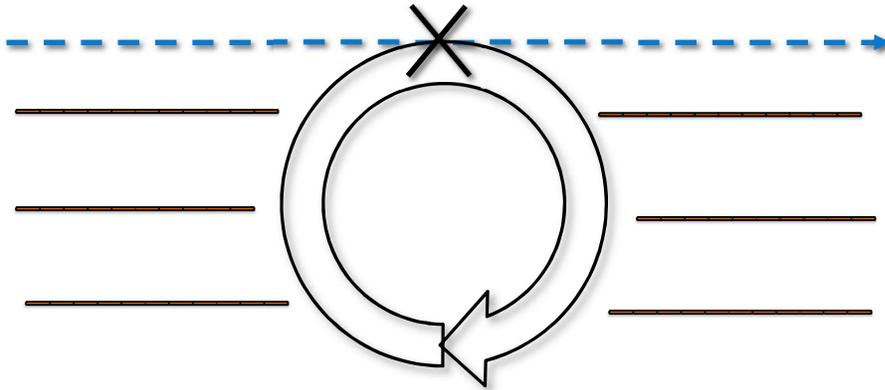


Week 1 - Stepping into
the Learning Circle

DVD Notes, Week 1

1. The Greek language has two primary words for time:
_____ and _____.
2. Kairos moments are the Holy Spirit's way of inviting us to
_____ from life.
3. Jesus said there are two things we should do if we want to learn from something; _____ and _____.
4. Fill out the diagram below to complete the learning circle.



5. By embracing Kairos moments, I am learning to live in
_____.

Day 1

So close you could reach out and touch it

Here’s a silly question for you. Have you ever had the sensation that your life was spinning out of control? Maybe it would be easier to remember the times you actually did feel like you were in charge of your life. Like you had life by the tail and things were going your way. “I think I remember a moment like that back in 19...”

Much more often we feel like life is something happening to us instead of something that we choose to live. Every one of us has the same 1440 moments of time to live every day, so why do we get to the end of that day and often feel more like a victim than a winner? I can’t think of many things more destructive to a life of passion than the relentless tick, tick, tick of each second lived in worry that everything is falling apart.

I think we all want to know that my life counts for something; that there is some meaning and value to the minutes that fly by every day. Perhaps that’s at least part of the reason why you were attracted to Jesus in the first place. You had the sense that if you could get close to Him, you could discover the secret of feeling like your life could count for something. Maybe He knows the secret to purpose and meaning.

And you’d be right about that. Something Jesus said in the gospel of Mark grabs life by the collar and says, “Listen up!”

Read Mark 1:14-15 and respond to the following question:

What did Jesus mean when he said the kingdom of God is near?

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

Mark 1:14-15

This is how Jesus introduces himself to the world;

1. The time has come
2. The Kingdom of God has come
3. Repent and believe the good news.

Would you agree that this is a pretty big deal? Reading that statement leaves one with the impression it's something we should pay attention to. And that's exactly what we're going to do. Over the next few days we're going to dig into what Jesus was trying to tell us and what you'll discover will change your life.

And it all starts with a little thing called time...

It's just a matter of Time

In the ancient Greek (which is the language Mark originally wrote his gospel in) there at least two different words commonly used for the one English word we write as "time." "Chronos" is a word you can probably recognize in a few of our English words like "chronometer" or "chronology." In the Greek it simply refers to a point along the flow of hours, minutes and seconds as in, "Time for dinner!"

"Chronos" = The flow of time

Write your own sentence that uses the idea of "Chronos" time.

The other word for "time" isn't quite so recognizable to us English speakers. And it just so happens to be the word Mark says Jesus used when he made his big announcement. The word is "Kairos" and it refers to something quite different than "Chronos." It refers to a particular event that happens at a particular point in time. A moment that stands out for its significance. For example, if that dinner call invited you into a meal that may well have been in the top three you've ever eaten, that would be a Kairos moment. A point in the flow of chronological time becomes significant for some reason. It may have even seemed to make "Chronos" time stand still!

“Kairos” – a significant point in time.

Do you remember the moment you got engaged? The birth of your first child? That special vacation you took with the family? Those are Kairos moments. Of course, not all Kairos moments are so positive. Do you remember the day Kennedy was shot? Where you were when the towers fell? Those are Kairos moments as well.

Describe a “Kairos” moment you have experienced in your life?

Follow the Neon Sign

Kairos moments can be positive, or negative, but they are never neutral. By definition, they leave a mark on your psyche. They are the chronological equivalent of a speed bump in the road of life. Even if you’re expecting something, it slows you up and makes you pay attention to what’s happening around you. And if you happened to miss the signs that a speed bump was approaching, well that can really get your attention!

If you’re still not sure about how to identify a Kairos moment, God gave you a neon sign with giant flashing letters to tell you you’ve just experienced a Kairos moment; it’s your emotions.

