

SESSION 1

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

OVERVIEW AND GOAL

Our world is both beautiful and broken. In order to bring restoration, God has implemented a big picture plan (called the Kingdom of God) for transforming human life and all creation. The journey of global discipleship begins with understanding and embracing this Kingdom plan in our lives.

KEY BIBLICAL PASSAGES

Matthew 6:9-15; John 1:1-14; Revelation 21:1-3; 22:1-5

BACKGROUND

It is God's desire that every person experience freedom and wholeness, and for this earth to be a place of justice, peace, and wholeness. Our world, however, is as broken as it is beautiful. Humans have rejected the love and direction of the Creator God. However, in his grace, God began a restoration plan. It was first introduced in the Old Testament, when he created the nation Israel who would be a light to the world in the way they lived and related to others. When Jesus came, he embodied all the hopes of Israel, and through his life, death and resurrection (which we will study more fully in the next session) God's Kingdom was established and opened to the world. Today the followers of Jesus are called to both "be" and "live" in the way that continues to spread and make real God's Kingdom intentions in our world. By entering the Kingdom story we are following the way of Jesus – the way of global discipleship.

BRIEF THEME SUMMARY

In sketching the Kingdom of God, we will touch on three core truths: 1) the deep need for God's Kingdom in our world today; 2) the certainty that the Kingdom of God will one day be fully revealed in a new heaven and new earth; 3) that we respond with openness and participate in God's Kingdom

intentions. These three core truths require us to face the harsh realities of our broken world, embrace the unshakeable hope that God's love and Kingdom will come, and make a firm and sincere commitment to follow God.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The need for God's Kingdom to come in our world is clear by what we see all around us – one out of every three people in our world experience hunger; homelessness is evident in the richest cities and countries in our world, and corruption, crime and violence fill our newscasts on daily. This is not the world that God intended. He pronounced his creation as "good," but human sin and disobedience soon began the human story of brokenness and pain. In light of these realities and challenges, we invite you to begin your journey by reading the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15 aloud as a group, which is appropriate given that this is a community prayer that begins with "our." Note the references to "daily bread" and "forgiveness of debts." For thousands of people in Jesus' day, the struggle to pay off loans and the need for food was a daily reality. These problems remain in our world today. Share why you think Jesus would include this in this foundational prayer.

Take some time hearing everyone in the room speak some of the modern problems that the prayer sheds light on – it can be a global problem, a problem in your own neighbourhood or community, or a problem that you face in your personal life or see evident in relationships at work or in society. Also spend some time identifying and naming some signs of God's Kingdom activities that are evident in your community and neighbourhood.

The Bible also teaches about the certainty of God's Kingdom, which is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, upon whom we will focus more directly in the next session. At this time everyone read Isaiah 65:17-25, and then the amazing picture of the end of the age in Revelation 21:1-3; 22:1-5.

What do you see in these passages that inspires you the most? Is there anything that surprises you? Take a few moments to share with one another

what you think life will be like in this "new heaven and earth" for people around the world.

Why do you think God has provided us with a glimpse of this certain, final future?

SERMON CONNECTION

The Preaching Guide offered your pastor notes for a sermon based on Matthew 13:31-32, 44-45. In verses 44 and 45, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a treasure, pearl and mustard seed. Finding the treasure and pearl brings great joy, and results in the person selling everything to purchase the treasure and pearl.

GROUP RELECTION: Spend some time as a group discussing when and how each person "found" the Kingdom life of God. What do you find most joyful about the new life? Go around the room and have everyone share the one most important treasure that they have experienced as a follower of Jesus. Some examples might be:

- The certainty of being forgiven of past sins
- The strength to overcome unhealthy or destructive habits
- The freedom to consider new directions in life

How are your priorities changing in light of the Kingdom life that you have discovered? What are some of the stresses that God's priorities can invite into your life?

GROUP DISCUSSION: In verses 31 and 32, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed that needs to be planted in the earth. As a group, discuss the ways you have sown Kingdom values in your life, priorities and relationships. What growth have you seen? What still remains invisible and requires your faithfulness and patience?

SMALL GROUP GUIDE

GROUP APPLICATION: Go around your group and talk about some issues of need in your neighbourhood, community or wider world that you would like to have more information about. Have each person take a topic and plan to research it over the next week, and bring back that information for the rest of the group for the next session.

GROUP PRAYER: Spend some time praying the Lord's Prayer together in the following way: have one person read a phrase in the prayer, then allow time for people to respond to the phrase as a response to God. Then have the next person read the next phrase, allowing for a time of response. Continue this way through the prayer.