

## **The Path to the New Normal Small Group Guide**

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Have you ever broken a bone? Explain.
2. What's one food you enjoy eating during the summer?

**Read the following passage:** Luke 3:1-18.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

John the Baptist had the unique mission of preparing the way for Jesus. John was the forerunner to the person who would change the world forever. John's ministry provides a picture of what it looks like to live in a season of uncertainty, disruption, and, ultimately, major change. John's preaching was connected to the primary first-century Jewish hope: the kingdom of God. The "kingdom of God" was not so much a reference to a place as it was a way of expressing God's dynamic rule in the earth (something like "the reign of God"). When God reestablished his rule in the earth, (Jews believed) Israel would be forgiven and exalted, and they would once again experience the presence of God.

So how were people to prepare themselves for God's kingdom? How would God's people experience the new normal they longed for? John's ministry demonstrated that it would not be comfortable. It required repentance. There would be a new level of accountability. Those unwilling to change would be judged. But embracing the discomfort would be worth it. God's kingdom meant the arrival of God's presence, God's salvation, and God's Spirit. And those who responded to John's call wouldn't live in shame. They would find forgiveness.

1. Can you think of any times in which discomfort or pain led to growth or change in your life? Explain. What can we do to cause the discomfort or pain we experience to be a benefit to us or those around us in some way? What are some unhelpful responses to our pain? What are some helpful ways to respond when we see others in pain?
2. What is an area of discomfort or pain you are dealing with in your life right now? Have you experienced God's help with this area of pain? Explain.
3. John's ministry was fueled by the hope he had for the arrival of God's kingdom. Generally speaking, how hopeful would you say you are right now? Overall, are you prone to entertaining big hopes, or are you more likely to restrain your hopes (perhaps in order to protect yourself from disappointment)? What do you think God wants you to hope for in this season? What is the ultimate hope for followers of Jesus? Is this hope real to you?

4. John said that he baptized people in water, but that Jesus would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. Are you experiencing the presence and help of the Holy Spirit in your life right now? Explain. What are some ways the Holy Spirit can help us?
5. Paul says that the Holy Spirit empowers followers of Jesus with a variety of gifts and ministries (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). Do you have a sense of some of the ways the Holy Spirit has empowered you to serve God's people and purposes? Explain.
6. John told the people that merely being descendants of Abraham was insufficient to ensure favor from God. They needed to produce good fruit with their lives. Do you feel that your life is bearing good fruit? Are there any areas of your life in which you see a need for repentance? Explain.
7. How did John address complacency and the abuse of power in his context (see Luke 3:7-14)? Are you using whatever wealth, influence, or power you have in a way God would approve of? Explain.
8. Do you regularly experience a sense of condemnation or guilt? Explain. Do you think God will forgive you if you ask him? How do we recognize when our feelings of guilt or shame are legitimate and when they are coming from some unhealthy source? What should we do when we feel guilty or ashamed?
9. Have you been baptized since becoming a follower of Jesus? If not, are you ready to take that step?

**Pray**