

LIVING IN GOD'S KINGDOM

[Leader's Guide]



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About the Leader's Guide:

This guide is intended to give you suggestions for discussion and further study. You may also use the discussion questions in the chapters to dig deeper.

The format of the chapters allows for a 6-week class, covering the basic truths in each chapter. If you plan to teach the course in 6 weeks, focus on the chapter summaries and headings. If you wish to take more time, each chapter is subdivided into two topics (e.g., Chapter 1 – God Revealed and Listening to God), facilitating a 12-week class.

[1] God and Revelation

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ To motivate students to a commitment to walk in the light and to walk in love, so they may have fellowship with God and his people.
- ◆ To give students skills and a method for learning to listen to God through Scripture, so that their lives are re-formed in his image and they grow in discernment.

Introduction:

The context of the A.W. Tozer quote: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ...Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech....” (in *The Knowledge of the Holy*).

God Revealed

- 1) **The triune God created the world, complete with the creation of humankind in his image to govern on his behalf and live in his goodness.**
 - a) Analogies of the Trinity: Discuss with your students where these analogies break down.
- 2) **God's design for creation was disordered with humanity's sin. Relationship with him was ruptured. But God himself initiated a restoration of that relationship and his good rule of the world. Because of this, we can know him.**
 - a) Discuss further the idea of Israel being a priestly kingdom, a holy nation, and a light to the nations (Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 42:6–7; 60:1–3). What do these ideas mean for Israel's understanding of itself and its relationship to other nations? What do they tell us about God's purposes? Relate this to Peter's words about the Church in 1 Peter 2:9–10.
- 3) **God's character of love and holiness shapes his relationship with people. Knowing that he punishes sin and yet pursues humanity for the sake of true fellowship motivates us to walk in light and in love.**
 - a) Discuss objections like: “If God loves unconditionally, then why does he give us all these rules? Why not give us freedom?” or “If God is love, why do some Scriptures say that his

wrath is coming on the disobedient?” or “If God loves me so much, why does he seem to be so absent in my life?”

- b) Discuss the “Holy Fire Love” poem. Which idea or phrase jumps out at you? What do you feel as you listen to or read this poem? Have you experienced this “holy fire love” of God? Share some personal stories if students are comfortable with each other.
- c) Other aspects of God’s character which you may want to discuss:
 - i) All-powerful (Jeremiah 32:17; Matthew 19:26)
 - ii) All-knowing (Psalm 147:5; Hebrews 4:13)
 - iii) Unfailing love and faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22–23; James 1:17)

Listening to God

- 1) **God still speaks today. His primary way to do this is through the Bible, his inspired and authoritative Word. The Holy Spirit who inspired this Word speaks through it to us.**
 - a) God’s great overarching story will be unfolded over the next lessons, but you may want to show how the different parts of Scripture connect to each other to tell this story (History, Wisdom, Prophets, Gospels, Acts, Letters, Revelation).
 - i) If you have a visually creative class, get them involved in creatively depicting the overarching story of the Bible.
 - ii) Check out The Gospel Project’s video that summarizes the biblical storyline in three minutes using famous art (Do a web search for “grand narrative of Scripture” or “Gospel Coalition”).
 - b) If your students have questions about how individual books came to be part of the Bible, share some of the following information
 - i) Old Testament books were established in the last centuries before Christ’s birth. Around 280 BC they were translated from Hebrew into Greek; at this point, they were considered Scripture.
 - ii) New Testament books were completely established by AD 397, but many of the books were in circulation and considered authoritative by the church much earlier. Most were accepted as Scripture by the middle of the 2nd century. Questions asked to determine inclusion:
 - (1) Did an apostle or someone closely associated write it?
 - (2) Do the churches recognize it as having authority from God?
 - (3) Does it tell the truth/does it agree with sound doctrine as revealed in previous Scripture?
 - (4) Does it claim to be of God?
 - (5) Does it possess the life-transforming power of God?
- 2) **Through reading and praying Scripture our lives will be re-formed in God’s image and we will grow in wisdom.**
 - a) Take a simple passage of Scripture and discuss and pray through it using the Lord’s Prayer method described.
 - b) A similar method of prayer is one Martin Luther taught. Choose a verse or two to meditate on. Speak with God about what you are learning from the text. Then express thanksgiving based on the text. Confession follows as you contemplate where you have not lived up to this text. Finally, move to petitions based on the text. (Learn, Thank, Confess, Petition)