- That moment of pure joy you felt wash over you when you picked up the phone and heard the voice of an old friend – that’s a Kairos moment.
- The tingle of excitement of the first day of a new position – that’s a Kairos moment.
- That rush of anxiety when see the stares and whispers from across the room – that’s a Kairos moment.
- The ache of loss and failure as you sign the divorce papers – that’s a Kairos moment.

Emotions are a reliable indicator that you've just entered a Kairos moment. And the truth is, negative emotions are a signal of the greatest opportunities for growth.

Jesus introduces his ministry to the world with the word Kairos. He is saying, "Not only has the appointed time for my ministry to begin arrived, this is also a game changer." This is a special moment. The kingdom of heaven is close by. Its time to pause for a moment, take stock and make some decisions about what happens next.

Greetings from the Universe Next Door

The idea of multiple realities existing simultaneously in different dimensions has been the stuff of science fiction for a long time. Even more serious scientists have begun suggesting the idea of multiple universes as a possible explanation for the evolution of life on earth. I think most of that makes for great stories, but all that fantasy may be based in a kernel of truth.

A Kairos moment is an invitation to step outside the rush of time as it were for a moment to reflect.

When Jesus said, "the Kingdom of God is near," and he used the idea of a Kairos moment, he was actually suggesting that two concurrent realities were actually about to intersect one another. The reality known as "the kingdom of this world" is one we are intimately familiar with. It's the world we were born into, marked by sin and death and dominated by the great deceiver.

But right alongside that world, flowing in the same stream of chronological time is another reality; the kingdom of God. A reality that we were created to inhabit. A reality we slipped out of when our parents Adam and Eve chose death instead of life. "The kingdom of God is near!" So close you could reach out and touch it, or more accurately, so close it is reaching out to touch you. You see, a Kairos moment is the kingdom of God reaching into your out of control, stressed out life and tapping you on the shoulder as if to say, "Hey there! Are you ready for something more?"

A Kairos moment is an invitation to step outside the rush of time as it were for a moment to reflect. It's what educators call a "teachable moment" and if we are willing to stop long enough to listen, it can become a doorway into a new life with more passion.

Ponder

How can you recognize a Kairos event?

Explain how both positive and negative events can be Kairos events.

As you think back on the last few days, what Kairos moment has the Holy Spirit been inviting you into?

Digging Deeper

The Old Testament Prophet Daniel shared a number of prophecies full of images and symbols. One of the most widely understood is the prophecy in Daniel 9:20-27 called the Seventy Weeks prophecy. It is widely understood to be a prediction of when the Messiah would come and begin his ministry.

Read Daniel 9:20-27 with the following interpretive tips to guide you.

- A “seven” is a prophetic way of referring to 1 week
- In symbolic prophecy, 1 day = 1 year
- The decree to rebuild Jerusalem was given in 457 BC
- Jesus was baptized in 27 AD
- He was crucified 3 ½ years after he was baptized
- Stephen was stoned and persecution of Jesus’ followers broke out 3 ½ years after Jesus was crucified.

Following the clues above, explain why Jesus would have been perfectly accurate in using the term “Chronos” when he said “The time has come”

Day 2

Teachable Moments

A Moment in Time

Your stomach is grumbling, so you look at the clock – 11:00. One more hour until you can go to lunch. That hour is one long hour.

At the restaurant later, as you peruse the menu, an old friend you haven't seen in years walks by your table. You gape at each other in that moment of recognition, then heartily embrace. You spend the next hour rediscovering the richness of your friendship. The time has passed before you know it.

What's the difference between these two hours?

The passing of time does not change us as much as events in time and our reactions to them. Here you are, walking on what you consider to be a straight path, no unexpected bends in the road, no intersections where you have to make a decision you're not prepared for. Then, seemingly out of the blue, something happens – good or bad – and you come to a screeching halt.

Events in time present you with choices – you can keep on walking forward and act as if the event never happened. Or, you can stop and refuse to move in any direction at all. You can go backward to a part of the path you already know and stay where you feel safe. Or you can choose to view the event as an open door, an invitation to enter into a process that can result in growth.

- *A passionate Life Study Guide, p. 11*

Thankfully, Kairos moments don't happen every day. I don't know if we could handle that much stress. But when they do happen, we come face to face with a choice. Will we ignore the invitation and keep plugging away through our lives, or will we pause, open the door, and step into a little kingdom thinking for a moment.

What might block me from engaging a Kairos moment?

Getting It backwards

Ever looked through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars? It's actually a lot of fun, but it's not really that helpful is it? Binoculars are supposed to help you bring what's up ahead into better focus. But turn them around and it makes even the stuff right in front of you seem confusing and distant.

A Kairos moment is an invitation to look ahead to what I can learn out of that moment

I have a friend who is an avid motorcycle rider. Recently he had an accident that ruined his bike and left him scratched up and bruised. As he described what happened to me, it was obvious that he was a little distressed. "Normally," he said, "I assume any motorcycle accident was largely the rider's fault. But I keep going over in my mind what happened, and I can't think of anything I did wrong."

