this today: "Father, show me what step of faith I can take to Live the Journey with you." As you pray that prayer, ask God to reveal to you anything that you need to sacrifice that's standing between you and God and what might need to be done to bring about this change.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What are some patterns in your story that have been really hard to break? How have you found success and where are you still finding yourself "crawling off the altar"?

When you think of sacrifice as an act of worship, what are some things you've given up on in your spiritual journey in order that you might experience more of God's good, pleasing, and perfect will?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Take some time as a family to talk about what you have and what other people might have. In particular, no matter how little you have, you can always find someone who has less. Talk about how God has called us to be the kind of people who sacrifice or give up some things in order that we might give more to God. Describe it as a way to thank God for who he is and to bless others too. Tell them about how the church is looking to raise some funds to fix our church and one way we're doing that is a HUGE garage sale on May 23.

What would happen if you then went around your house and gathered things that other people could use, but that are no longer being used in your home; or maybe even some stuff that could stop being used in your home. It would be great if you had already picked out a few things you personally were going to give to be sold, maybe even something that your kids know you still kinda like having. Regardless, set a goal with your kids to get a certain number of items. You'd be surprised how quickly you can find 50 items. Gather those up, put them in bags, and set them aside to give to Journey the week of May 17-22. When you do, remind your kids that this is one way we honor God - by choosing to let some things go.

# sacrifice.

## PUTTING MONEY IN ITS PLACE

(1 Timothy 6:6–10)

*"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*

*there are some things* that Americans tend to have very passionate beliefs about, and if you dig too deep, you will quickly be told, "It's none of your business." At least one of those topics is money. As we talk about sacrifice, and in particular how we might use our money to advance the work of God both in and through Journey, one of the natural tendencies is to believe that the church just wants my money. Not only is *I Live the Journey* not about money-raising as the end game, the very fact that we're so sensitive to the conversation about money is evidence that 1 Timothy 6 is as relevant today as it was then.

Perhaps this is what we really need to call out: Money is a lousy God. Period. This is why Jesus said the two are mutually exclusive. "You can't serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24) Money is the epicenter of American capitalism, but God is the epicenter of my life. God is eternal and money is temporary. Godliness leads to great gains, but riches lead to great stress. God gives us eternal life while money grants us temporary pleasure and long term destruction. Ironically, God gives us money and money has a way of wanting to kick God out.

*so, one way we Live the Journey* and dislodge money from the place that only God can occupy in our lives is by intentionally, regularly, and sacrificially giving it away. Why? Because when we refuse to hold onto our money and take faith risks to invest our money into the things we believe truly matter in life, then money is forced into its rightful place. It becomes a tool in our hand not a god in our head. Let's be the kind of people who use our money for God instead of letting money become our God.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Ponder your money. Ask God to show you what role it plays in your life. Take a minute to put your wallet, your bills, your credit cards, the remote to your TV, your keys, anything you have that represents the role of money in your life in a bucket or bowl and place it in front of you. Then as you pray, literally pick up the bowl and hold it up like an offering. Tell God that you don't want this stuff to be your God. Commit to loving God more than you do the stuff of this world.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Think about the kind of home you grew up in and the role money played there. Was there always enough? Never enough? Was it managed well or managed poorly? Share how your childhood has affected your view of money and your hopes or dreams or even fears that you carry as a result of it.

In what ways have either you, or people you know, found themselves wandering from God in pursuit of riches? What has been the result of that pursuit?

Why do you think most people don't like to talk about money? What do you think is the root cause of that?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Have everyone in the family go and get their favorite material possession or something that represents it if it's too big or too complicated to move, like keys for a car or just the controller from a computer game station or something like that. Then have each person share why they love what they chose.

Then, without a guilt trip, simply remind one another that the thing we love will one day break, be outdated, or need to be replaced. If they're old enough, talk about how when people die, their favorite things don't go with them. That is why, as a family, we don't put all our hope in them. It might be really powerful to pray this simple prayer, "God, I love you more than \_\_\_\_\_ (the favorite thing they chose)." Take a minute to remind each other that there are way more important things in life than our possessions, and as a family, we want to make sure we always love God more than we do our stuff.

## sacrifice.

# WHEN ALL I HAVE IS ALL THAT MATTERS

(Mark 12:41–44)

*“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”*

As the disciples watched with Jesus, the temple donations were given by tossing coins into a clay pot at the entrance. The result: It was easy to see and hear who put in what. No quiet checks, no subtle swipe of a card, just the loud clanging of coins. The more noise you make, the more money you must have given. The more money you gave, the more powerful and spiritual you are. The more powerful and spiritual you are, the more God is pleased with you. That was the first century comparison game lie that those who offered a financial sacrifice had to fight against.