[2] Jesus Christ and Salvation

Learning Outcomes:

- ◆ To know Jesus personally, and to understand his life, mission, teaching, death, and resurrection as part of God's glorious plan for salvation.
- ◆ To understand and accept salvation as a gift from God that, when received, gives us new life in his kingdom. This salvation transforms our lives in the present and leads us into a glorious and eternal future in God's presence.
- ◆ To find comfort in the assurance of salvation for believers.

Introduction

Jesus' stated purpose for coming to earth was to seek and save the lost by the way of the cross (Luke 19:9–10). As you read through the parables in Luke 15, notice how God always takes the initiative to seek out the lost. Even in the case of the prodigal son, the Father is watching and waiting for his son to return long before the son realizes he needs to come home. Conversely, the lost items are in a position of weakness before they are found. See how the lamb must be carried back home on the shepherd's shoulders instead of walking, and how the prodigal son returns home with nothing. What does this say about God's role and our role in salvation?

Take note of the celebrations that occur every time something lost is found. What is God's attitude towards sinners and those who come to repentance?

Jesus Christ

- 1) Who is Jesus? Jesus is the King, come to establish God's kingdom of justice and peace.
 - a) One of the first things we ask when we meet someone new is "What is your name?" Names are significant, and every name for Jesus in the Bible reveals to us more about who he is and why he came. What do the following names tell us about Jesus?
 - i) JESUS (Matthew 1:21) – "Yahweh saves" or "Jehovah is salvation" – This name specifies what Jesus does; salvation is his mission.
 - ii) CHRIST (Matthew 16:16; see Psalm 2:2; 18:50) – "Messiah" or "Anointed One" – This name refers back to the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:12–16). Jesus is a descendant of David, the anointed King, and the fulfillment of this covenant: his kingdom and rule will never end (Luke 1:32–33).
 - iii) LORD (John 13:13; Philippians 2:9–11) – This name shows the supreme power and authority of Jesus as Lord. The word for Lord (*kurios*) in the NT is often used in the Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) for God's personal name *Yahweh*. Jesus has supreme power and authority because he is God.
 - iv) IMMANUEL (Matthew 1:23; see 28:20) – "God with us" – This name specifies who Jesus is: God becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us (John 1:14).
 - b) For further study on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, read Glen Stassen's *Living the Sermon on the Mount*.

- 2) Though Jesus was rejected by many people and killed by the authorities, this seeming failure turned out to be God's great victory.
 - a) Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–31. What is “foolish” about Jesus’ sacrifice? Why do you think so many people rejected Jesus and still do? How does Paul show that this seeming failure is actually a great victory that brings God ultimate glory? If the message of the cross is foolishness to the world, how does this affect the way that we share the gospel and witness to our unsaved friends?

