



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

LEADER DISCUSSION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for allowing God to work through you as you lead your group. The small group experience is crucial to our actually doing what the scriptures that form the basis of this series tell us to be and do. The relationships developed in a small group setting allow people to process what they are learning from the sermons and their reading. Such processing is crucial to personal change. Without it, most of the time we are left with good intentions. Individuals change the most in the context of mutual sharing. Small group leaders are asked to help create an environment where this mutual sharing can occur. The leader need not make it all happen, but only needs to facilitate an atmosphere where people feel that they can make it happen together.

As a result, your job is to walk in step with the Spirit. You don't have to be the best teacher, you don't have to be a front-line leader type and you don't even have to possess an out-going personality. The best small group leaders are those who commune with God and pray for their group members. If you start there, God will lead you.

Our desire is to provide you with tools that will support you in this endeavor. For this reason, we have written small group lessons. Each week's lesson corresponds with the weekend sermon during the Great Reversal series. In addition, each group member will have access to a daily prayer and reflection guide that will help members reflect on the message. This is intentional. No one learns something new just because they hear it one time. The best way to learn something and to change is to hear it, read it, write about it and process it with others. The small group experience provides a venue for processing the information.

Each lesson contains the same elements:

- Suggested Icebreakers
- Worship Song Suggestions

- Focus Scripture
- Discussion Questions
- Ministry Time Idea

These have been written so that you can use it exactly as it is written, but most of the time God will lead you in slightly different ways. You might do worship first and move the icebreaker around. Someone in the group might bring a worship idea. The ministry time should always be a result of listening to God's leading.

Most likely you will not have time to discuss all of the questions during the small group time. Pray about what you will ask and follow what you sense the Spirit leading you to do. It is almost impossible to write questions that will fit every group. Therefore, you might ask the first question and the group will answer the next two questions during the natural flow of conversation. If this is the case, skip the next questions and go to the next one.

We have included these lessons on the church web site and in the Prayer Journal. Your copies are different in that some of the questions are written with the group in mind or followed by leader's notes to help you facilitate the discussion.

To help you facilitate worship, we have also provided a Woodland Hills CD that includes praise and worship music. Feel free to use this if you so desire. If you would rather have live worship from musicians in your group, you are certainly welcome to do that. We just want to support you and what God is doing in your group.

Whether you are a seasoned Covenant Group leader or a novice leader who is venturing into new territory with a short-term group, rest in the fact that God is moving in your midst. As you see the Spirit doing what the Spirit does, record what you observe. This is a way to celebrate God and it will build your faith and confidence as a leader.

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

THE KINGDOM: IT’S REALLY UPSIDE DOWN

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What were evening meals like when you were growing up?

Option #2: Share a time when you felt especially welcomed by a group of people.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- Psalm 27 (You’ve Been Good); Track 2
- Covered; Track 11

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read the first six verses in Luke 14. What stands out to you from this story?
- How did Jesus’ actions confront the social norms of the time? What does this say about the social norms of the Kingdom?
- Read Luke 14:7-14. What is Jesus saying through these parables?
- How did these parables confront the situation around the meal at this Pharisee’s house?
- How do these parables confront modern social norms?
- How do our normal lives line up with what Jesus is saying in these verses?

MINISTRY TIME

Close with a short time of prayer and blessing for the members of the group. This is especially important for new groups. But established groups can also practice this. One way of doing this is for the leader to call each person by name and then pray a short one or two sentence blessing for that person. A prayer like this might go: “Lord, thank you for Jennifer. I know it was a risk for her to come tonight, but her smile really brought something to the group.” Or, “Jesus, I was really blessed by Stephen’s openness to share. His honesty was a blessing to us. Bless him now with your presence.”

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

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What is the best party you have ever attended? (There may be some who share some wild stories with this one, but you can ask people to leave out the details)

Option #2: What is your favorite restaurant?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 14:15-24. What do you see as significant in this passage?
- What is it that makes this so radical or even shocking about God’s Kingdom?
- Who are the outsiders in our culture who often don’t get an “invitation”?
- Beyond your initial conversion experience, how have you responded to God’s invitation to Kingdom participation?
- How does this parable confront the way we currently live as God’s people?
- What do you sense God saying to you through this parable?

MINISTRY TIME

The last question above can lead into a time of personal sharing and prayer. Be sensitive to people and listen to their hearts. Some might share how they felt excluded. Others how they have been the excluder. Both are important confessions. Be led by the Spirit and be sensitive as people open up. At the same time, make sure that no one person dominates the personal sharing. If you feel like someone is going on too much, you can say something like, “Excuse me, I hear you and I would like to pray for you right now.”