*truth is*, people have played the comparison game with money ever since it was invented. Think about it. Your bank account, your vacation destinations, your car, your house, your clothes, your phone... you name it, it's only as awesome as it is better than the next person's. That is how capitalism works and why we keep buying the next best greatest thing.

But that's not how the Kingdom of God works. God is not into the comparison game. He's not interested in how much more you gave than the next person. Like this widow, God's more interested in what you sacrificed in the process. In this case, all you have to start with is all that matters.

In *I Live the Journey* we're not asking everyone to give the same. Jesus wasn't interested in it and neither are we. In fact, one of our sayings is, “Not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.” We're inviting everyone to join us in making a sacrifice so that together we can all say, “I gave in significant ways to make this vision a reality.” Join us and refuse to play the comparison game of giving. Just give in response to God's leading. That's the only sacrifice that matters.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Ponder your own experiences with giving financially to the work of the church. Why do you do it? Why don't you? What fears do you have? What assumptions are you bringing to the table?

What do you think Jesus might say to you? Invite the Holy Spirit to offer a word to you about your finances. If what you hear sounds condemning, know that's not from God; it's just a distraction. Refuse to live as one condemned. But if you sense a conviction that could be hard, but also feels like it might lead to greater peace, listen to that... it's probably the voice of God.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Where is the comparison game most powerful in your life? Where do you find it creeping in and where are you tempted to still play it?

When you think of this widow who gave all she had to live on, what does that do in you? In some ways, she represents the anti-comparison game. In other ways, perhaps she enhances it in you. Why is that, and what do you think Jesus is trying to say about giving by making this observation with his disciples?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* As a family, begin to talk about money. Talk about how the things your kids love to do all cost money. Tell them what it costs to buy a tank of gas and how much it costs if you take them to a friend's house. Or talk about soccer cleats and paying the dues for the team. Not in a guilt trip way where they feel bad for going to visit a friend or play a sport, but where they understand that everything they want to do costs money. Now explain to them that one of the things we want to do as a family is make a financial contribution to Journey to help fix our broken church buildings and why that's important. One of the ways we can "find money" in our home is to stop doing some things that would create extra money in our budget. For example, maybe you give up buying drinks if you go out for a meal. Or maybe you stop putting juice boxes in lunches and start filling reusable bottles with water. Why would your kids choose to do this? Because it saves your family money so we can create some money to give away. Begin to discuss what you might give up for a period so you could give away more.

# sacrifice: WHEN LOSING IS WINNING

(Mark 8:34–36)

*“Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?”*

*When we talk about sacrifice,* that last question Jesus just asked might be one of the most powerful questions to consider. “What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?” This isn’t a guilt trip question about your possessions or Jesus subtly trying to tell you it’s a sin to buy a new car. This is simply a profound, soul-searching question asking, “How do you define success?” If you define success as our culture often does by the abundance of one’s possessions, then you might find yourself at odds with Jesus.

Instead, Jesus offers us a backwards, upside down, and very “other” way of thinking. It’s the proverbial tortoise that beats the hare. It’s David beating Goliath. It’s not power over; it’s power under. Ultimately, we all make sacrifices in life. What Jesus is warning us is that if you sacrifice for stuff that doesn’t matter, you might end up with the applause of people and a sea of spiritual regret as a bonus gift.

Instead, Jesus is calling us to be the kind of community who is sacrificially giving their lives for Jesus and the gospel. It’s the kind of community that puts others first, refuses to live by the ways of the world, and ultimately is willing to lose some stuff in this life so that they can gain a life that truly matters both today and for eternity. When we say “I Live the Journey” what we mean is, I want to experience the best of heaven on earth. I want to do this life with Jesus at my center and everything else must come second. When we sacrifice, the temptation is to believe that I’m giving up some important things. Instead, let’s see sacrifice as an act of wisdom. When I empty my hands of what kinda matters so I can grab more of what ultimately matters, that’s not foolishness, it’s pure genius. If I grab less of this world so I can hold more of God, then losing is actually winning.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Think about sacrifice as winning. Take some time to thank God that he called you to give up some stuff; now you know it's a huge blessing because it's no longer weighing you down. Thank God for the backwards way of the Kingdom of God, and renew your passion to do life in a way that lets you grab less of this world and more and more of God along the way.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What is your favorite underdog story? When do you most rejoice when the unexpected winner comes out on top? In what ways is your spiritual story a bit of an underdog one?