That's a great description of how we often choose to handle the Kairos moments in our lives. When something significant happens, especially if it's a negative experience, we immediately want to look back at what happened, dissect our actions in minute detail and try to figure out what happened. But a Kairos moment is an invitation to look ahead to what I can learn out of that moment. Instead of trying to figure out what we want to leave behind, a Kairos event calls us to discover what we will take with us.

Welcome to the Learning Circle

We tend to think of the walk of faith as a linear journey from salvation to Heaven.



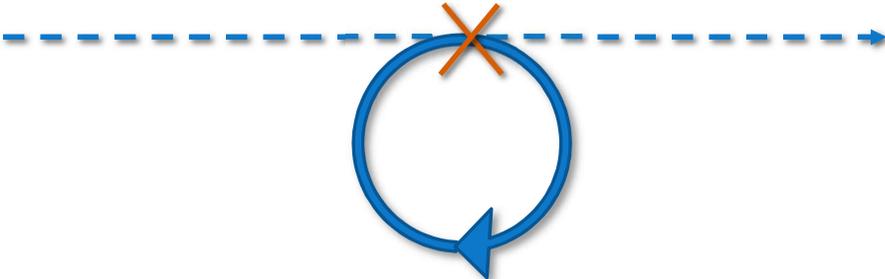
As a follower of Jesus, my job is to stay on the straight and narrow, turning neither to the right or to the left, until we can make it to the finish line. And while there are indeed some valuable spiritual principles to learn in all that, it's not actually a very good description of the walk of faith.

Picture yourself moving through your day. You may have started out with a pretty clear purpose of where you were heading, or just trying to keep things moving in a general direction. Then, boom! A Kairos event happens and you're suddenly at a crossroads.

Every Kairos moment acts as a kind of intersection in the journey of your life. And every intersection requires a choice. Will you;

1. Ignore the moment and try to keep moving forward as if nothing happened.
2. Freeze up and wonder if you should even be on this road at all.
3. Run back to familiar territory where you feel safe.
4. Pass through the Kairos portal and enter into the learning circle

It's always my choice, but whenever a Kairos event occurs I do have to choose.



Use the diagram to draw the four options on the chart and then mark the one you feel tends to be your default choice when you face a Kairos moment.

Take another look at what Jesus said when he announced his ministry in the gospel of Mark.

Read Mark 1:14-15 again. What were the two things Jesus said we should do when we experience a Kairos event?

R _____

B _____

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

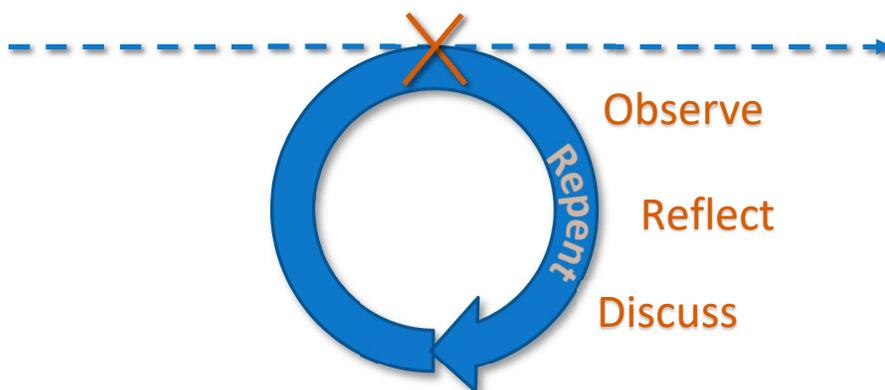
Mark 1:14-15

Every Kairos event is an invitation to enter a learning circle that consists of two basic parts. The first half is a call to repent, and the second a call to believe. From the moment you accept that invitation, you have entered a learning mode. And one thing is for certain; you'll never be the same.

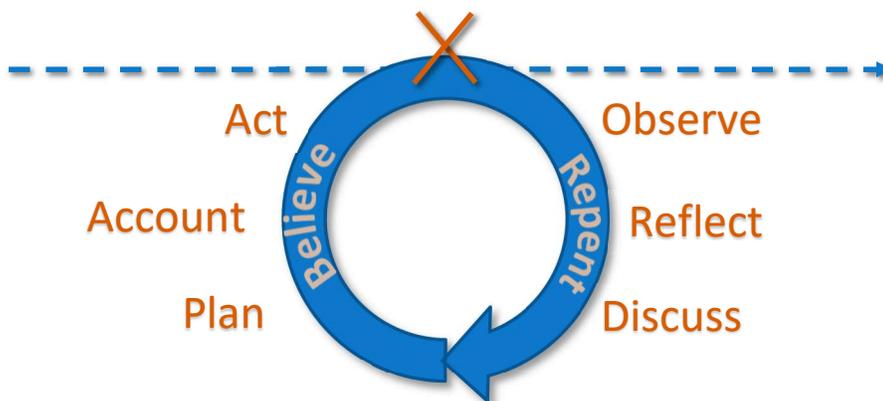
Life as a follower of Jesus is intended to be a dynamic experience. What we call discipleship is, quite literally, developing a lifestyle of learning. Fortunately, Kairos events are just that, events. They have a beginning and an end. But the repentance and belief they invite us into are process words. They describe an ongoing experience.