Salvation

- 1) Jesus’ death and resurrection provide forgiveness of sins for all who repent and place their trust in Jesus.
 - a) “Atonement” (at-one-ment) is the reconciliation of God and humans through Jesus on the cross. You may have noticed that the Bible describes salvation in different ways, and words often vary depending on what translation you read. Because Jesus’ death and resurrection affected humanity on many levels, each word is like a puzzle piece that helps us understand the big picture of salvation. Consider the following terms and definitions:
 - i) PROPITIATION (1 John 4:10; Romans 5:8–9) – Jesus diverted God’s wrath.
 - ii) EXPIATION (1 John 1:7) – Jesus covers/takes away our sin.
 - iii) GRACE (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:14) – the gift of God’s merciful saving kindness, given to us through Jesus.
 - iv) MERCY (Ephesians 2:4–5) – through Jesus God showed us kindness even though it was in his power to punish us for sin.
 - v) VICTORY (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54–57) – Jesus has victory over evil, having defeated Satan and death.
 - vi) REDEMPTION (Colossians 1:13–14; Titus 2:11–14) – Jesus paid for our sins and brought us out from under the power of sin and slavery.
 - vii) JUSTIFICATION (Galatians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21) – we are declared righteous through Jesus.
 - viii) RANSOM (1 Timothy 2:5–6; Mark 10:45) – Jesus paid the debt we owe God.
 - ix) EXAMPLE (1 Peter 2:21–23) – Jesus is our example on trusting God in the middle of suffering.
 - x) RECONCILIATION (Romans 5:1, 10; Ephesians 2:11–22; 2 Corinthians 5:18–20) – Jesus brought us into right relationship with God and with each other.
 - xi) REVELATION (John 3:16–17; Colossians 1:15; 1 John 4:8–9) – Jesus and his death reveals God’s character.
 - xii) SACRIFICE (John 15:13; Hebrews 7:27; 9:24–26) – Jesus willingly laid down his life for us, and unlike the sacrifices of the OT, this one sacrifice covers our sin once and for all.
 - b) How do you react to the illustration of reconciliation (a wronged friend offering a lifesaving kidney for the one who broke the friendship)? Does it seem realistic? Connect this to the outrageous grace of God. What do you struggle to grasp about God’s grace and salvation? Are there any aspects that are hard to believe?

- 2) Jesus' death and resurrection provide entry into God's eternal kingdom for all who repent and place their trust in Jesus.
 - a) How do you see salvation working itself out in your everyday life? Do you consider your salvation to be "life insurance" or an ongoing process of God's grace transforming your life? How can the ongoing nature of salvation be an encouragement in times of failure?
- 3) All of creation was affected by sin and all of creation will be affected by God's salvation.
 - a) The teaching about new heavens and a new earth will be discussed further in chapter 4. Discuss the Creator's attitude toward his creation and how this might affect us.
- 4) When we have accepted God's saving work on our behalf, we can live in confident assurance.
 - a) Do a further exploration of Jesus' resurrection. What is the case for this having actually occurred? The death and resurrection of Jesus is at the core of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3–8). If the evidence for these historical events is solid, one's Christian faith can take a lot of hits in other areas and remain unshaken. Apologetics comes from the Greek, meaning "to defend." Dr. Gary R. Habermas is a strong defender of Christ's physical resurrection. Check out Habermas' web page for audio, video, articles, debates, and even a resurrection quiz game. He has made this his life's work.

[3] Holy Spirit and Discipleship

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ To understand and welcome the Holy Spirit's presence and purpose in the lives of all believers.
- ◆ To understand and put into practice the **Vision, Intention, and Means** of discipleship.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

