

# The Upside-Down Kingdom

## 1: The Wrong Sort of Guests?

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...*

What children's stories do you particularly like or dislike and why?

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.*

*You could try this...*

Lay out some objects. Ask people to select one & write a prayer to God, inspired by the object. Then share your prayers.

### WORD

*This is a complex parable. Be careful not to just state what you see as the 'the one real meaning' of the passage –instead, allow people to explore the story & its different implications.*

**Read** Matthew 22:1-14

**Now, BEFORE DISCUSSING, everyone act out the story together.**

The more dramatic, the better –this is a parable & the story is deliberately 'bigger than life'! You will need the following parts (double up parts if necessary):

*Jesus, King, King's Son, King's Servants, Soldiers, A few invited first time, A few invited second time*

# Growth Group Notes

## Jun-July 2008



### For each character in turn:

- How did the person/people who played that character feel about the character? What was it like to be in their shoes?
- Discuss as a group...
  - Who do you think that character represented? Do you know people today who the character might represent?
  - Why did Jesus portray that character in that way?
  - Do you relate to this character personally?
  - Do you know people today like this character?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What do you like or dislike about the story?
- What different points do you think Jesus was making with the story? What points do you think he *wasn't* making? Do you think there are any parts he included just for dramatic effect?
- How do you think the king feels about those who pay no attention (v5)?
- How do you feel about the king inviting both good and bad to the wedding banquet (v10)?
- What does the end of the story (v8-14) imply about everyone being invited by God, but change being necessary? What implications does this have for us personally? What implications does it have for how we engage with our community?

## WHAT NEXT?

**Individually:** Take time to reflect . Ask God to show you which parts of this story he wants to speak to you personally through.

**Together:** The carnival is coming! Discuss together how you're going to get involved then pray for it.

# The Upside-Down Kingdom

## 2: Kingdom Kids

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...*

What is your first response when you think of children?

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.*

*You could try this...*

Try and find a CD of young children singing worship songs. Listen to the CD, then read Psalm 8, focussing particularly on verse 2

### WORD

**Read** Matthew 19:13-15; 18:1-6;

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passages:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

*NB: Jesus is addressing the disciples. These issues are important for us all –whether or not we directly care for children at present.*

Now use **some** of the questions below (and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!)

## ***Growth Group Notes***

### ***Jun-July 2008***



- 19:13-15: In what do we make it more difficult than it should be for children to come to Jesus...
  - on Sundays
  - in their families
  - in schools?

Answer for yourselves personally and then as a church

- How can we encourage children to come to Jesus in these contexts (you personally and as a church)...?
- How as a society are children being hindered from coming to Jesus? What wrong messages/examples are given by adults? What can we do?

#### **From 18:1-6:**

- The disciples asked 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' If they'd asked you, what would have been your first response?
- What does Jesus mean when he says we should become like little children (v3-4)? How does this differ from being childish (1 Cor 13:11 & 3:1)?
- Jesus is very harsh on 'causing children who believe in him to sin' (v6). How can we avoid leading children away from Jesus?

## ***WHAT NEXT?***

Pray for children first this time...

- Pray for the children of our town –especially at carnival time.
- Pray that they wouldn't be hindered from coming to Jesus.
- Pray in particular for children known to you.

# The Upside-Down Kingdom

## 3: Kingdom Maths

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...*

If you could organise a party for the town, what would you include?

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.*

*You could try this...*

Take time to say sorry to God & ask for his forgiveness –maybe by writing on bits of paper things you’ve done wrong, screwing them up & then burning them (outside?!)

### WORD

**Read** Matthew 18:21-35

- Why do you think Peter asked his question (v21)? Have you ever felt like asking Jesus the same question –if so, when?
- Do you like Jesus’ advice to Peter?  
What difference does it make when you are the one who is being forgiven?!

Now, as in week 1, **act out v18-35** (characters: Jesus, king, servants 1-4, jailers)

Then...

# Growth Group Notes

## Jun-July 2008



**For each key character (Jesus, King, Servant 1, Servant 2) in turn:**

- How did the person who played that character feel about the character? What was it like to be in their shoes?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*) –*as a whole group or in 2s&3s first...*

- Where do you see yourself in the story?
- What do you think is fair or unfair in the story?
- Jesus says 'forgive from your heart' (v35). What does this mean in practice?
- What is the effect of unforgiveness on the lives of...
  - ... those who don't forgive?
  - ... those who aren't forgiven?
- How easy do you find it to ask for forgiveness
  - ... from others
  - ... from God?

Here are some popular phrases relating to forgiveness. How far do you agree or disagree? (refer to this passage, or other Bible passages where it helps)

- 'You must forgive and forget'
- 'You can't forgive unless someone says sorry first'
- 'You can only change yourself –you can't force someone else to forgive'

## **WHAT NEXT?**

Pray for one another, but also pray for situations known to you locally or in the world where unforgiveness is ruining lives.

# The Upside-Down Kingdom

## 4: Unfair Kingdom

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. If you want an ice-breaker, you could try this...*

What things do you think are really unfair? Each take turns to share.

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God.*

*You could try this...*

Use a song or hymn about God's love and grace.

### WORD

**Read** Matthew 20:1-16

Now, as in previous weeks, **act out v18-35** (characters: Jesus, vineyard owner, 5 workers, foreman) and then...

**For the vineyard owner, early workers, later workers, Jesus, in turn:**

- How did the people who played those character feel at different times during the story?

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage as a group:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

## **Growth Group Notes**

### **Jun-July 2008**



Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- By mid-afternoon, where would you rather be –feeling unwanted in the marketplace or chosen, working & earning?
- Compare this passage with Matthew 18:10-14. Whether Jesus is talking about children or unbelievers, whether searching for lost sheep or returning to the market place, God seems overly concerned for those who are 'lost'. How do you feel about this?
- How should God's attitude towards the lost affect our attitudes?
- Have you ever been envious of God's generosity/grace to others? Are you more likely to rejoice with them or moan?!
- How do you feel about God's grace towards those who reject him but return later?
- To what extent do we expect God to abide by our standards of what's 'fair', rather than us accepting his kingship?
- Are the first last (v16) or does it just seem this way?
- If this is what the kingdom of God is like, how do you feel about being part of it?
- What practical difference does this parable make to the way you live?

## **WHAT NEXT?**

Do you know any 'lost sheep' or 'people in the market place' who you could invite to a church event/service, Alpha or a Growth Group social?

Make a note of them. Pray for them now. Keep praying for them and if appropriate, commit to inviting them.