Like a lot of spiritual words that we toss around, the words "repent" and "believe" have collected an amazing amount of baggage through the years. Later we'll dig much deeper into what repentance and belief were intended to be as Jesus taught them. But for now, you can think of these two concepts as each having three parts

When Jesus said repent, he was saying:



And when he said believe, he was saying:



Kairos moments can, if we let them begin a process of repentance; processing what we've just experienced to understand the meaning. But the learning God has for us isn't complete until we've engaged in the process of belief; making a plan of action and being accountable for it.

It's all about the Change

By now it's probably hit you that what this all means is change. And that can be a scary word right? But that is exactly what we're talking about and, no matter how scary it can seem, passion is impossible to maintain without change.

The Greek language has a lot to teach us about what we mean when we say things in English. Take the word "enthusiasm" for example. It's a close cousin to "passion" and it puts a smile on your face when you see someone with enthusiasm (unless you're tired and cranky, and then enthusiasm is just irritating.) But there is something about passionate and enthusiastic people that draws us to them. Perhaps it's because we were created to have that spark firing inside us. The word enthusiasm comes from the Greek root "entheos."

Entheos = Having the god within

When you are enthusiastic about something the ancient Greeks recognized that spark as something divine. But the struggles of life begin to take their toll. Hurt and pain teach us the dangers of reaching out and trying new things. When we reach a Kairos event we begin looking backward to try and avoid what caused the pain. And that drains the passion out of us, inch by painful inch. The hunger in our hearts for passion and meaning settles for a diet of quick fixes and thrills that have no lasting impact.

This is not what Jesus had in mind when He promised his followers abundant life (John 10:10). We were created to find passion and enthusiasm in life. Jesus died so that we could have access to that kind of life again. And Kairos events are the doorway into that passion again. The learning circle is really a journey into that kingdom Jesus announced.

Ponder

In Romans 8:28 Paul makes a statement that often gets quoted to people who are going through negative Kairos moments.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 (NIV)

Unfortunately, this verse often gets misquoted as saying, “All things work together for good...”

Now that you know about Kairos events and the learning circle, how does that change your perspective on what Paul is saying in this passage?

Day 3

Words, Words, Words

I saw a posting on a Pinterest page recently that carried a rather pointed message. It read, "People on earth hate to hear the word repent! Those in hell wish they could hear it just once more. America: Repent or perish." I'm sure whoever wrote that intended it to motivate change, no matter how shaky their theology might be. Get your act together or you'll burn in hell! Isn't that what we usually associate with a word like "repent."

We hear that word and we think about judgement and failure. After every mistake we promise ourselves we're going to do better. And when we mess up again, we'd better repent of our failure and try again. We feel shame and condemnation. We hope that God will be gracious one more time and accept us back instead of condemning us.

But what if we've completely misunderstood what Jesus was meaning when he said "repent?" When Jesus talked about Repentance he was talking about the process of change; and that's challenging enough to deal with. If that's what repentance is about, wouldn't you agree that its challenging enough without loading it down with all that judgement and shame?

Yesterday we looked a little deeper at what Paul meant when he taught that God works in all things for our good. But wait till you read how he introduces that entire section.

Read Romans 8:1 and respond:

Think about one of those Kairos events that you've experienced recently. If you could be guaranteed that no one would judge you or make you feel stupid, how would that affect your willingness to enter the learning circle?

Four horizontal lines for writing a response.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," Romans 8:1 (NIV)

No condemnation! That sounds too good to be true. But as we look at what repentance really means, I hope you can start to believe it. Perhaps it can help to take the word outside its normal spiritual context and into a much yummiest place. Take a trip with me to the land of 31 flavors. Perhaps you already know exactly what you would order. Or maybe you approach all that goodness with a completely open mind. But I'll bet you've repented at least once every time you go to Baskin Robins.

No, I'm not talking about the guilty feeling you have for eating too much ice cream. I'm talking about the fact that as you looked at all those flavors, you probably walked down the case and thought to yourself, "I think I'll have Marble Mint Chip. But after a couple more steps you said, "No, I'll have Chocolate Brownie Delight." You just repented! You changed your mind.