- 1) **The Helper is the Holy Spirit, God's indwelling presence (John 14:15–28; Romans 8:9–11).**
 - a) In *Dissident Discipleship*, David Augsburger quotes Donald Kraybill: “The early Anabaptists used the term *Gelassenheit* to convey the idea of yielding absolutely to God's will with a dedicated heart—forsaking all selfishness. They believed that Christ called them to abandon self-interest and follow his example of suffering, meekness, humility and service.” Do you find it difficult to yield absolutely to the Holy Spirit? How does selfishness get in the way? What did Jesus mean when he said if you lose your life, you will find it (Matthew 10:39)?
- 2) **The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in our lives for living Christ-like lives, for building up the body of Christ, and for reaching a lost world with the gospel.**
 - a) For more on the law versus the Spirit, read through Paul's argument in Romans 7–8. What is the point of the law? How does it reveal the real root of the problem with humanity? How is the law fulfilled in the Spirit-led life? See also Galatians 5. Also consider the following quote by Gordon Fee: “The key to life in the Spirit for some is to spend much more quiet time in thanksgiving and praise for what God has done—and is doing, and promises to do—and less time on introspection, focused on your failure to match up to the law.”
 - b) Check your motives! The gifts of the Spirit along with all other demonstrations of the Spirit are for building up the Church and bringing God glory. They are not intended to make us great, to satisfy our curiosity of the supernatural, or cure our spiritual boredom. Have you ever wished for more supernatural Holy Spirit power in your life? What were your motives? Consider how you can pray for more of the Spirit so that God—not you—will be praised. As you are praying, are you using the gifts you already have to build up the Church?
 - c) Spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament include apostleship, prophesying, evangelism, distinguishing between spirits, wisdom, teaching, shepherding, exhorting, performing miracles, healing, service, leadership and administration, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, giving, faith, and mercy (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:7–10, 28; Ephesians 4:11). Do you think this is an exhaustive list? Where can you see these gifts being used in your church? Do you recognize any of these gifts in your own life? There are many spiritual gifts assessments available online that may, along with prayer and advice from mentors, help you determine your spiritual gifts.

Discipleship

- 1) **The Holy Spirit's empowerment for discipleship is essential because God's Kingdom exists alongside the kingdom of the world.**
 - a) In the New Testament, disciple (Greek: *mathetes*) means “one who learns.” We learn to live like Jesus not only through study and gaining head knowledge, but also by practical

obedience. Is your life one of active learning or do you just “coast” through life? What can you do to develop a habit of learning from Jesus daily?

- 2) **Mature disciples have a clear Vision, a certain Intention, and a commitment to the Means of discipleship.**
 - a) Have you ever given in to the popular belief that life doesn't have to change when you become a Christian? Why does this kind of “Christianity” fail to produce a truly satisfying life?
 - b) Discuss the tension between “Following Jesus’ example” (James 2:20–26) and “There’s nothing you can do; it’s all by grace” (Romans 4:1–5).
 - c) Spiritual disciplines can be thought of as exercise for the soul (1 Timothy 4:7–8). Remember that the disciplines themselves will not transform us—only God can do that—but they help us focus on the things of God and loosen our grip on the world. Spiritual disciplines can be divided into three different categories: *Inward* (practiced in the privacy of our intimate relationship with Jesus), *Outward* (practiced as we interact with the world around us), and *Corporate* (practiced in the context of community). The following list contains examples of disciplines and ways to incorporate them into your life:
 - i) **MEDITATION** – “The ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word” (Richard Foster). Christian meditation is not like the world’s meditation with the goal of completely emptying your mind. Rather, Christian meditation means intentionally and intently focusing on God and his word, filling your mind with his thoughts. Try picking a passage of Scripture and read through it carefully, slowly, and thoughtfully, as many times as is necessary. Listen for God to speak to you through the passage.
 - ii) **PRAYER**– This is our way of communicating with God and allowing him to change and transform us. Remember that communication goes two ways; take time to listen to God as well as talking to him. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; and James 5:13–16. What do these verses tell us about prayer? What can you do to develop a life of unceasing prayer?
 - iii) **FASTING**– More than just giving up something, fasting provides a chance to refocus on God, spend time in worship and prayer, and realize our dependence on God. You can give up food, activities, entertainment, media, or whatever else you think will give you an opportunity to refocus on God. Decide how long your period of fasting will last, and then stick with the commitment you have made. Remember that the purpose is to give up something from your regular routine in order to fill that space with godly activity; resist the urge to fill that space with other distractions.
 - iv) **SIMPLICITY** – A life of simplicity is a life free from materialism. Instead of being consumed with wealth and possessions or the pursuit of these things, choose a simpler lifestyle that helps you find satisfaction in God’s provision. The changes may be small, like being content with one or two pairs of shoes instead of dozens. Or the changes may affect something bigger, such as what kind of house you have. In any case, as you consciously make decisions to live simpler, you will find that some of your material resources are not as important as you first thought and can be used to help others. For example, the money you save by eating out less often can be donated to support a Christian ministry.

