



**THE GREAT
REVERSAL**
The upside down Kingdom of God

GOING DEEPER
LEADER DISCUSSION GUIDE
FOR EXISTING GROUPS

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GENERAL STRUCTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

ICE BREAKER

This guide will include ice breaker suggestions to use if you like. It's probably best to pick just one if the group is large.

WORSHIP

We recommend you worship together to help people shed the worries of the day and focus on what God wants to do in your group today. A couple of songs will be listed for each week. Feel free to use them or design your own worship experience. They are on the CD you received with your kit.

SHORT TRANSITIONAL PRAYER

Closing worship with a short prayer can be effective in helping people transition from praise and thanksgiving expressed in worship to engaging with God through the Scriptures. It can be good to ask others in the group to do this prayer. Be sure to ask them ahead of time so that they have a chance to decline and so the transition is smooth. This should be one person so it doesn't expand into a long time period.

To do: This guide will leave a blank for you to indicate who you've asked to do this each week.

READ SCRIPTURE AND COMMENTARY TOGETHER

To do: This guide will leave a blank for you to indicate who will read aloud each week.

FACILITATE CONVERSATION AROUND THE QUESTIONS

Use our questions only if they fit for your group. Otherwise, write questions that do fit your group.

CLOSE BY MINISTERING TO ONE ANOTHER

It's important to take some time to think and pray together about how our time in Scripture impacts the life of our group as well as our own lives. We suggest three components to this:

1. Reflect and pray together about how our group life could respond to this teaching.
2. Give each individual time and space to reflect for a few minutes on how they might apply it personally.
3. Give opportunity to share concerns (outside the study) we have and pray for those.

It's important that everyone who is comfortable doing so gets an opportunity to pray and be prayed for.

THE KINGDOM: IT'S REALLY UPSIDE DOWN

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Tell us your most outrageous wedding story. It can be any wedding you attended.
- Have you ever been asked to give up your seat for someone else? If so, when?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Psalm 27 (You've Been Good); Track 2 or Covered; Track 11

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

When we relate to one another, we tend to express either law or gospel (*grace*) in the spirit of our actions and words. Good laws are intended to protect the common good for all who are subject to the law. But sometimes laws go awry and end up harming people when strictly enforced. The Gospel gives us the power to extend grace to one another—often at some cost to ourselves—in a way that is better than merely the fulfilling of the law. Consider, as you read these examples whether it is possible to do better than merely what is “right” in the eyes of the law.

- Look at the first two paragraphs. What does Sabbath law require in these two situations? (For more information about the Sabbath, see Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 16:22-30 is an example of it in effect.)
- Did Jesus break the law? One of the ten commandments? If yes, what does this mean that Jesus breaks the law of God? If no, how do you explain the reaction of those who knew the law best?
- Did it cost Jesus anything to confront the keepers of the law in this way? Explain your response.
- Consider the banquet. What seems to be happening that bothers Jesus? What is the normal pattern for finding your seat at such a banquet?
- How is the humility Jesus recommends an act of grace? What might it cost those who follow the teaching?
- Consider the teaching Jesus gives about hosting a lunch or dinner. How does what we have been describing about law and grace apply in this case? What might this teaching look like today? Who would we need to invite if we were to include those who are excluded regularly from our social gatherings?

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, He was being carefully watched. There in front of Him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, He healed him and sent him on his way. Then He asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” And they had nothing to say. When He noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, He told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

LUKE 14:1-14

When one of those at the table with Him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

LUKE 14:15-24

THE UPSIDE DOWN INVITATION

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Describe your most memorable meal. What was served? Who were you with? What made it memorable?
- What is one characteristic of a great feast or banquet?
- What’s the worst excuse you’ve ever given for turning down an invitation?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

At the Foot of the Cross; Track 8 or Lead me to the Cross; Track 7

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Jesus’ previous parable concluded that the one who invites guests who cannot repay the invitation will be blessed. Perhaps in response to this challenging teaching, someone suggested that all who will eat at God’s banquet will be blessed. In this context, a leader of the Pharisee’s home (14:1), it would have been safe to assume that these religious leaders would include themselves and all faithful Jews to be present at God’s banquet and so would be among those blessed as the dinner guest stated in verse 15. Knowing this, Jesus offers another parable that creates a distinction between those who are invited and those who actually participate and therefore are blessed. Keep these dynamics in mind as you discuss the following:

- Who was invited to the banquet? See vs. 16-17, 21 and 23. Who actually came to the banquet?
- Considering the answer to the questions above, who will be “blessed” by participating in banquet?
- Since this is a parable, what does this mean for us today if we consider that God is the host and we have been invited to the banquet?
- Verse 24 contains a threat that those who were invited but made excuses will not taste the dinner of the host. What would this have meant to those Jesus was speaking to? What does it mean for us today?
- What stands out to you most from this parable? What challenges you most?

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

IT'S FREE BUT COSTS EVERYTHING

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Tell us a little about the largest project you've ever taken on.
- Have you ever started something you couldn't finish? What happened?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Glory Train; Track 5 or I'll Fly Away; Track 9

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This week's text starts with a hard teaching of Jesus in verses 26-27. Jesus is forcing the issue. No middle ground is available. You either make a radical decision to follow Jesus absolutely, or you do not. No "if's, and's, or but's". Just to be sure we get this clearly, Jesus illustrates it in three ways. 1. You either build a tower or you do not. Building half a tower is only an embarrassment. So, we must count the cost to be sure we are willing to do what it takes. 2. You are either in it to win or you are not. A king would be a fool to wander into a war unsure if he is able to defeat the enemy. If he cannot confidently defeat the enemy, he is wise to come to terms of peace before it is too late. 3. We either have salt which is good for preserving food and improving taste, or we do not.

- Have you ever seen a building that the owner failed to complete? What did it look like? What do you suppose it cost? What benefit was there in starting it at all?
- How is our life of faith similar to examples about building a tower or waging a war?
- What does Jesus mean by counting the cost? Whose decision is it?
- What is Jesus really saying here? Does he really mean for us to hate our families and even life itself?

(Leader: There is a danger in taking this passage to mean that we somehow must love our families or our lives "less". God does not want us to "love less" in any situation. God does, however, require that we have absolute loyalty to God alone. If anything else interferes with our faithfulness to God, it becomes an idol. Consequently, when we choose God over our family members or close friends they may question whether we love them and whether we are still faithful to the family or the American way of life. We must follow God's leading regardless of what others think.)

- What then, is the cost Jesus is warning us we have to accept if we want to finish the project, to "fight the good fight" and be "the salt of the earth" as a Christian?

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them He said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

LUKE 14:25-34

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

LUKE 15:1-7

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Have you ever had a pet run away and get lost?
- Did you find it? How did you feel about it either way?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Where I Long to Be; Track 4 or Jesus, Be the Center; Track 6

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Jesus tells this beautiful parable about the heart of God in a tense setting. He is responding to the religious leaders who are “grumbling” because Jesus shares company with “tax collectors and sinners”. With this in mind, read the parable aloud. Remember both the “sinners” and the “righteous” (the religious leaders) are present listening to Jesus. Surely they will see themselves in this parable. Let’s read it with them in mind.

- Who does the “lost sheep” represent? What about the 99 sheep who were not “lost”? What about the friends and neighbors?
- When the shepherd calls together the community to rejoice with him over the lost sheep, who do you suppose that includes?
- Re-read verse 7. Do the “righteous” really not need repentance? Why or why not?
- Of course, as the community of God and the body of Christ in our world today, our covenant groups are an appropriate gathering of “friends and neighbors” who “rejoice” when the Lord wins the heart of the lost. But most likely, our groups share some characteristics with all three groups in the parable.
 - a. The “sinners” who are drawn to Jesus, but we perhaps have not fully embraced him.
 - b. The “religious” folks who think we’re on the inside of this whole thing but we don’t look much like Jesus.
 - c. The “friends” of God who do rejoice in what God is doing in our midst. Especially when God brings another lost soul to our community for healing and restoration.

As a group discuss each of these three group’s characteristics and consider what it would look like to move more fully into the third.

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

LUKE 15:8-10

IS GOD REALLY LIKE THAT?