That's what repentance is really all about. To make a change in direction. No guilt or red-faced warnings of impending doom. No shame over your former choice (because it would have been tasty too.) You were thinking one direction and you decided to go another. When a Kairos event pulls you up short and opens a door into the learning circle, Jesus invites us to take the first step to change; Repent.

Observe

To understand a bit more about how repentance actually works, let's dig into a moment with Jesus found in Matthew 6. The first step in effective repentance is to observe.

Jesus is right in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. He's has been talking about the kind of life He is teaching and he gets to an issue we all struggle with; worry.

Read Matthew 6:25 and respond:

What are the things that Jesus says not to worry about? Can you honestly say you practice what Jesus is preaching here? If not, why not?

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"
Matthew 6:25 (NIV)

When you really think about what Jesus is saying in this passage, that’s a really tall order. Don’t worry about what you’ll eat or wear. Those things are pretty basic needs. If I wasn’t assured of where my next meal was coming from, I would definitely struggle with this statement.

What does Jesus tell us to do in Matthew 6:26?

It would be easy to miss the significance of what Jesus is saying here. “So people worry and birds don’t. So what?” But there’s more to it than that. Depending on the version of Bible you’re reading, it might have used words like “observe,” or “consider,” instead of “look at.” When we look at the birds and consider the fact that God completely takes care of their needs, that should tell us something about God.

When you come face to face with a Kairos event, the first step in the learning circle is to take a good look at what is happening. Unless we’re willing to make some honest observations about this situation, it will be really tough to get any learning out of it.

This is a good time to remember what our natural instincts are when faced with uncomfortable observations. Remember what Adam and Eve did when they realized they were going to have to talk with God about that fruit they ate? They hid, and that’s exactly what we wish we could do in some Kairos events. But unless we take an honest look at what’s going on inside, it will be pretty tough to experience any change.

If there’s no condemnation coming from the One you’re hiding from, then maybe its safe to come out and observe what’s happening. So take the risk and observe what’s really going on.

How do you respond when you observe something about yourself that is difficult to deal with?

Reflect

The next step in the learning circle is to reflect on what you are observing. Jesus went on in verse 26 and asked a rather rhetorical question. “Are you not much more valuable than they?” Now the answer to that question is obvious, but it does make you stop and think right?

“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” Matthew 6:26 (NIV)

That’s precisely the point. Once I’ve stopped long enough to observe what is happening, a little further reflection on that moment is in order. If you’re an introvert, you’ve probably got this skill mastered. You carry on conversations with yourself all the time. If you’re an extrovert, well, your turn is coming when we talk about discussing. But before you include the rest of the world in your thoughts, take a moment and reflect.

The roadblock you’ll probably run into is Blame. Its impossible to reflect on a Kairos event if your thoughts are consumed with who else it at fault for this situation you are in. If you want to travel the learning circle, you have to be willing to set blame aside. I’m not suggesting that its all your fault. Most of the Kairos moments I’ve had in my life were at least partially someone else’s fault. But the learning circle is about God and me.

How does blaming get in the way of reflection?

Discuss

There's one more step to repentance. Jesus intentionally instigates a discussion.

Read Matthew 6:27 - 32 and respond:

What questions would you want to ask Jesus if you were sitting with the disciples that day?

In New Testament times, the usual method of rabbinical teaching was through question and answer. The Rabbi would ask a question and the students would dialogue about it. We don't know what all was said in response to these questions, but we can be sure that there was some discussion about all this.

In order to fully repent, we have to let others into our learning circle. We have to be willing to discuss what we've observed and reflected on and get an outside perspective on the situation. Other people see things in a way that we don't and they can open our eyes to things we can't see in ourselves.

Obviously that kind of a conversation assumes people who know you and people you trust. People who are strong enough to hear your confession and filled with grace enough to respond to you the way Jesus responds to us.

That's why Jesus expected His followers to do their following in a community of people who were all on the same journey. That can be hard to do in a church with hundreds of people. That's why the small group you are in right now can be so powerful in your life. At least one of those people could be the kind of person you can trust to follow God's instructions in James 5:16.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” James 5:16 (NIV)

Read James 5:16 and respond:

With whom in your life do you have honest conversations about Kairos events?

Embracing the Change

Most people I know are willing to admit they aren't perfect and that there are some things in their life that could use some change. Its when God starts getting specific that we get uncomfortable. I hope you've begun to see that repentance isn't about shame and judgement, but that doesn't mean its easy.

Repentance is about change and that is always a challenging process. And changing me is perhaps the toughest case of all. In looking at what Jesus taught in Matthew 6:25-26 Mike Breen writes, “We try to change the things we worry about. But Jesus says that the person who worries needs to change.”

Ironically, this change process that we struggle with is the cure to the worries we get consumed with. Jesus includes a promise at the end of his teaching that brings a lot of hope.

Read Matthew 6:33 and respond:

What am I supposed to seek and what does Jesus promise if I put that first?

