

Study Guide for

Upside-Down Kingdom

by Donald B. Kraybill

Chapters 4 -6

Chapter 4

Wilderness Bread

*In the discussion questions for this lesson (page 258) Kraybill poses the question: "Does it 'spiritualize' a serious problem like poverty to say that 'Jesus is the bread of life'?" As Christians we are compelled to take action to alleviate human suffering. One response to this question is to engage your group in a project to help end world hunger. Kraybill gives a list of websites that are helpful in generating ideas for such a venture. I suggest the websites: www.bread.org, www.cropwalk.org, or www.freedomfromhunger.org as good starting points. For a complete list of Kraybill's recommendations, look at "Website Resources" on pages 297-298 of *The Upside-Down Kingdom*. As class facilitator, browse through a few of the websites to familiarize yourself with various projects. You may wish to ask for volunteers to take the initiative in coordinating this class project. Plan to introduce this idea with the fourth chapter. After a few weeks, allow class time for the project coordinators to present options for the rest of the class to choose from.*

Gathering

- Invite a class member to open with prayer.
- For the New Testament reading ask for a volunteer to read aloud *The Parable of the Wedding Banquet* found in Matthew 22:1-14.

Sharing

- Invite a class member or two to share a favorite section from the text. What was significant to them in the chapter? What questions did they have?

Listening and Reflecting

- Kraybill poses some provocative questions for Chapter Four on page 258. Divide into smaller groups (if necessary) to discuss your responses. Reconvene as a large group

after ten or fifteen minutes to share highlights of the small group discussions or tie up loose ends from the whole class discussion.

- Read the last few paragraphs of the chapter aloud, beginning with "When the values of Jesus' upside-down kingdom..." at the top of page 82 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
- Jesus lived "hand to mouth" in a society that was disdainful of the poverty-stricken. How does this image of a "homeless savior" speak to the prejudices of modern Christians?

Sending

- Close with prayer encouraging one another to look for ways of reaching out to the poverty stricken in your area and the world.
- Assign the fifth chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 84-98) for the next session.

* * *

Chapter 5

Free Slaves

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 Great Banquet* found in Luke 14:15-24 or *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant* from Matthew 18:23-35.

Sharing

- The possibility of social upheaval makes some people uncomfortable. Imagine you are ordinary Jews and Gentiles living during the time of Jesus. As a class, briefly share what your reactions to Jesus' revolutionary social message would have been. How might you have reacted to hearing one of the above parables?

Listening and Reflecting

- How do the ideas from the fifth chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* build on what was discussed in the fourth chapter? In the first four chapters?
- To focus on the fifth chapter, talk about the six Jubilee principles for combating social injustice or share your favorite section from the chapter.

- Divide into smaller groups if necessary to discuss the questions Kraybill includes for Chapter Five (found on page 259) for 8-10 minutes.
- 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 chapter, beginning with "Christian obedience today..." on page 97 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
- Kraybill asks questions on page 96 about pocketbooks and piety. Affluent or not, these kinds of questions can make modern Christians very uncomfortable. How do you reconcile the issues of faith and income?

Sending

- Invite a class member to lead in a closing prayer.
- Assign the sixth chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 99-119) for the next session.

* * *

Chapter 6

Luxurious Poverty

Gathering

- Opening prayer
- For the New Testament reading ask for a volunteer to read aloud *The Parable of the Rich Fool* found in Luke 12:15-21.

Sharing

- What is our typical response to people lower on the "social ladder"? Invite members of your class to share how they responded the last time a person from the street approached them asking for money or food. Gently evaluate their responses from the perspective of *The Upside-Down Kingdom*.

Listening and Reflecting

- This chapter has the potential to stir up a controversial discussion. Before delving in, briefly review content by talking about the six dangers of wealth or asking individuals to share their favorite sections.
- Discuss the questions Kraybill includes for Chapter Six (found on page 259). Break into smaller groups as necessary. After several minutes, summarize the main points of

- the discussion as a group.
- Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the last few paragraphs of the sixth chapter, beginning with "The stories in this chapter..." on page 118 and continuing to the end of the chapter.
 - In this chapter Kraybill writes about the dangers of wealth. Especially now, in an age of retirement planning and mutual funds, wealth and greed are distractions from the kingdom. In many ways *The Parable of the Rich Fool* speaks directly to this kind of financial security. How do we reconcile Jesus' "kingdom of nobodies" with our modern economic affluence?

Sending

- Invite a class member to lead in closing prayer.
- Assign the sixth chapter of *The Upside-Down Kingdom* (pages 99-119) for the next session.