



ANN ARBOR  
CHURCH

# THE KINGDOM

## LEADER'S NOTES

### BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- This Bible study is attempting to cover a massive and complex topic in an extremely concise form. We are melding the larger, overarching concept of the Kingdom of God with the smaller and more practical concern of the Church.
  - For this reason, it is important that you are comfortable enough about the concept of the Kingdom of God to be able to adequately expound on the study notes provided.
- It would be a mistake to feel the pressure to get them to grasp the entirety of what the Kingdom of God is with a few scriptures- your goal is simply to introduce them to the idea of the Kingdom and the reality that it exists.
  - Having even a simple understanding of the Kingdom of God is an important first step to properly internalizing the importance of the church in our personal lives.

### LEADER'S NOTE #1 - WHAT IS A KINGDOM?

- Before we can have a conversation about what the Kingdom of God is, it is important to establish that they understand on a basic level what a "kingdom" is.
- These four defining qualities of a kingdom are not an exhaustive list of everything that is true of a kingdom, but they are a good starting point and will help us connect dots later.

### LEADER'S NOTE #2 - WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

- It is simple to make the connection about an earthly kingdom and God's Kingdom when considering the first three qualities- a ruler, a people, and a law code. But it is a bit more difficult to connect the "territory with boundaries," since the Kingdom has no boundaries. The following analogy is helpful:
- Candle Analogy:
  - The Kingdom of God doesn't have physical borders like an earthly kingdom, it is present anywhere God's authority is being upheld, but how brightly the Kingdom's light shines is determined by the source.
    - If you place one lit candle in a dark room it shines a light, but the darkness closes in around it, muting its power.
      - The Kingdom is present even when one follower of Jesus is present, but because they are alone the light is muted.
    - If you place many candles in a room their combined light illuminates much more, it is a greater source of light and power.
      - When two or more followers of Jesus gather, our light shines brighter and the Kingdom is more evident.

- When you step outside into the bright sunshine everything is illuminated
  - The truest expression of the Kingdom will be in Heaven when there is no more darkness to fight against.
- Therefore, we say the Kingdom is “both now and not yet.”
  - We can shine the Kingdom light now, but it’s truest form will be when we enter eternal life with God in Heaven.

### LEADER’S NOTE #3 LUKE 4:16-21

- It is helpful to offer context before you read the verse. This is the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he is declaring that the Kingdom of God is upon them, and this verse from Isaiah is a description of what the Kingdom is like and how you know it is here.
- Jesus mentions the following characteristics of the Kingdom
  - Good news proclaimed to the poor
  - Freedom for the prisoners
  - Recovery of sight for the blind
  - The oppressed being set free
- All four of these are both literal and figurative examples of Kingdom living
  - In the Kingdom of God, there are no poor people, they have all they need (we take care of one another, are thoughtful about each other’s needs, etc...)
    - But he is also talking about the spiritually poor, those that are lost, depressed, anxiety-ridden, and emotionally wounded- God fulfills their desires, heals them, cares for them.
  - The points about freedom for the prisoners and the oppressed being set free are a matched set. The Jews in Jesus’ time were literally oppressed by both the Romans and the Jewish religious leaders.
    - Jesus is saying that there is no oppression in the Kingdom of God, no crime, no conflict, no prejudice, no division.
    - He is also saying that we will be set free from the spiritual enslavement to sin, addictions, unwanted desires, etc....
  - The blind will see. Jesus is referring to the literal healing he will do while on earth, but also to the spiritual awakening that happens when we enter the Kingdom.
    - Our eyes are opened to the truth about life, death, sin, righteousness, and truth.
  - All these qualities should exist in the individual life of a follower of Jesus, and in a Jesus-following community- the church.

### TRANSITION NOTE:

- At this stage we move from the overarching concept of the Kingdom into the more practical conversation about the church- here is a helpful analogy in making that transition
- Foreigner analogy:
  - Assume you grew up in America and only speak English. You travel alone to Japan, a place you’ve never been where you do not speak the language.
    - What would that feel like? (Overwhelming!)
    - Every time you try to order food, get directions, or even simply have a conversation with someone it is a difficult task.
  - Now assume you walk into the U.S. embassy in which everyone is from America and speaks English. The embassy has your favorite foods from back home, and it all just makes sense.

- The feeling you had when you walked into that U.S. embassy is the same feeling citizens of God’s Kingdom are meant to have when they walk into church.
- In the world we are constantly surrounded by people, ideas and temptations that are not oriented towards the Kingdom of God. Followers of Jesus feel like foreigners in the world, we speak differently, act differently, and think differently.
- So, when we walk into church, we are meant to feel at home, surrounded by people who are trying to live like we live, who speak our same spiritual language, etc....

#### LEADER’S NOTE #4: 2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4

- How this verse is approached will vary depending on the experience of the person you’re studying with.
- If the person studying has limited religious background and very little/ no church “baggage” this scripture is less vital
  - I will certainly still read and address it, but it is a less important place to make a point than if they are previously religious.
    - Seekers without a religious/ spiritual background need to be made aware that they must carefully examine both the lifestyle of church members as well as the teaching to evaluate if this is a church they can thrive in.
    - I always communicate at this point that while we are trying to help them evaluate their own spiritual walk, they are also evaluating our church- are we living the life and teaching the truth?
- If the person you are studying with has a religious background this verse takes on a different role.
  - Assume for a moment that the person you are studying with grew up in the Catholic faith, or a different denomination of church (perhaps Lutheran or Baptist). In fact, maybe they are still attending their previous place of worship.
    - This doesn’t need to be a moment you plant your flag and declare that our church is better or make it an “us vs them” moment regarding church membership.
    - At this point we are simply introducing the idea that not all churches are the same, and this verse makes it clear that some churches and Christian organizations will wander from the truth, and we must be careful to evaluate what is true in terms of doctrine and lifestyle.
    - There will be conversations in later studies that bring in implications about another church they attend currently or formerly. But there are more important topics to focus on before that (Sin, Discipleship, Grace)
- What beliefs and practices should be the most important when we evaluate whether a church is doing Kingdom work?
  - This following diagram is helpful.
    - The outer edge represents personal opinions and convictions. We don’t necessarily need to be in unity on these things and they should never become a source of serious disagreement.
    - The middle circle represents beliefs that are important to a community but not at the core. We should dialogue on them and do our best to come to agreement, but in the end, these are not the most important things (this often deals with culture)
    - The inner core circle is what really matters. We must be in unity on these doctrinal and lifestyle matters. These are the most important things to look for when evaluating a church.