- v) SERVICE – A life of service is one that practices humbly meeting the needs of others. Recognizing areas of need is the first step, but true service requires actively going out of your way to help others, even if the tasks seem “beneath” you. Not all acts of service will be fun, easy, or glamorous, but you can find joy in serving because your service is ultimately done for the Lord Jesus (Matthew 25:40).
 - vi) SOLITUDE – Finding solitude in the middle of our fast-paced world may be difficult, but the purpose is to retreat from distractions for a time in order to be present with God. Remember that even Jesus spent time away from his disciples and the crowds so that he could rest, recharge, and be alone with God (Luke 5:16). Intentionally seek out a quiet time during the day to read the Bible, pray, and meditate. Periodically go on a retreat of silence or solo retreat, whether for a few hours, a weekend, or more. When life is busy and stressful, do not forget to “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10).
 - vii) CONFESSION – Acknowledge and repent of sin in your life and accept forgiveness from God. Practice being accountable to your fellow Christians by confessing your sins and praying for each other (James 5:16). However, use discretion in confession; not all sins need to be confessed publicly. Find someone you trust who will encourage and challenge you to pursue a life of godliness.
 - viii) What aspect of your life needs to be transformed (perhaps greed, worry, lying, pride, loving enemies, anger)? Which soul-training exercises may be helpful in giving God room to work in these areas? For further study on the spiritual disciplines, read Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.
- 3) **The Spirit makes possible this good life, the life for which we are saved.**
- a) Being a disciple is truly the “good life,” but it will require hard choices and suffering (Luke 14:25–33; Mark 8:34–38; Matthew 10:34–39). “Jesus Christ did God’s work on earth only because he submitted his will to God’s will, accepted pain and suffering, embraced the cross, and trusted absolutely in God” (C. Arnold Snyder). If we are to do Christ’s work in this world, we must also do these things. How does it make you feel to know that being a Christian is not always easy? Do you depend on the Holy Spirit to live a life of discipleship?

[4] The Kingdom and the Future

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ To understand that the nature of God's kingdom is service in contrast to the world's definition of kingdom, dominion, and power.
- ◆ To cultivate an anticipation of joy for the return of Christ and God's kingdom come, while living in the present as the kingdom citizens we already are.

The Kingdom of God

Donald Kraybill's *The Upside-Down Kingdom* or Scot McKnight's *The King Jesus Gospel* are good resources for further study on this theme of God's kingdom. For applications to youth ministry, check the online version of *Direction Journal* for two articles on "Thirsty for the Reign: A Kingdom Theology for Youth Ministry."

1) God's kingdom is present now. It is his reign through Jesus Christ over all creation.

Those persons who repent and place their trust in Jesus have already entered this kingdom.

- Discuss the present reality of the kingdom. The first thing Jesus preached was "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus also said that the kingdom does not come visibly for the kingdom is found within you (Luke 17:20–21). How does one identify the kingdom and its effects according to the gospels?
 - The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12) describe a kingdom citizen. Discuss how these qualities reflect life and core values in the kingdom.
- 2) Jesus' parables describe the value of the kingdom and how it is currently operating in our world.
- Talk about the value of the kingdom of God in Matthew 13 in relation to the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:25–35). In the parables, Jesus likens the kingdom to costly treasures that are worth selling everything for, and then speaks of how a disciple who does not count the cost of discipleship cannot truly follow Him. What does "counting the cost" of pursuing the kingdom look like in our context?
- 3) God's reign is characterized by generosity, sharing of power, servanthood, inclusion, love and peace.
- Take time to explain the year of Jubilee from Deuteronomy 15. How does Jesus fulfill the year of Jubilee with His incarnation?
 - Generosity is mentioned as a mark of the kingdom. Discuss the principle of sharing (Acts 2:42–47) with God's people and the sowing/reaping principle (2 Corinthians 9:6–8).
 - Discuss the concept of shared influence (or power). How is this manifested in the church (congregational versus leader led churches)?
 - Servanthood is another mark of the kingdom. Read Philippians 2:1–11 and consider the practical expressions of serving others as we seek to imitate Christ.
 - Talk about inclusion. How do we include people who think differently than we do about ethics, values, and discipleship into our fellowships? How do we affirm the person without affirming the sinful lifestyle they are living? Can we agree to disagree on certain matters of faith and life? What is non-negotiable?