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

The very same kingdom that Jesus said was near in Mark 1:14-15 is the goal. And he told us how to seek it. Repent and Believe he said. Now he's promising that if you will enter the learning circle, you can expect the result to be security in all those things we are prone to worry about.

Processing

There's still one more half of the learning circle to go, but for today, find confidence in the knowledge that anyone willing to repent will find a God who isn't interested in condemning you.

Take a few moments and ponder over these questions before you go on about your day.

What experiences have triggered the strongest reactions in your life?

What are some things you have learned about yourself by reflecting on your thoughts, emotions and reactions?

Day 4

A Four-Letter Word

There's a plaque hanging on the wall in our guest bathroom. When you come to my house someday you can see it. Just make up some excuse to use the restroom and you'll see it hanging right over the toilet. To be honest, I'm not sure why this plaque ended up in that particular location. I don't make the decorating decisions in my house, but I approve. It's the kind of think that you need to see often and the kind of thought that only works if you apply it to the everyday situations of life and not just the big stuff. It says,

"Hope is hearing the music of the future. Faith is the courage to dance to it today."

Something you have to think about a little bit right? But the more you think about it, the more profound it becomes. It captures the essence of another religious word that we are very prone to misunderstanding; "faith."

When we talk about having faith, I wonder if there isn't a little corner of the mind that starts playing the Disney theme song. "When you wish upon a star. Makes no difference who you are..." We associate faith with dreams, ideas and wishes. It's a somewhat ephemeral concept that we leave in the realm of the future.

But that doesn't match up too well with the way James talks about faith in James 2

Take a few minutes to read James 2:14-26 and respond to the following questions:

What does James say demonstrates that we have faith?

James gives two people as examples of those who lived their faith. What did they have in common?

What is the difference between living out your faith and trying to earn your salvation?

According to James, Faith is a very tangible thing. Its dynamic, it moves. In Hebrews 11:1 the Bible tells us that faith has substance and leads to confidence in things we can't yet see. Or, in other words, Faith is actually a four-letter word; *r-i-s-k*

You've probably heard the expression, "experience is the best teacher." But that's not exactly guaranteed. Just because you've had a Kairos moment doesn't mean you've chosen to enter the learning circle. And if you only get far enough into the learning circle to repent and then stop, there's a good chance you'll be repeating that rather unpleasant experience again in the future. Repentance is an absolutely essential part of the learning circle experience, but its only half of what Jesus said was necessary to tap into the kingdom of heaven.

"The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news." – Mark 1:14-15

You can observe, reflect on, and discuss your situation. But then its time to move on to the other half of the learning circle; the action part. Unless I am willing to take some action in response to what I've discovered through the process of repenting, I'm likely to end up right back in the same situation in the future.

That's where faith comes in. It leads me into three corresponding steps that take me through the process of Biblical belief. And it all starts with making a plan.

Plan

Let's go back to the Sermon on the Mount and the promise Jesus tucked in Matthew 6:33

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

Read that verse and rewrite it below. When you rewrite it personalize it with your name as if Jesus was speaking directly to you.

When Kairos events happen and we accept the invitation to enter the learning circle, we begin the process of evaluating how my current choices match up with the Kingdom life Jesus came to offer. Embracing a Kairos moment almost always leads me to discover that I've been using something else as a substitute for God and His plan for my life.

Let's say you encounter a Kairos moment when you check your bank balance and discover you're overdrawn...again. The process of repentance might well reveal not only the practical issue of not having any money left to pay the bills, but it might also reveal that shopping has become a way to fill an inner void in your life.

Belief in the kingdom of God starts with making a plan to put first things back in first place in my life. When I seek things first that don't line up with kingdom life, it always leaves me feeling unsatisfied in some way. So what will I do instead? If meeting the needs of my heart in my own way hasn't been working, what will I do differently?

What are some of the things that get in your way of making plans for change?

There have been dozens of books written on the art of strategic planning, but most of us are actually pretty good at it. As long as we can see what we want to accomplish most of us can figure out some steps to get there. That's called vision.

If your vision is a day at the lake, the planning follows in short order. You pick your particular destination, gather the necessary supplies, decide on how you'll handle lunch and pack everything up. It's the same with inner change. It all starts with God's vision for that aspect of your life. How does God see this part of my life working?

If that sounds a bit overwhelming, here's a good starting place. Look back to where you wrote out Matthew 6:33 and underline the word "righteousness." The first step to a good plan is discovering God's vision for right relationship with him. Putting him back in first place begins to displace the worry that has been driving my actions. Once I can see where God is leading, its then a matter of filling in whatever steps I need to take to get from where I'm at to what He is inviting me into.

What are the characteristics of a good plan?

Account

Change is not something that happens in private. It may start out as a very private process, but with faith, it doesn't stay there. I've made lots of plans about all sorts of different things in my life, but the plans I've been most successful in finishing are the ones that somebody else knew about. At least one other person needs to know what you are planning to do and has permission to ask you about it from time to time. That's called accountability. It can be really easy to cheat on that new diet I started if nobody actually knows I'm on one.

