

*Study Guide for*

***The Upside-Down Kingdom***

by **Donald B. Kraybill**

**Introduction & Chapters 1 - 3**

## **Introduction**

For this 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition of Donald B. Kraybill's *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, the author requested that a study guide be written for teachers or leaders to use in planning Sunday school lessons or small group sessions around the text. This study guide is designed not as a rigid lesson plan, but one that serves as an outline for inspiring discussion of the text. The study guide is divided into four sections for each chapter: Gathering, Sharing, Listening & Reflecting, and Sending. Each lesson follows basically the same form. As leader of the sessions, make sure to read Kraybill's "Guide for Discussion Leaders" on pages 263-264 of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* before making your first lesson plans.

The basic outline of the lessons can be adjusted according to your tastes and the preference of the class. All of the lesson guides begin and end with prayer. Although they are included, you need not feel obligated to use them. Also, each lesson includes reading a parable. Because this course is about understanding the upside-down reign of God, the parables serve as pictures exemplifying God's reign. The titles of the parables are from the *New International Version* of the Bible.

Kraybill included his own questions for discussion that are excellent for use in a classroom or small group. While this study guide is designed to enhance Kraybill's text, it also incorporates the discussion questions into the study guides for each chapter. There are a number of discussion prompts in the lessons. Feel free to use your own discussion questions or base the discussion around class members' questions. To better facilitate the discussion, have your group come to class with a list of questions and thoughts from the reading.

It is important that class or small group members come to the sessions already having read the chapters. Some review is incorporated into the lessons, but most of the time should be devoted to discussion. Encourage the group to do the reading ahead of time. Chapter lengths vary, but the reading should take no more than 30-60 minutes. Also, there is some reading aloud during class. You can judge whether or not the group members are comfortable reading

aloud. The safest route is to ask for a volunteer to do the reading.

Remember that this study guide is just an outline. Depending on the personalities of your group you may follow this outline closely or loosely. Above all, get into *The Upside-Down Kingdom* and engage yourselves in lively conversation and discussion!

## Chapter 1

### Down is Up

#### Gathering

- You may choose to open the session by leading the group in prayer. This could either be a prayer for the specific needs and goals of the group or it could be a simple recitation of the Lord's Prayer.
- For New Testament Scripture reading ask for a volunteer to read aloud *The Parable of the Mustard Seed* found in Mark 4:30-32.

#### Sharing

- After opening with prayer and scripture reading, ask the group to think about ways they would describe the kingdom of God. These could be original analogies, an image that stood out from first chapter, or an example from the Bible. Take about 3-5 minutes to make a list on the board or a large piece of paper. Discuss the suggestions the group compiled.

#### Listening and Reflecting

- Transition from describing the kingdom of God to thinking critically about *The Upside-Down Kingdom*. As leader of the session, review the content of the text with the class for a few minutes. Talk about what Kraybill calls "Detours Around Jesus" or share your favorite section from the chapter.
- Discuss the questions Kraybill includes for Chapter One (found on page 257) for 8-10 minutes. If the group is large, break into smaller groups to better facilitate discussion of the text. For the sake of time, assign one or two questions for each small group. If the group is not large, the discussion can be done as a total group activity.
- Gather back into the large group and have a spokesperson from each small group give the highlights of their discussion.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the last few paragraphs of the first chapter, beginning with "The kingdom vision outlined..." on page 31 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
- Kraybill ends the first chapter by asking some big questions. It is easy to talk about

turning our backs to the kingdoms of this world, but what are ways—even small ways—to show our loyalty to God by taking an active role in reign of God on earth?

### **Sending**

- End with a prayer encouraging each other to follow God's call by actively participating in the reign of heaven on earth.
- Assign the second chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 33-55) as well as Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13 for the next session.

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## **Chapter 2**

### **Mountain Politics**

#### **Gathering**

- If the group is open to the idea, invite a class member to offer prayer. Or, you may wish to begin by reciting the Lord's Prayer.
- For the New Testament reading ask for a volunteer to read aloud *The Parable of the Tenants* found in Matthew 21:33-46.

#### **Sharing**

- This chapter is dense with the summary of history. Rather than getting bogged down in a discussion of ancient Hebrew tradition, guide the focus of the lesson to Jesus' counter-cultural message.
- To review the chapter, ask the group what they found new, interesting, or provocative in the reading. Compile a list on the board or large paper.

#### **Listening and Reflecting**

- After hearing thoughts from various class members, discuss Kraybill's questions for the second chapter (found on pages 257-258). Divide into smaller groups if the class size necessitates it. Reconvene after 8-10 minutes to summarize the discussions.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the last few paragraphs of the chapter, beginning with "Jesus was a revolutionary..." on page 54 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
- How does Jesus play off Hebrew tradition at the same time that he gives a counter-cultural message? Does this background of Jewish political history change your understanding of the Gospel message? In what ways? What new angles are brought to light with this Jewish history in mind? Jesus is seen as very political—is this

- something new? Is it helpful, offensive, or obvious?
- What are some ways to become active (politically or otherwise) in the upside-down reign of God?

### **Sending**

- End with a prayer empowering one another in ways to be a visible witness in the counter-cultural reign of God.

Assign the third chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 56-70) for the next session.

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## **Chapter 3**

### **Temple Piety**

#### **Gathering**

- Invite a class member to open the lesson with prayer.
- For the New Testament reading ask for a volunteer to read aloud *The Parable of the Lost Coin* found in Luke 15:8-10.

#### **Sharing**

- Like the second chapter, this chapter is filled with a myriad of background information explaining the roles of the religious authorities. Instead of getting bogged down in the minute detail of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Levites, focus the discussion on ways Jesus worked to overturn the religious status quo.
- Make a list on the board of the ways ancient Hebrew sacred and secular powers were tied together. How did Jesus work to purify Judaism from the ruling authorities?

#### **Listening and Reflecting**

- After opening the conversation of the text, discuss Kraybill's questions for the third chapter (found on page 258). Divide into smaller groups if the class size necessitates it. Reconvene after 8-10 minutes to summarize the discussion.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the last few paragraphs from the chapter, beginning with "Jesus affirmed the new..." on page 69 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
- Jesus was very concerned with rejecting the temptations of institutional. How do we keep Christianity fresh, without getting bogged down by complex doctrine and rules? How are we tempted by the status quo? What elements of religious status quo would

Jesus reject today?

**Sending**

- Close with prayer encouraging one another to seek out ways of rejecting the status quo of Christianity.
- Assign the fourth chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 71-83) for the next session.