

Seek ye first [Kingdom of God]

LENT 1B | Study 1 of 6

'Sing and Study' Bible Study Series | compiled by Rev. Irene Bom

SING

SEEK YE FIRST / CH4 641

by Karen Lafferty

Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and His righteousness;
and all these things shall be added unto you.
allelu, alleluia!

Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
seek, and ye shall find;
knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
allelu, alleluia!

You shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
allelu, alleluia!

DID YOU KNOW?

The story behind the song, from an interview with Karen Lafferty on reformedworship.org:

'It was back in 1971. I had quit my entertainment job and was trying to support myself with teaching guitar lessons. I had three students! When my savings were all gone and I had no money to make my car payments, I became very discouraged and confused.

One evening I went to a Bible study at church, and we talked about Matthew 6:33. I was tremendously encouraged and challenged by the words about Christ's kingdom. So I went home, wrote the tune, recorded it on a tape recorder, and then sang this little descant part.

I taught the song at church the next week, and it caught on right away. The Lord really paved the way for me with that song. *Seek Ye First* has opened doors for me all over the world. And because it's in so many hymnbooks, about 40 percent of my mission support comes from that song!'

ICE BREAKER (allow 20 minutes)

Prep: Sing the song (or listen to a recording) and have someone read out the DID YOU KNOW? column.

Song: What connections, memories or feelings does the song evoke for you? Is there a verse, phrase or image that is particularly meaningful?

Theme: Have someone read out the quotation below. Note how 'Kingdom of God' features in the song.

KINGDOM OF GOD

source: <https://followingjesus.org/the-kingdom-of-god-an-introduction/>

Although Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God frequently, he never clearly defined it. Instead, he spoke of it in parables, comparing something familiar (mustard seed, leaven, lost coins, a man who sowed a field) with something unfamiliar.

The kingdom is something that cannot be seen in and by itself, yet its effects are plainly visible. To enter the kingdom, in fact to

even *see* the kingdom, one must experience a dramatic change — a reorientation, a new way of thinking and seeing, a kind of metaphoric rebirth.

The kingdom of God as preached by Jesus is a vision of a profound transformation of human beings and human institutions — social, political, economic, and religious — to a form that expresses the character and nature of a God of love.

In summary the context is:

1. Crowds of people are going out into the wilderness to confess their sins and be baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan.
2. John knows that he's 'preparing the way' for someone who is superior to him in every way.
3. Jesus is about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23) and John just a few months older.

Read Mark 1:9-15

DISCUSSION

Listening & Learning Questions

1. What verse jumps out at you? What do you find intriguing?
2. How would you describe Mark's style of writing?
3. Explore what makes Jesus' baptism special.
4. The Spirit 'drove' Jesus out into the wilderness (v.12). What force, passion and danger is implied by this word? What other words and phrases add colour to the text?
5. There are some dramatic contrasts in this passage. Like water and wilderness. Discuss.

Heart & Healing Questions

1. How do you think Jesus' baptism and the temptation in the wilderness prepared him for his public ministry?
2. What do we discover about God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
3. What do we learn about the spiritual life and the Kingdom of God from this passage?
4. How is Jesus' message good news – in general and for you in particular?
5. What word or phrase from the passage (or the song) will you carry with you this week?

COMMENTARY

v.9 *Galilee* is situated in northern Palestine.

v.9 the *Jordan* River flows north to south through the Sea of Galilee down to the Dead Sea. **v.9** *John* means 'God is gracious'. **v.10** *heavens torn open* is an apocalyptic image (see Ezekiel 1:1, Isa 64:1).

v.10 *like a dove* could mean either in the form of a dove, or in bird-like descent. **v.11** *my son* echoes Psalm 2:7 and Gen 22:2. **v.12** In Scripture God often leads chosen people into the isolation and barrenness of the *wilderness* or desert.

v.13 *forty days* corresponds to many periods of trial and testing in the OT (e.g. Ex 34:28, 1 Kings 19:4-8). **v.13** *Satan* means 'accuser, adversary'.

v.14 *good news*, i.e. gospel. **v.14** for details about *John's imprisonment*, see Mk 6:17-20.

v.15 *Kingdom of God* refers to God's sovereign rule, the in-breaking of God's reign. **v.15** *repent* means 'turn from your sins'.

CLOSING (allow 5-10 minutes)

Sing the first verse of *Seek ye first* (or listen to a recording) and end with the closing prayer.

MARK 1:9-15

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⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

CLOSING PRAYER

by Thomas, and posted on <http://everydayliturgy.com/>

Heavenly Father,
May we seek you and find you,
may we knock and the door be opened,
for we are sojourners looking for your Kingdom.

As we encounter suffering in this world,
turn our hearts, our ears, our eyes, our souls
toward Christ, who emptied himself,
and was tempted,
and suffered for us,
even giving his own life.

In this suffering, plant seeds of hope,
and let us never stray so far into despair,
that we forget the resurrection of Christ
and the power of his Spirit.

Amen