

CHAPTER 2, SESSION 13: THE GOSPEL MANY PEOPLE HAVE NEVER HEARD

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

For many people this will be the first time they have heard that the kingdom of God is something other than “where we go when we die.” Not only that, but they will also be discovering that the kingdom of God is in their midst—right now. This major shift in thinking can result in confusion, anger or resistance. As the leader of the group, do not worry yourself with convincing anyone to believe what the author is writing; that is not necessary. Instead, encourage them to stay with their questions, uneasiness or doubts. Over time the Spirit will lead them into the truth.

If this paradigm shift is a major challenge to your entire group, be prepared to set the session plan aside and allow the conversation to go where it needs to go. In that case, keep going back to the chapter for insights, and then go to the Gospels to see what Jesus really had to say.

And just as a word of encouragement—for many people this teaching is a paradigm shift, but it is also the most exciting spiritual discovery they have made as adults. Be ready to watch God do amazing things in the lives of your fellow apprentices.

SUPPLIES

- ✎ Blank paper and pens for the “Experiencing Transformation” activity

WELCOME

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

At the end of the silence you may offer a prayer of your own or simply say “Amen” or chime a meditation bell.

SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul shaping exercise of “play.”

1. How did you play this week?
2. What surprised you as you attempted this practice? What challenged you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [35 minutes]

JESUS’ PRIMARY MESSAGE, his central teaching, his Good News, was the availability of the kingdom of God.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. Prior to reading this chapter if someone asked you, “What is the gospel Jesus preached?” how would you have answered? How does your answer compare and contrast to the author’s answer on page 35?
2. The author interprets this phrase, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” as “Change the way you have been thinking—a life of intimacy and interaction with God (the kingdom of God) is now in your midst”

- (p. 37). How does this interpretation differ from your own? How do you respond to the author's interpretation on both an intellectual and emotional level?
3. Why do you think the message of the kingdom of God has been lost in so many churches?
 4. If you were having a conversation with a friend who said, "I believe the kingdom of God is just a promised future, not a present reality" what would you say to help them see it as both a future promise and a present reality? (For help check pages 41-42, the paragraph beginning "There is no doubt that the kingdom of God has not been fully established.")
 5. The author speaks of the kingdom of God having "authority and power" (p. 43). Can you recall a time when you felt connected with a power outside of yourself that was good and loving? What happened? How did it feel? Although your story may seem odd or unusual, if you are comfortable share this experience with others in your group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [15 minutes]

The author writes, "...children do not need to be in control. They have very little authority or power, and live each day in dependence and trust, receiving everything as a gift. And this, I believe, is what Jesus is advocating" (p. 44).

Give each participant a blank sheet of paper and read the following instructions:

☞ Take a few minutes to write down on a blank sheet of paper two or three areas of your life where you "need to be in control."

After 5 minutes say:

☞ Spend a few minutes in silence recalling a time when you surrendered control of a situation to God.

- What impact did your surrender have on you?
- How did the situation turn out?

☞ With your group spend time exploring the deep challenges of letting go of control.

ENGAGING THE WORD [15 minutes]

Have a volunteer in your group read aloud Luke 17:21-22. If members of your group have different translations, you may want to note how they differ. Reflect on these questions:

1. How does this passage confirm the teaching of this chapter?
2. Review the author's definition of the kingdom of God (p. 42). With that definition in mind discuss what Jesus might mean when he says, "the kingdom of God is among you."
3. Spend 5 minutes in silence with your eyes closed. Breathe deeply and meditate on the fact that the kingdom of God is among your group right now. When the 5 minutes have passed, share with each other how it felt to ponder this beautiful truth.

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read these words from the chapter aloud:

Change the way you have been thinking—a life of intimacy and interaction with God is now in your midst (p. 37).
Amen!

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 3, which explores the inclusivity of God's kingdom.
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be hospitality, so you will need to make plans early in the week to try this practice.
- ☞ Don't forget about the silent retreat which is only a few weeks away.