The first step to a good plan is discovering God's vision for right relationship with Him.

What are some advantages to having someone to be accountable to? In what ways might accountability be uncomfortable?

This is where far too many people choose to bail out of the learning circle. It can be frightening to open up your struggles and plans to someone else. Will they misuse that information and judge you? Will they actually follow through? Will they think less of you? These are all very real fears based on real previous experience. How do we overcome the fear that keeps us hiding behind our masks?

I've spent years looking for the silver bullet that would take out all these fears at once, but I haven't found one yet. Remember that faith is a four-letter word. There is always risk involved in acting now on what we hope for in the future. I can testify that when I've taken that risk, the results have always been worth it. But there are a couple of steps that can help you get there.

1. Be the kind of person you wish others were

It hurts when you are on the receiving end of some unfair criticism. But it can be so easy to see the deficiencies in others that we can jump in and judge them in spite of the fact that we wouldn't want them doing the same thing to us. Just a bit further on in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus reminds us to practice focusing a little bit closer to home.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye...You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Matthew 7:3,5

Notice Jesus didn't tell us to ignore other people's issues. The speck is something that will get addressed at the right time. But be the kind of person who is honest with their own faults and gracious about the faults of others. When you are authentic in that way, you'll begin to find others who are also authentic. And those are the kind of people you can trust to be accountable with.

2. Start small

Trust is something that gets built over time. Identify an issue that is a little less personal and share that with someone. If that investment of trust proves to be well placed, it will yield a dividend of more trust. You can be confident in trusting them with something more personal.

3. Be intentional

It can feel a little funny to make a formal agreement over something that can be so personal. Often our instincts are to keep something like this somewhat light and informal. But that kind of informality can only work when there's a high degree of trust already established. If you're just starting out, its helpful to explicitly identify the expectations each of you have about how this particular relationship will work.

How often will you meet? Who calls who? What exactly do you want to be held accountable to? Answering a few questions like that, and even putting them in writing, can make the next steps in that relationship flow much more smoothly.

Accountability is challenging enough that a lot of people are tempted to skip this step in the learning circle. But it is a crucial spoke in the wheel, and if we leave it out, practicing what we claim to believe can become nearly impossible.

Before you continue, have you ever experienced an accountability relationship before? If so, what was that experience like for you?

In what ways can you see an accountability relationship contribute to your spiritual growth?

Take a moment to think about the people in your friend circle. Are any of them possible accountability partners? Write their names down here.

Act

This is the last step in the learning circle. I actually have to do something with what I've learned. You've probably heard someone explain to you that their faith was a personal matter. I'm sure they meant well, but when you understand what Jesus meant by faith, a statement like that is a logical impossibility. There is no such thing as private faith. Faith is action, and actions can be observed.

Once I willingly climbed to the top of a 30 foot pole with the sole purpose of jumping off. It was a zip line and I was excited about feeling the wind in my hair as I "flew" down the cable. A certified instructor checked my harness. They showed me how there were two different pulley systems that I would be attached to the cable with. There was no chance that I could fall off and die.

I started climbing up that pole and by the time I reached the top, all my faith in the people and safety systems experienced an immediate crisis. I knew I was safe and I wanted to jump, but somehow my body was unwilling to leave the platform. I told it to jump and it said "No!" A short argument between my muscles and my brain ensued. Finally, my brain won and I had the most exhilarating trip down the wire.

But what if I hadn't jumped. Could I still say that I had faith in the equipment and the people who had rigged it? Not really. I would be all talk.

Isn't it the same thing we face in our spiritual beliefs. If I claim to believe something I am unwilling to put into action, how much do I really believe it? If I've observed, reflected, discussed, planned, been accountable, but I don't act, how much actual learning has taken place? A Kairos moment is only effective as a learning tool if I am willing to complete the learning circle.

Finding Your Inner Gazelle

Dave Ramsey, a financial expert and teacher, is fond of some rather interesting word pictures. In his book, Total Money Makeover he talks about what it takes to make a change in your financial life. He describes the moment when a gazelle realizes a cheetah is about to turn it into lunch. Suddenly there is only one thing that matters; escape the cheetah!

That's the picture he says you need to have in your head as you deal with the financial problems trying to eat you for lunch. Figure out what you have to do and don't let anything stop you until its done. That may be a little melodramatic, but it does make the point that if when Jesus said, "Believe the good news," He fully intended us to engage the new kingdom He proclaimed with everything we have.

A Kairos moment is a gift; a Holy Spirit wakeup call that invites me into the sacred space of learning how my life can come a little closer to the kingdom life God intends for me. And if I'm willing to believe enough to act, it's like a passion infusion as I discover a whole new vista opening up in my life.