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- What's the most valuable physical item you've ever lost?
- What's the most valuable item you ever found?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

There is a Higher Throne; Track 1 or You Are Good; Track 3

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Once again, the context is that tax-collectors and sinners were coming to hear Jesus teach and the scribes and Pharisees were annoyed at this. The whole lot of them would hear this together. The theme of lost and found is played out a second time here with the woman and her coins.

- Look at both the parables of the sheep and of the coin. Who is the active party and who is the passive? If we take these to be parables about God's heart, what would do we learn about God? What does this say about God's role in our reconciliation with God?
- When we imagine God and salvation, does this image of God desperately pursuing us come to mind? If so, what does that mean to you personally? If not, what does come to mind? And what difference does it make?
- Is there a role for us in these parables? If so, what is it?
- Reflect back on these last two parables and consider and what they say about God's heart for the lost. Then consider again the parable of the banquet found in Luke 14:12-24. List both the promises and the warnings you see in these passages. In what ways do these parables complement each other? Is there tension between them?
- What else stands out to you from what you've read and heard from one another today?

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

LUKE 15:11-24

GOD IS WAITING

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Who was the rebel in your household growing up and what did they do? (If you were an only child tell us something you did that was rebellious.)
- How did your parent(s) respond?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Jubilee; Track 12 or Way Down; Track 13

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the previous two parables, we see God’s heart for the lost and the strong desire God has to seek us out even when we are passive like the coin or the sheep. We are what we are, human beings made in God’s image and God pursues after us when we are far from him. In this next parable along the same lines of lost and found, we see that the son actively breaks with the father. In our discussion this week, let’s focus on both God’s heart toward the lost as well as what it means to be lost in these parables.

- In what ways was the son actively lost where the coin and the sheep were more passively lost?
- Brainstorm together about what comes to mind when you think of “lost” and then do the same with “found”. Be sure to include more than simply personal salvation. It’d be great if someone takes down a list for each.
- How many of the descriptions of “lost-ness” fit us today? How about “found-ness”?
- Looking at the son, was he lost because of what he believed or because of what he did and how he related to the father and the father’s community? Discuss what this might mean for us as we think about who is “lost” today and how we can pursue them.
- What did repentance look like for the son? Was it primarily about apologizing or was more involved? What were the lasting effects?

(Leader: In this parable, the son is lost when he is separated from the father and the father’s community, repentance means not just a change of heart or beliefs but reengaging with the father and the community and participating as a full member again.)

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

CONFRONTED BY UPSIDE DOWN

ICEBREAKER OPTIONS

- Who was the “good kid” in your household growing up? How did they get that reputation? (If you were an only child, expand this to include neighbors or cousins if you weren’t the “good kid.”)
- When have you felt taken for granted?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Jesus, King of Angels; Track 14 or There is no Other Name; Track 10

TRANSITIONAL PRAYER:

READINGS:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Last week we explored how “lost” described the relationship of the younger son to the father. We saw that it was not the son’s (or the sheep’s or the coin’s) beliefs about the father that made him lost, but it was his dishonoring of him and leaving his community. When the younger son decided to go back and seek whatever mercy may be found, he was overwhelmed with the gracious response and was fully embraced by his father and the community who celebrated with the father. But there was one who did not celebrate. The father—again compassionate with his children—reassures the older son that he too is a part of the father’s family. This is not a celebration for its own sake—it is for the recovery of what is lost. There is joy enough in participating in the ongoing life of the community.

- Why was the older son upset? How did he feel slighted?
- Have you felt slighted when someone else received extraordinary grace way beyond what was deserved? Tell us the story. Why did you feel slighted?
- If you are a person who has been a Christian from a very young age, have you ever found yourself feeling like this older brother? If so, talk a little about it. What made you feel that way?—someone’s more dramatic entrance into the kingdom?
- How have these parables reshaped the way we think of “lost” and “found” (or “saved”)? Is it simply about what we believe? What else is involved?
- If you still have it, go back to the list generated from brainstorming at our last meeting. Revisit the question: in what ways are we “lost” today? In what ways are we “found” in this group?
- What new insights have you gained from this study of Luke 14-15? How might it affect the way we move forward as a group?

MINISTRY TIME — SEE RECOMMENDATIONS ON PAGE 5

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

LUKE 15:25-32