How would you define success? What do you consider "winning in life" and how has your definition changed over time?

What is the most profound statement in Mark 8:34-36 for you? How does it impact you and what does it mean to you?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* We want to get our kids realizing that following Jesus requires a sacrifice, and it's worth it because it produces a blessing we might not expect. In order to teach this illustration you'll need two things: 1. You'll need a financial gift you can give each kid. A dollar or two would be great. 2. You'll need a bag for each kid with something worth more than you gave them...or at least worth more to them than the money. Like maybe a bag of candy or a coupon for an ice cream treat from your freezer that you wouldn't normally have.

Have each of your kids decide if they're going to keep their money or trade it for what you secretly have in the bag. They each make the decision as individuals, and they don't see what's in the bag until everyone has made their choice. Some people might keep the money and others might get the "prize." Talk about which was the better choice and how sometimes, giving up what we have means getting something way better. Talk about how this works with giving gifts. Like when you give a present to a friend and what you get in return is joy from seeing the look on their face. Tell them that's how God works. We give stuff away and we get joy back.

## sacrifice: TRUE TREASURE

(Matthew 6:19–21)

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

- If you’ve ever left your bike or a tool outside only to find it a rusted mess the next time you went to use it...
- If you’ve ever opened a closet, cupboard, or shed door to discover that insects and rodents have destroyed your stuff...
- If you’ve ever had your house or car broken into and the contents stolen...

...then you know what Jesus is talking about. The stuff of this earth is not permanent and is susceptible to damage and loss. In sharp contrast to this is the stuff of heaven. While we don’t know all the details of what heaven is like, we do know a few things from this teaching by Jesus. First, the stuff that is treasured in heaven is the stuff that moths can’t eat and rust can’t ruin. Secondly, whatever is in heaven is permanently in heaven. It cannot be stolen or removed. It would appear that keys to lock stuff or alarms for intruders are pointless there because God’s kingdom is filled with an abundant God who meets all our needs. And there’s so much good that evil simply has no place and cannot even visit there.

*this begs the question,* “Why wait till I die to experience heaven?” I mean really, if God offered you the stuff of heaven today, would you say, “No thanks. I think I’ll wait till death to taste that”? I don’t think so. The great news is that God’s kingdom can be experienced here and now by those who choose to embrace its values. Every time you choose love over hate, giving over hoarding, generosity over scarcity, sacrifice over selfishness...you experience a little bit of heaven on earth. So sacrifice temporary happiness for eternal love and store up your treasures in heaven. This earth has nothing of ultimate value to offer.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

How are you experiencing Heaven on earth these days? In what ways have you begun living by a different Kingdom value and how is God blessing you for it? Thank God for his grace in your life and the treasures of Heaven that you are experiencing today.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

When have you experienced stuff on that list we just read about? When has rust, or rodents or thieves jacked with your stuff? How did it make you feel, and what have you done about it to prevent it from happening again?

Talk about your experiences of "Heaven on Earth." How have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? What have you experienced of heaven here on earth in ways that you would never trade for money, even if someone offered it to you.

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Find a clear plastic bottle, a glass jar, a bowl, a piggy bank, pretty much anything you have that could serve as a financial gathering space. If you wanted to, you could turn this activity into an art project and decorate your bank too. But regardless, now you have a place to gather some funds.

Remind your family that you want to give to God in this series and then put this bottle in a place where you can begin to collect change with your kids toward this end. Remind them that small things make a big difference when we work together.

*vision:*

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

(Jeremiah 29:11–13)

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

*if God's dream* for His people is good, filled with hope, blessing for our future, and freedom from harm, then why do we experience pain and loss? Why does cancer still take the lives of believers and it seems like God's plan has been defeated?

If we're honest, we've all felt that way. Maybe you feel that way right now. Maybe you're seeking God with all your heart and yet you're also mourning a great loss or your life is not adding up to a beautiful hope and future. Does that mean that Jeremiah was wrong and misheard from God?

Consider the words of Jesus to the disciples shortly before his crucifixion in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world." They were about to experience the "loss" of their Messiah, be confronted with great doubt, and wonder if they were deceived in following Jesus. Surely they were praying and surely God was not listening.