Day 5

Signing Up

So now you're ready for a Kairos moment. You know what it means when time seems to stand still for a moment. You are ready to step into repentance by observing what's happening, reflecting on what it might mean, and discussing it with someone who is spiritually wise. You're ready to believe by making a plan for change, sharing it with someone else who will hold you accountable, and you're ready to act.

This makes so much sense, why isn't everybody doing this? There are so many blessings that come from living what the great spiritual leaders of the past call, "the examined life." Who wouldn't want to have that experience?

I believe most people desperately want the results that the learning circle can provide, but anything really worth having requires some effort to get it. I really would love having six-pack abs, but there is so much pain between me and that desire that, as of this point, I've been unwilling to endure it.

And that's where things always get complicated right? When my desires bump up against the cost of getting them, I start to really struggle with just how interested I really am. So before we end our time with the learning circle and it gets filed along with all the other great ideas I'm not going to do, take a few moments and count the cost of all this.

Read through the following list of passages. For each one, identify the potential roadblock to change it is addressing and what scripture has to say about it.

Romans 8:1

Roadblock:

Solution:

Matthew 6:25

Roadblock:

Solution:

James 5:16

Roadblock:

Solution:

Matthew 6:33

Roadblock:

Solution:

Now take a moment to read Romans 8:28 and apply its message to whatever situation your latest Kairos moment has put you in.

Pick a Kairos moment that's been on your mind as you've been working through this week's study. Write out the passage on the lines below, but in place of the words, "all things," write in your specific challenge.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

Slinky Faith

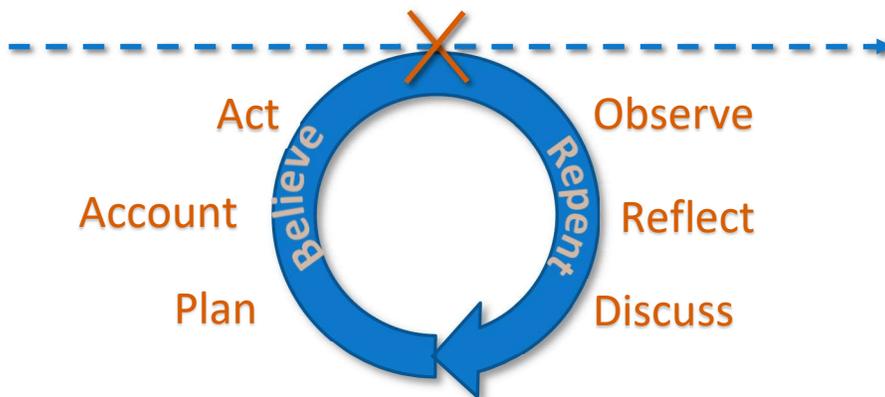
If this all seems a bit overwhelming, let me remind you that God usually takes us through these things one step at a time. He never asks you to process more than what He is able to help you work through. I have found that He tends to approach the growth areas in our lives a bit like peeling the layers of an onion; or better yet, the circles in a slinky.

Remember that wonderful children's toy that, "...walks down stairs, alone or in pairs and makes a slinkity sound?" When we apply the learning circle to life, the slinky is a great way to visualize the result. Chronos time marks our path through the minutes, days, and years in some kind of liner fashion. Kairos events invite us into the learning circle. But if we really do learn, we'll come out the other side of the learning circle somewhat further ahead of where we started.

Because God often breaks things down into bite-sized chunks, a trip around the learning circle will help me grasp a life lesson. Later, a similar situation may come up again, but this time I'll build on what I previously learned and take another step forward. Living a passionate life not only means being willing to learn from the Kairos moments God invites us into, it also means being willing to let Him set the pace of what I'm learning today. Trying to bite off more than what God has set aside for this experience is a great way to end up feeling overwhelmed.

Wrapping it Up

As you finish this section of the study, I hope you'll take a few minutes and apply what you've learned to a situation you know you need to learn something from. Finish out this week by stepping through the following questions and see how all the pieces of the learning circle fit together.



Which part of the Learning Circle is hardest for you to go through? Why?

How will you recognize a Kairos moment when it happens to you this week?

Be ready to share a Kairos moment with your group when you meet.

Digging Deeper

Most of us have regarded depression as a negative, shameful experience using terms such as “breakdown,” when it is important to regard it as a possible sign-post towards change. As a Christian counselor, I have been using the context of the learning circle in my practice. I have seen transformation in individuals who have chosen to view depression as a learning event, a signpost from God. It may be discipline, it may be guidance but it is something we need to responsibly process and respond to.

-Dr. Angus Bell

How does this perspective on depression compare with yours?

If you struggle with depression, what might that signpost be pointing to in your life?

Special Note: It is important to remember that depression is a complex interaction of emotions based on both psychological and physiological components. If you are struggling with depression, it is important to treat both aspects. Please see your family doctor for the proper medical treatment before looking into the Kairos learning opportunities that might be there.