- f) Peace and non-retaliation reflect the life of Christ in the believer. How do our actions affect the witness of the kingdom when we refuse to fight back (Romans 12:17–21)?
- g) To help students visualize these characteristics, tell stories from your congregation of people who are living kingdom values.

God's Future

- 1) We live in a time when the future has already invaded the present. This has set up a clash of kingdoms.
 - a) Pop culture is fascinated with the dark side and its powers, yet also emphasizes the victory of good over evil. The *Lord of the Rings* franchise and the *Hunger Games* series both reflect this trend. In what way do these themes and narratives resonate and imitate the gospel story? Can we find gospel themes in popular culture? We must, though, let Scripture and the gospel interpret those themes, not the other way around.
 - b) Paul gives us images of armour and weaponry in our fight against the powers of darkness. Discuss the practical expressions of the armour of God in Ephesians 6 and how we fight the good fight (2 Corinthians 10:4–5).
- 2) We anticipate the full and eternal completion of God's kingdom when Jesus Christ the King returns. Evil will be completely destroyed and God will restore his creation. He will make his home with his people.
 - a) The influence of Greek dualism has seeped into the Church so that we, wrongly, see the body as something to throw away when it dies. Dualism teaches that the spirit (the personality or self) is eternal and good while the body (our physical entity) is decaying and useless when used up. In light of 1 Corinthians 15, talk about the value our bodies have at the resurrection and how God saves the whole person, body, soul, and spirit.
 - b) Judgment and the wrath of God have been downplayed in recent times. As a resource you may want to read J. I. Packer's chapter on wrath in *Knowing God*. Packer emphasizes that God's wrath is really a form of love. God's wrath expresses the fact that he really does care that we sin and disobey; otherwise God would be indifferent to our failings and sins. Discuss with your students how they respond to this teaching.
 - i) For those who persist in sin and do not repent, God will have no choice but to judge the sinner according to his or her faithlessness (1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Galatians 5:19–21; Revelation 22:14–15). Discuss the rightness of God to act in this way (Romans 1:18–32).
 - c) C. S. Lewis paints an interesting picture in *The Last Battle* (Chronicles of Narnia) where those who followed the lion, Aslan, enter into a new Narnia at the end of all things. Surprisingly, the children note that everything looks the same but new and fresh, without fault or error. Relate this picture to the new heaven and the new earth that John talks about in Revelation 21. Heaven and earth, the dwelling of God and the dwelling of humankind, come together in a mutual dwelling where we will never again be separate from God.
- 3) This promise of a completed kingdom motivates us to live this present life with kingdom values.
 - a) Discuss motivations. What motivates us to find and engage in employment? What motivates us to care for our siblings or aging parents? What motivates us to study for a test? Our hopes and dreams motivate us to do well and excel. How does knowing that Jesus Christ is coming again to establish forever his kingdom motivate us to personal holiness, mutual encouragement, tenacious perseverance, and faithful service?

[5] Church and Mission

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ To instill in the students a conviction that the journey of faith is one taken in community with other believers, that the Church is the expression of this community, and that the faith community is expressed in and through its ordinances.
- ◆ To motivate the students to see that through the Church they have a part in the mission of God.

