

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to understand:

1. that the kingdom of God has an outward and an inward aspect; also a present and a future aspect
2. that the command: “Seek first the kingdom of God” means that the culture of the kingdom has a higher priority than the culture of the world (your traditional human culture)

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to dedicate yourself to make the culture of God’s kingdom your own.

Theme: Dedication to God and his kingdom

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

- *To dedicate yourself means to give yourself wholly to God and the extension of his kingdom.*

Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual (or: reasonable) act of worship. ²Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

God calls us to dedicate our bodies and our minds to him.

- *The dedication of our bodies.*
‘The body’ represents the whole human nature, not just the physical nature. It represents the whole human personality, because the body gives expression to it.

Christians bring a living sacrifice. Animal sacrifices have to be killed before they are brought. But Christians bring themselves as living sacrifices. They sacrifice their lives (body, mind, time, energy, possessions etc.) to God. They no longer desire to live out of their sinful nature,

but out of their born-again nature.

Christians bring a holy sacrifice. They separate themselves from what is wrong and evil and they dedicate themselves to what is right and good, that is, to God and his kingdom.

Christians bring a well-pleasing sacrifice. They dedicate themselves to what pleases God. They want to please God with the places they visit, with the activities they do and with the people they fellowship with.

Such dedication is ‘a spiritual act of worship’. The original word in Greek is ‘logiken’. It means that the above mentioned dedication is the only ‘logical’ or ‘reasonable’ way of worship. In the only other place it is used in the Bible (1 Peter 2:2) it can only mean ‘spiritual’. We are ‘spiritual’ (filled with the Spirit) when we give ourselves wholeheartedly to God, his kingdom and his righteousness during every Day of the week.

➤ *The dedication of our mind*

Christians do not adapt or conform themselves to the sinful world. They resist atheistic philosophies, false religions, bad friends, destructive conversations, sexual immoral magazines, dubious activities, daring dress, experimentation with drugs and extreme sports.

Christians are being transformed by the renewal of their minds and attitudes. That leads to a change of activities and a change of character.

➤ *The dedication of our members.*

Matthew 6:22-23

²²“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Christians are careful what their eyes *look at*, because their eyes are the windows of their soul.

Isaiah 50:4-5

⁴ The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. ⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back.

Christians are careful what they *hear*, because their ears connect them to God's voice

Matthew 12:34-37

³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ³⁷For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

Christians are careful what they *speak*, because their tongue shows what is in their hearts.

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship God (in one or two sentences). Which part of your body do you want to dedicate to God as a spiritual act of worship?

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: **The kingdom of God**

Read or explain in your own words.

Definition of the kingdom of God

The kingdom of God (Christ) is the kingship or sovereign reign (rule) of God (Christ) over everything and everyone. It is especially his kingship that is acknowledged in the hearts of his people and lived out in their lives. It is made possible by Christ's sacrifice of atonement and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The kingdom of God results in:

- our complete salvation from beginning to end
- the establishment of the Church on earth
- our influence on every area of society (intellectual, physical, emotional, social, ethical and spiritual)
- and finally in the complete renewal of the universe at the second coming of Christ.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: The kingdom of God

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| Day 1 | Matthew 13:44-46
The cost of entering God's kingdom |
| Day 2 | Matthew 22:1-14
The conditions for entering God's kingdom |

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| Dag 3 | Mark 7:1-9
Religious traditions (human culture) that cripple God's Word |
| Day 4 | Mark 2:18-22
The New Testament message must be poured into new forms |
| Day 5 | Luke 10:29-37
Love in God's kingdom |
| Day 6 | Luke 14:7-14
Humility in God's kingdom |
| Day 7 | Luke 12:13-21
Materialism in God's kingdom |
| Day 8 ^{BS} | