BREAKING GROUND
Week 1: Preparing the Way
Matt 3:1-12

1. What was the longest period of time you spent in the wilderness or away from civilization? What was it like?

READ Matt 3:1-12

2. Given Matthew’s description of John and his message, what would be the reaction if John the Baptist showed up in church today?

3. How would you paraphrase John’s message (v. 2) for people today? How would you explain the “kingdom of heaven”?

4. Dallas Willard says this about the Kingdom of Heaven, “The gospel is not about getting into heaven after you die, the gospel is about getting into heaven before you die.” What does Willard imply with his statement. Do you agree or disagree?

5. Reread verses 7-10. John is condemning the religious leaders for their spiritual pedigree. John says, it’s not your family tree that saves you...but it’s the grace of God. How do we today still hold on to a type of spiritual pedigree?

6. In v. 11 John says that compared to Jesus he is not even worthy to be his servant. “I am not worthy to carry his sandals.” What role does humility play in your spiritual journey?

7. What do these images mean: The coming wrath (v. 7), the ax (v. 10), the fire (v. 10), His winnowing fork (v. 12)? In light of the entire passage, what is the point that John is trying to get across?

8. How does this passage challenge you to live in such a way that prepares the way for the Kingdom of Heaven just as John did?

BREAKING GROUND

The kingdom sums up God’s plan to create a new human life by making possible a new kind of community among people, families, and groups. [It combines] the possibility of a personal relationship to Jesus with man’s responsibility to manage wisely the whole of nature; the expectation that real change is possible here and now; a realistic assessment of the strength of opposition to God’s intentions; the creation of new human relationships and the eventual liberation by God of the whole of nature from corruption.

A. Kirk, The Good News of the Kingdom Coming
Week 2: Fulfilling All Righteousness  
Matt 3:13-17

1. What event(s) in your life helped define when you “grew up”? Graduating, starting a job, marriage, etc.

READ Matt 3:13-17

2. What strikes you about this passage? What is confusing about this passage?

3. Reread Matt 3:11-12. In these verses John gives this prophetic statement of the coming of the Messiah. He is mighty and powerful, one who will judge all. We don’t know the how much time has elapsed between verses 12 and 13, but look at how verse 13 introduces Jesus. Jesus appears as this simple guy who is traveling alone from a small agricultural area of Galilee. How do you think the people responded to this? Does it carry any implications?

John’s baptism was one of repentance. Jesus came as a sinless man, having nothing to repent of. It’s only at Jesus’ insistence (v.15 “Let it be so now. It is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.”) that John proceeds with baptizing Jesus.

4. Craig Blomberg in his commentary on Matthew says, “To fulfill all righteousness means to complete everything that forms part of a relationship of obedience to God.”
   a. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
   b. Why would Jesus need to do this?
   c. In what ways does this challenge you?

5. Upon coming up out of the water, God speaks. Do you think that Jesus needed this affirmation from God when he began his ministry?

6. Take a moment and reflect on the mind-boggling truth that Matthew reveals in chapter 3: Jesus is the incarnate Son of God; He is God in flesh! What did this mean for the first century Jews? What does this mean for us now?

7. What next step do you think God may be calling you to? Serving, tithing, baptism, etc.

Leaders, some folks might be thinking through baptism…this is a great passage to help people understand the importance of baptism. Here are some teaching points:
   Jesus did it (Matt 3:12-17; Mark 1:9)
   Jesus said it (Matt 28:19-20)
   It shows that I follow Jesus (Acts 18:8; 1 John 2:3)

BREAKING GROUND
Week 3: Overcoming Temptation  
Matt 4:1-11

1. If you were to fast for 40 days, what food would you miss the most?

READ Matt 4:1-11

2. How vulnerable to temptation was Jesus?

3. For each of the three temptations:
   - What was its nature?
   - What potentially might appeal to Jesus?
   - What price would there be were he to yield?