The Church

- 1) **Life in God’s kingdom is lived together in the Church. The Church is God’s people.**
 - a) Review the images used in the NT: Family of God, Body of Christ, God’s Temple, Bride of Christ, the Branches on the Vine (John 15:1–8), and the Flock of the Shepherd (John 10:14–16). Discuss which of these metaphors resonates with the students and how the church functions practically in these images.
- 2) **Local churches are kingdom communities, gatherings of God’s people for the sake of carrying out God’s mission.**
 - a) Discuss the kingdom values of Jesus, specifically His teaching on leadership and power (Mark 10:35–45). Consider this as a template for all our relationships and how kingdom people behave in society.
- 3) **Ordinances are important symbols of our life together in Christ in these kingdom communities. They are ways in which we encounter God.**
 - a) *Baptism and Membership*
 - i) Read and discuss Romans 6:1–7. Consider how the image of joining Christ in His death changes how we live and what it means to be “dead” to the old life of sin.
 - ii) Discuss the hesitation some students might experience in becoming a member of the church the same time as they are baptized. Some of the reasons may include: “I am attending a college/university in another community next fall.” “I’m not sure if this is the church I will settle down in.” “I want to be baptized but I don’t want the responsibility of membership.” You may want to have the class respond to these reasons and refute them. (1) Resource: Thom Rainer, *I am a Church Member* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013).
 - b) *The Lord’s Supper*
 - i) Discuss the preparation of one’s own heart for participation in the Lord’s Supper. What does it mean to examine oneself prior to participation (1 Corinthians 11:27–32)? How we balance the fact that “we are not worthy and never will be” with the challenge to examine ourselves?
 - ii) In a generation increasingly individualistic, consider the symbolism of the bread and the cup. A single grain alone does not make a loaf, nor does a single grape make juice. Both must be crushed to become part of the whole. Communion symbolizes the surrender of my individualism to be a part of Christ’s body.
 - c) *Footwashing*
 - i) Discuss the contemporary relevance of footwashing. Is there another way to show your willingness to serve others in a symbolic fashion? Does participating in an “earthly” gesture help the students to consider the measure of their “service”?

On Mission with God

1) **The Church exists to proclaim and to demonstrate God’s reign. It does this through fellowship, witness, discipleship, and worship.**

a) *Worship*

i) “Worship” comes from an old English word conveying the idea of “worth-ship.” Discuss how singing songs of praise gives worth to God. Discuss also how the elements of our worship service, such as taking up the offering, reading Scripture, testimonies, and preaching, are worship. Furthermore, discuss how one prepares for worship by oneself. Worship can be something we do on a daily basis through our work, family life, and our recreation times.

b) *Fellowship*

i) Discuss the synonyms for “fellowship”—companionship, friendship, communion of the saints, partnership.

ii) More on Ephesians 2:11–22: The imagery Paul uses is of the Jewish Temple where walls divided men from women and Jews from Gentiles. With the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the walls that divided men from women and Jews from Gentiles has been torn down to create one new people with one distinguishing feature—they belong to Christ.

c) *Witness*

i) Discuss the two sides of the one coin: proclamation and social justice. Share the dangers of leaning to one side of the coin while ignoring the other: the verbal testimony of Christ without feeding the hungry or social change, or speaking out for the outcast without sharing the cross of Christ. Read James 2:14–19 and 1 John 3:16–18 and discuss the balanced approach of Christian witness.

ii) Check out Gary Haugen’s (International Justice Mission) TED talk on helping end poverty by stopping violence. We are often good at responding to the victims of violence and poverty, but how can we act to stop the injustices from happening in the first place? Study Isaiah 58 and discuss the mutual actions of compassion and justice.

d) *Discipleship*

i) Tools for discipling others: Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), and Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials Workbook*.

2) **Each of us has a place in the Church’s mission.**

a) Discuss what it means to be a missional church. Gary V. Nelson writes, “God calls us to live a missionary existence in the world not just as something we do, such as education and worship, but as the very essence and character of the church” (*Borderland Churches*, St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2008). Nelson says we cannot be content to be “attractive” in our witness, with a “build it and they will come” mentality; we must advance the gospel by engaging our communities.

b) Discuss tithing or “worship through giving” in the light of Malachi 3:6–12. How can students begin to learn the freedom brought by this obedience even when they are in a season of limited resources?