However, we know this: resurrection Sunday destroyed the despair of Friday forever. The hope we have in God and the future we yearn for is in fact found in Jesus. We know there is a day where nothing will stand between us and God and where pain will be no more. But until that day, as we wrestle with sin and struggle to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we make every investment we can to bring us closer to experiencing God today. This is Living the Journey.

*our vision* for the future is the same as God's vision spoken through Jeremiah. In this world, our goal is to be the kind of people who fight injustice and restore hope in God. Therefore, we passionately seek God, pray fervently and invite Him to do great things in us daily so that even in the midst of pain, people might still find hope in Jesus. He is our only vision for the future.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Use Jeremiah 29:11-13 as a prayer. As you read through it, confess your doubts and remind yourself that, regardless of your current circumstances and the reality of pain in this world, God's plan is best. Seek God today believing again that he wants to reveal himself and his goodness to you. Invite God to answer this prayer: "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey, and where I can experience your goodness today?"

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What are some of your own struggles with believing God's vision for your life is truly best? What movement have you made or been making towards believing that is true? When is it hardest for you to trust that God is good, and He has beauty and goodness for you?

Talk about this statement: "Jesus is our only vision for the future." How have you found that to be true for you? Who in your world most needs to give up on their plans and embrace Jesus' plan for their life. What needs to happen for them to experience God's goodness today?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* As a family, share your highs and lows. Let your kids rate their day with a thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs sideways rating for how it went. Give everyone a chance to share why they said what they said. What was the best part of their day or week and what was the hardest part? Take some time as a family to remind each other that we celebrate the highs and mourn the lows together with God. Talk about how God is good and that he wants to bring us good things. Talk about how he loves us unconditionally and that he is with us even in the hard times.

vision:

## LIFE TO THE FULL

(John 10:9–11)

*"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."*

*Jesus uses two word pictures* to describe himself in this text. The first is a gate and the second is a good shepherd. But notice this, both word pictures are sandwiched around one profound truth: the evil one wants destruction, but God offers us true life. In this world, the vision of the demonic is to steal, kill, and destroy the things of God. This is in stark contrast to Jesus whose vision for people is a full and abundant life.

Perhaps the reason both of these word pictures are surrounding this one tension is because both the gate and the good shepherd bring abundant life. The purpose of the gate is to keep evil threats out and to provide abundant food and security to the sheep inside. In the same way, the good shepherd's purpose is to protect the sheep and grant them life at any and all cost.

*our vision for the future* of Journey Community Church is the same as that of Jesus. We yearn for people to be saved from evil in this space. We pray that God would indwell people with his abundant and life-giving Holy Spirit. We are united together, we take faith risks, we give sacrificially, all so this vision of who Jesus is and the promise of eternal life can be realized by as many people as possible.

We're not raising funds to make our worship center flashy or our children's ministry extravagant. That would be pointless. However, fixing our worship center and technology so people can fully engage, installing an elevator so handicapped kids and volunteers are able to reach their ministry, making an information center that is easy to find and helpful for those who attend our services, and installing solar so we can use more of our resources for direct ministry needs...that is not pointless. They remove barriers that keep people from a Jesus who offers an abundant life. That is our vision. That is why we give.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Think about this promise of Jesus that he came to bring, “life to the full.” How has the presence of God in your story made it more full and vibrant? Take some time to thank God today for the best of his goodness and that he is the ultimate giver of life. How is God calling you to participate in *I Live the Journey* and be a bringer of that same life and hope to others?

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

Describe your vision for Journey. What would you say if someone asked you, “What do you hope and dream for this space?” How has this series *I Live the Journey* inspired you to play a role in seeing that vision for this church become a reality through you?

Share a little of your own spiritual story with one another: How have you personally experienced the abundant life Jesus offers, and in what ways have you experienced the devil trying to steal, kill and destroy it?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Look back over all the activities your family might have done in this series. Find a few from each of the previous 3 weeks that was fun and worked well for your family. Then talk about each one. Ask your kids what they remembered and what the point was. Let them share, and as they do, remind them that this is God’s vision for your family and for our church: that we would be united, filled with faith, and giving sacrificially to the call of God in our lives. Remind your kids that, as a family, we want to help other families experience how good God truly is, and that’s why we’re giving to the vision of *I Live the Journey*.

vision:

## WHAT COULD AND SHOULD BE

(Nehemiah 2:17–18)

*"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.' I also told them about the gracious hand of my God on me and what the king had said to me. They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So they began this good work."*

Nehemiah is a book about a man who had a vision from God. His vision was that the city of Jerusalem was God's city. However, he had a problem, a massive problem. The city was neglected, in ruins, and desperately in need of repair. It did not reflect what he knew or had experienced about God. It reflected destruction, despair, and hopelessness; none of which seemed right to him. The problem he set out to fix was way beyond what he could do on his own. So before he could see this problem fixed, he had to raise funds, find volunteers, lobby support, and cast a vision for what could and should be.

Eventually he gathers the leaders of the tribes of Israel to cast his vision. In so doing, he tells them two things that are essentially the same two things we are experiencing today at JCC.

First, some stuff is in ruins and it's not good. Our building is in need of repair and as God's stewards of this space, we're not okay with its condition under our watch. Nehemiah was not okay with the city walls being broken and we're not okay with throwing extra money at an ever-increasing electrical bill or handicapped kids not being able to get upstairs. We're not ok with a sound and video system that's one break away from being totaled.

Secondly, God has been gracious in the past and has abundantly blessed us. The truth is that we have this facility like Israel had Jerusalem - solely because a good God handed it to us. Our previous landlords on this property easily could have kicked us out and built condos. But God came through, and his people stepped up. We're acting upon God's proven faithfulness.

*only one question remains:* Will our response be like those who listened to Nehemiah? Let's do this good work!

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

What motivates you to bring about change? What inspires you to not accept the status quo and to reach for what could and should be? How is God calling you to be a change agent and to be a bringer of his vision to people around you? As you answer those questions, prayerfully re-up your commitment to seeking out ways to be that today and through your part in the *I Live the Journey* process.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What piece of *I Live the Journey* and the “fix” that we feel called to do to our campus brings you the most joy? What are you most excited to see our church do with the resources we are raising, and how are you being inspired to help?

Nehemiah said the response of the people was “Let’s do this good work.” What is a “good work” you feel like God wants to do in and through you these days? How has this series inspired you to connect more intimately with God and to experience more of his vision for your life and our church?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Grab some legos, building blocks, a doll house... pretty much anything your kids can build something with. Then play with them and build something awesome. Once you’ve got it the way they want it and things are pretty well set up, ask them what would happen if you started taking it apart and stuff was all messed up. If they have siblings, ask how they would feel if one of them just destroyed it.

Now talk about what you’ve built in relationship to our church buildings. Talk about how they are really good, but that some things need to be fixed so they can be awesome again. Remind your kids this is why we’ve been making sacrifices as a family and giving up some things. It’s so that we can give to help repair the church and make it the kind of place that is easy for people to find God and get to the ministries that are there to help them.

*vision:*

## FAMOUS LAST WORDS

(2 Timothy 4:6–8)

*"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

*if you had a chance* to write down your final words to the next generation of Christ followers, what would you choose to say? In this case, the Apostle Paul sees death on the horizon, and he is choosing to write his final words to his pupil Timothy with great intentionality. It's both a reflection and a challenge.

His reflection is that his life is ending well, even though he knows he is not going to die of natural causes. The Roman government will take his life from him. But nonetheless, he declares that he ended his life fighting the good fight, finished the race, and in the midst of thousands of reasons and opportunities to chuck his faith, has instead chosen to keep it. As a result, he has made an investment in eternity. He trusted his life to Jesus in a way that gives him confidence that God has even better things in store for him in the future.

*his challenge* is a vision of the future for all "who've longed for Jesus' appearing." Paul's right. If you have a longing for God, then lean hard into Him. You won't regret it, and the rewards make every sacrifice worth it. Any of us could choose to live in such a way that we could say, "I Lived the Journey. I left my past behind and fought the good fight. I sacrificed for great causes. I united myself with other Christ followers to make the world a better place. I gave. I risked. I stepped out in faith. Now I can't wait to see Jesus face-to-face."

*that's the vision* Paul gave his life for. That's a vision worth giving your life for. That's the reason we've been praying, "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey." The answer to that prayer is a gift from God and a vision worth living for.

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Take some time to ponder your ideal final words. What would you want to be the last thing you say to the generation coming behind you? Now ask this question which is a bit harder to answer: Would those words be hypocritical or are they what your life says non-verbally already? Take some time today to evaluate your life, not only in the words you say, but in the life you live. Remind yourself that God's vision for your life is the best vision, and lean into it today.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What do you long for? What does your soul yearn for on such a deep level that you are willing to fight and sacrifice to see it become your reality?

When is it hardest for you to keep the faith, and have you had seasons when you totally walked away from it? If so, what brings or has brought you back, and what makes it all worth it for you?