Henry Nouwen in his book *In The Name of Jesus* uses Jesus’ temptations as a case and point for Christian leaders. Many of us think of moral or ethical temptations because most of us cringe when we hear the media expose sinful behavior by Christian leaders. But Nouwen focuses our attention elsewhere, on temptations that many of us think are good things.

   1. The temptation to be relevant—to do things, show things, prove things, build things that demonstrate the ability to make a difference in people’s lives.
   2. The temptation to be spectacular—to do something that will win great applause and popularity.
   3. The temptation to be powerful—to use political, economic, spiritual, and even military might as instruments for establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth.

4. Do you agree or disagree with Nouwen’s observations? Do you see these temptations prevalent in the church today?

5. Jesus was in the desert, alone and hungry for 40 days. When have you been alone in the “desert”? How can it help to know that Jesus has been there? What is the difference between being lonely and being alone?

READ Hebrew 4:14-16

6. When you face temptation how do you deal with it? How did Jesus deal with it? What implication does Jesus’ example of dealing with temptation have for us?

*Leaders, you may want to break up into men’s and women’s groups if room is available and it’s not too awkward. You make the call.*

7. How can we pray for each other this week as we face temptation?

**BREAKING GROUND**
Week 4: The Kingdom is at Hand
Matt 4:12-17, 23-25

1. When did you leave home to be on your own for the first time?

READ Matt 4:12-17, 23-25

2. How had the people been living in darkness (v.16)?

In all of the Bible’s references to light, light is not self-generated. It comes from outside the earthly and human sphere and transforms that sphere with a transcendent splendor. As a symbol light thus pictures the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God: it is from above, but it permeates everyday life.

Dictionary of Biblical Imagery, pg. 512

3. What was Jesus’ message? What is that relation between repentance, the kingdom of heaven, and light?

Read John 8:12

4. What is Jesus claiming in verse 12? How is Jesus the light of the world? See Psalm 27:1; Matthew 4:12-17 (quoting Isaiah 9:2); Isaiah 42:6; Acts 13:47 (quoting Isaiah 49:6); Acts 26:18, 23; Ephesians 5:8-14.)

5. What do you think he means by saying, “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness”? (See 1 John 1:5-7; 2:9-11).

6. Jesus said that whoever follows Him will have the “light of life.” How does this light affect the lives of those who follow Jesus?

7. How has coming to know Jesus been like moving from darkness to light for you?

8. In vv.23-25 crowds of people are coming to Jesus. What are they learning about God’s kingdom?

9. In what ways does God’s kingdom seem present now for you? In what ways does it seem “not yet”?  

BREAKING GROUND
Week 5: Establishing the Team  
Matt 4:18-22

1. Can you remember a time when you felt like you were called to do something? Explain.

READ Matt. 4:18-22

2. What invitations does Jesus give to these fishermen? What seems unusual about their response?

3. What prior knowledge of Jesus do you think they had (vv. 13, 17; John 1:35-42)?

4. How might Zebedee have felt (v.22)?

5. What kind of connotation does the metaphor “fishers of men” carry for you? Negative, positive? How would you reword it for 2012?

The church throughout the centuries has struggled with the temptation to be “keepers of the aquarium instead of fishers of men.”

E.V. Hill - pastor

6. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.

The normal pattern in Israel was for a prospective disciple to approach a rabbi and ask to study with him. Later rabbinic disciples followed their master around, often imitating the master’s teaching of the Torah, because “imitating the master is imitating Moses’ imitation of God.” But at the inauguration of his kingdom mission, Jesus establishes a new pattern, because he is the one who takes the initiative to seek out and call these brothers to enter into a permanent relationship with him.

Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary on Matthew*

7. Many of us are not in vocational ministry, but can you recall a time when you felt the Jesus calling you to be on mission with Him? Explain.

8. Whatever our profession, whether preacher or plumber, teacher or technician, hotel maid or hospital orderly, discipleship means that we place as the priority of our lives joining with Jesus in reaching our daily world with the good news of life in the Kingdom of Heaven. In your current position or profession, how do or how can you do that?