[6] Anabaptist History and Thought

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ To give students a basic understanding of the Reformation and the development of the Anabaptist movement.
- ◆ To help students appreciate some of the values and beliefs for which Anabaptists stand.
- ◆ To teach students to apply an Anabaptist perspective to contemporary life, becoming more faithful followers of Jesus in the process.

Chapter Content

1) Introduction

- a) Help your students to understand what Christendom was. It was a period of time when Christianity was culturally dominant. The Church occupied a central and influential place in society, and the society thought of itself as Christian. This is no longer the case in the Western world. How can the beliefs and practices of Anabaptism help us to navigate this new reality? You may want to come back to this question after discussing some of the distinctives of Anabaptists.

2) The Church before the Reformation

- a) Watching a video like *The Radicals* may help your students to understand this story better. The Mennonite World Conference website also has some video resources.

3) Who were the Anabaptists?

- a) Was Menno Simons right to openly oppose this group's actions? When should we speak out against those who distort God's truth and when should we just ignore them?

4) What did they believe that was so different?

a) *The Bible and Jesus*

- i) Discuss the Stuart Murray sidebar quote. Are we ever in danger of marginalizing Jesus as the imperial church did?
- ii) What is the difference between being a fan of Jesus or a follower of Jesus?
 - (1) Kyle Idleman, author of *Not a Fan: Becoming a Completely Committed Follower of Jesus* says, "The biggest threat to the church today is fans who call themselves Christians but aren't actually interested in following Christ. They want to be close enough to Jesus to get all the benefits, but not so close that it requires anything from them."
 - (2) Discuss the difference between the people described in John 2:23–25 and those Jesus describes in Luke 12:25–32.

b) *Salvation*

- i) Discuss the *Let's Talk* Denck quote. Ask your students for examples of how they have come to know Christ more truly through obeying him.

c) *The Church*

- i) Read and discuss the "Rule of Christ" in Matthew 18:12–18. What is the right motivation for confronting sin in the church? How can we practice this in a life-giving way? See also Galatians 5:13–15; 5:22–6:5.

- ii) Does the separation of Church and state mean that Christians should not be involved in government functions, such as voting, working as civil servants, or running for office at various levels of government? Are there limits to what Christians can do? If we are citizens of God's kingdom, what is the right way for us to view earthly governments? Read and discuss Romans 13:1–6 and 1 Peter 2:13–17, keeping in mind that Paul and Peter were writing to people living under the totalitarian rule of the Roman Empire.
- d) *Non-conformity*
- i) Jesus refused to conform to society's values and expectations when they went against God's will. He suffered for this, but continued to forgive his enemies. Peter encourages Christians to follow this example (see 1 Peter 2:18–23; 3:8–17, 4:12–19). What should be our perspective on suffering? How is it possible to respond to evil with good?
- e) *Helping Those in Need*
- i) In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul deals with the matter of a special collection for poor believers in Jerusalem. Discuss his teaching on generosity – the motivations, the attitudes, and the rewards (2 Corinthians 8:1–15; 9:6–15).
 - ii) What questions or comments do you have about financial generosity? What is your current approach to giving? What goals are you prepared to set to make giving a part of your spiritual growth?
- 5) **The Continuing Story**
- a) Discuss the statistics in the *Let's Talk* segment. Are any of these surprising to your students? Why? Is being Mennonite a culture or a faith tradition?
 - b) The Mennonite World Conference website has video stories of non-traditional Mennonites. MCC's *A Common Place* magazine (also available online) shares interesting stories from Mennonites all around the globe. You may also have stories from your own denomination's missions work in other cultures. Help your students to gain a broader vision of the Mennonite tradition within the Christian Church.
- 6) **Denominational Sections**
- a) Three brief histories of the denominations sponsoring this book have been included for your use. What aspects of your denomination's history connect with your students' lives today? You may want to add some detail about the history of your own church to help students understand their local family.



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