As you've been praying this prayer, "Father, show me what step of faith I can take as I Live the Journey"... what has God been revealing to you? How has God's vision for your life become your vision for your life?

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Paul says that the goal of his life has been to stay the course and keep connected to Jesus no matter what. One result is that God promises him what he describes as a "crown of righteousness" in heaven. One fun way to talk about God's vision for your family and for our church is to talk about living the kind of life that God rewards. To do this, you could take a piece of paper and using some scissors, cut it up to look like a crown. Then brainstorm with your kids the kind of things God loves to see in us. Write words like "loving others" or "telling the truth" or "serving God" on the crown. Then let your kids decorate them and use tape to size them for their head. Remind them that this is God's vision for us and this is why we choose to "Live this Journey" with our church. We want to be the kind of people who give and sacrifice and chase after what God truly rewards.

vision:  
GOD'S MATH

(Luke 1:37)

*"For nothing will be impossible with God."*

(Judges 7:2)

*"The LORD said to Gideon, 'You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against me saying, 'My own strength has saved me.'"*

*maybe there's a long list* of reasons God is awesome, but one of them clearly has to be that God can do great things with virtually nothing. This is so true of God that the word "impossible" is not even in his vocabulary. If it's a God thing, then it's a possible thing. God's math defies all rules.

In the case of the story of Gideon, God wanted to use him to defeat his enemies in battle, but they had enough men in his army that their confidence level was too high. They still had the "I got this" idea. So God wouldn't help Gideon until the odds of his winning were stupid and ridiculous. Then, and only then, did he send him into battle. If you're in Gideon's shoes, that's super scary. But if you're on the hillside watching, this is good drama. On occasion, God might actually limit your resources just so that when he does stuff, you won't be tempted to try and take credit for it. He loves to do the impossible in ways that people stop and say, "Now that was a God moment."

*that's exactly how* Journey ended up with the property we call our church campus. It was stupid ridiculous odds against us kinda stuff. We needed a one million dollar cash offering pronto. Seriously, a million dollars as a 10% down on a loan so we could still keep doing church and not be on the street watching condos go up in it's place. We didn't do it. God did it through us.

Same is true of this *I Live the Journey* opportunity before us today. Raising 2.75 million dollars is not anything anyone in our church can do on their own. It is, however, something God wants to do through us. And when he does, it's an incredible, God-only kinda thing that you'll tell stories about for decades. How great will it be to tell people, "No joke, I LIVED THE JOURNEY!"

## ■ FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT

Ask this: What in my life seems impossible? Remind yourself, that if God is in it, then that's simply not true. As we end this *I Live the Journey* series, decide with no uncertainty that what God has called you to, God is in. Decide that no matter how impossible it may seem, you're going to trust God and take the faith risk and sacrifice according to his call on your life. It will be awesome to watch God come through in our community as we all do this together.

## ■ TO TALK ABOUT WITH A FRIEND OR IN MY GROUP

What is something that seemed impossible to you, but somehow, as you trusted God for it, he came through?

Where do you feel like the odds of success are against you, and how can you lean into God for hope in this situation? Where do you most need to remind yourself that Luke 1:27 is true?

This is the last day and the last week of this Journal. Share with one another how God has used it in your life and what you believe God is doing in you today.

## ■ TO DO (FAMILY FRIENDLY OPTION)

*an activity:* Have your kids write the word IMPOSSIBLE really BIG on a piece of paper or an old shirt or a poster board or the side of a cardboard box or anything you want. When they ask why, don't tell them. Just say we need it big and we need it BOLD.

Then, once they're done, ask them this: Is anything impossible with God? When you have a conversation with them and after they've asked you all kinds of silly things like, "Could God make a boulder so big he couldn't lift it?" - then tell them NOTHING is impossible for God.

To celebrate this fact and in a grand finale of this *I Live the Journey* devotional, let them completely destroy whatever they wrote IMPOSSIBLE across. (If you really want to earn parent points, have them write it across a cake in frosting. Then take it outside and have a food fight in your driveway yelling nothing is impossible with God at your opponents. HAAAAA! I promise they'll never forget that day.)



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thank you **GOD**  
for uniting our community  
and showing each of us what

**STEPS OF FAITH**

we need to take as we

**LIVE THE JOURNEY.**





**JOURNEY  
COMMUNITY  
CHURCH**

this guide is also available online at  
[ILiveTheJourney.com](http://ILiveTheJourney.com)