IT'S FREE BUT COSTS EVERYTHING

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What is the best gift you have ever received?

Option #2: What is your favorite restaurant?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 14:25-27. What stands out to you from these verses?
- How is it that being part of God's family is free, but it costs everything?
- What are some of the costs that we experience today in following Jesus?
- Read Luke 14:28-35. How do we often fail to count the cost in our walk with Christ? How does that impact our long-term commitment?
- Why is it important to count the cost to following Jesus?
- How does counting the cost impact our relationships with one another when in the American culture it is so easy to opt out of friendships and move on to others?
- How does this passage challenge you and your journey with Jesus?

MINISTRY TIME

One option for this time would be to ask all who are comfortable praying to talk with God aloud about themselves. In other words, each individual would be invited to pray about how this passage is challenging them and ask God to lead them along a new path. For this to work, the leader and maybe even another key person must be willing to start it out.

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

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: Do you like owning pets? What kind?

Option #2: Tell about the last time you got lost.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 15:1-7. What impacts you about this parable?
- How does the view of God as a shepherd conflict with common views of God?
- How have you experienced God as a shepherd?
- Why do you think the celebration is important to the shepherd? How do you respond to people celebrating you for who you are?
- In what areas of your life do you feel lost and need the Lord to find you?

MINISTRY TIME

Break up into groups of three to share personal needs about how they need God to move in their lives. Ask each person to pray even if they have never done so before. You can even tell them that if they are not comfortable praying like that, they only need to say something like: “Lord please bless _____ and meet her need.”

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?

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: What is one of your hobbies?

Option #2: Share about a time when you lost something valuable.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 15:8-10. What do you see in this parable?
- What does this parable say about how God views or values people?
- How does this view of God confront common perceptions of who God is?
- How do Jesus' words confront our culture where people are seen as a commodity?
- In what ways do we treat friendships as expendable and therefore fail to value people like God does?
- If you were to know "down deep" within your soul that God valued you this much, how would it impact your life?

MINISTRY TIME

Play a worship song in the background, and ask people to close their eyes. Say something like, "Imagine God being so in love with you that He searches for you with great persistence, looking and looking, calling out to you. You need not be lost in a big way. You could just be off and lost in a small way, but one that you are ashamed to share because you feel you will be rejected. But God pursues you anyway." Then let people experience the presence of God. After the song is over, you can ask people to share their experience if you feel it appropriate.

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

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: Share about a time when you felt especially loved by another or a group.

Option #2: Share about a memorable birthday party?

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

- Jubilee; Track 12
- Way Down; Track 13

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Ask these questions in any order you prefer. Choose the ones that best fit the group and in the order that fits the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 15:11-24. Share what stands out to you from this passage.
- Put yourself in the position of the lost son. How would you feel when seeing the Father’s reception of you?
- This parable in many ways repeats the same message as the previous two. Why is it hard for us to comprehend the upside-down, radical love of God that such repetition is needed?
- How has your view of God changed during this series?
- How can someone doing “all the right things” still find himself isolated in a far country, apart from God’s celebratory love?

MINISTRY TIME

Ask this question: What is one thing you want God to do in your life right now? Spend some time praying for people after they respond.

CONFRONTED BY UPSIDE DOWN

ICEBREAKERS

Option #1: At what lunch table did you sit when you were in high school?

Option #2: Rank yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 about your level of being a rule follower when in high school. 10 means you were a total conformist, 1 means you were a rebel.

WORSHIP SONG SUGGESTIONS

Choose one or two of the following:

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

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions are not written to be asked in any specific order. The facilitator should choose questions that best fit a group and ask the questions that fit the flow of the discussion.

- Read Luke 15:25-32. What do you observe in this passage?
- How did the older brother fail to understand his father?
- How do we participate in the attitude of the older brother today? What does this say about how we misunderstand who God is?
- What is God saying to you through this passage?
- What is Jesus saying to the “religious leaders” of the time who are listening to this parable?
- Why is it easy for those who are “inside” the church to miss what God is saying here?
- How does this parable challenge you?

CELEBRATION TIME

End the meeting with the question: What has occurred over the last six weeks that you would like to celebrate? End with a time of connecting and sharing over food. You might want to shorten the discussion time so that you have plenty of time for this part of the meeting.

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

