
NOW & THEN

Lesson 3



Signs of the Kingdom

Primary Scripture: John 11:1–44 (NLT)

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed to help you recognize how God is at work even when life remains unfinished, and to understand why suffering continues in a world where His Kingdom has already begun.

1. The Problem We Experience

One of the hardest questions in the Christian life is not whether God can act, but why He does not always act the way we expect. We are told that God is present, that He is powerful, and that His Kingdom has come. And yet, we still experience loss, delay, sickness, and unanswered prayer. This creates a deeper tension than confusion—it raises questions about how God actually works. If God is active, why does He sometimes seem slow? If His Kingdom has come, why does suffering remain? Many people quietly begin to measure God’s faithfulness by whether circumstances change. But Scripture does not define God’s work primarily by immediate outcomes. It shows us something deeper.

We believe:

- God is at work
- Jesus has authority over life and death
- The Kingdom has come

And yet:

- People still suffer
- Healing is not immediate
- Outcomes are not predictable

This is not a contradiction.

It is where we begin to understand how God works.

2. What John 11 Actually Shows Us

John 11 is not just a story about a miracle—it is a revelation of how Jesus operates in a world that is not yet fully restored. Lazarus becomes sick, and Jesus is told about it. Instead of going immediately, Jesus delays. Lazarus dies. By the time Jesus arrives, the situation is beyond what anyone expected Him to allow. This is not accidental—it is intentional. Jesus is not absent, but He is not acting on the timeline people expected. This is the first key insight: God’s work does not always align with our urgency. What feels like delay is often part of a larger purpose we cannot yet see.



Read: John 11:1–16

Key Truths:

- Jesus is aware of the situation
 - He chooses not to act immediately
 - Delay does not mean absence
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Reflection

Where are you assuming that delay means God is not working?

3. God Is Present Before He Resolves

When Jesus arrives, He does not begin by fixing the situation. He enters into it. He listens. He observes. And then, He weeps. This is one of the most important moments in the passage. Jesus knows what He is about to do, and yet He still grieves. This shows us that God’s presence is not dependent on resolution. He is not only present when things change—He is present in the middle of what has not yet changed. Many people look for God only in outcomes. Scripture shows that He is just as present in the process. If we only recognize God when circumstances improve, we will miss Him where He is already at work.

Read: John 11:17–37

Key Truths:

- Jesus enters into human pain
 - God’s presence is not tied to immediate change
 - Compassion is part of how God works
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Reflection

Where are you overlooking God’s presence because you are focused only on what has not changed?



4. Signs of the Kingdom Are Not the Full Kingdom

When Jesus raises Lazarus, it is a powerful moment—but it is not the end of the story. Lazarus will still die again. The miracle is real, but it is not final. This is what makes it a “sign.” In Scripture, signs are not the full reality—they point to something greater. The raising of Lazarus shows that Jesus has authority over death, but it does not eliminate death from the world yet. This is how the Kingdom works now. We see real evidence of God’s power—healing, restoration, breakthrough—but those moments are not the full completion of His work. They are signs of what is coming.

Read: John 11:38–44

Key Truths:

- Miracles are real but not final
- Signs point forward to full restoration
- The Kingdom is present, but not yet complete

Reflection

Where have you expected signs of God’s work to function as full and final solutions?

5. Why Suffering Still Exists

Suffering continues not because God is absent, but because His work is not yet finished. The resurrection has begun a new reality, but the world has not yet been fully restored. This means we will experience both: evidence of God’s power and the ongoing presence of brokenness. Many people assume that if God is truly at work, suffering should disappear. Scripture teaches that both exist at the same time. If we misunderstand this, we either lose hope when suffering remains or develop unrealistic expectations about how God should act. Understanding this tension allows us to trust God without requiring immediate resolution.

NOW (Already True)

- God is present and active
- Jesus has authority over death
- The Kingdom has begun
- Signs of restoration appear

THEN (Not Yet Complete)

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- Death still exists
 - Suffering continues
 - Healing is not constant or predictable
 - The world is not yet fully restored
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Reflection

Where are you expecting the world to function as if restoration has already been completed?

6. How This Changes the Way We See God's Work

If we define God's work only by outcomes, we will often conclude that He is not working. But if we understand how the Kingdom operates, we begin to see His work differently. We see Him in presence, not just results. We see Him in process, not just completion. We recognize that signs are evidence, not fulfillment. This does not remove the tension—it reframes it. Faith is not believing that everything will resolve immediately. It is trusting that God is at work even when resolution has not yet come.

Reflection

Where do you need to change how you recognize God's work in your life?

7. Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Recognize Signs Without Demanding Completion

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Identify One Area of Ongoing Struggle

Choose one situation where you are waiting for change.

Do not change this throughout the week.

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Step 2 — Name What Has Not Changed

Be honest. Do not soften the reality.

Step 3 — Identify Evidence of God's Work

Look carefully:

- Where is God present?
 - Where has anything shifted, even slightly?
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Step 4 — Refuse to Demand Immediate Resolution

Do not conclude that nothing is happening.

Do not assume delay means failure.

Daily Prayer

Lord,
Help me see where You are already at work.
Keep me from defining Your faithfulness
only by what I can see completed.
Teach me to recognize Your presence
even in what is unfinished.
Amen.

8. Living It Out

Write one area where you are waiting for God to act:

Write what has not changed:

Now write where you can see evidence—however small—that God is present or working:



Return to this daily.

Faith is not demanding full resolution.

It is learning to recognize God's work before it is complete.

Final Note

God is not only at work when everything is fixed.

He is at work in the delay,
in the presence,
and in the signs that point to what is still coming.

The Kingdom is here.

But it is not yet finished.

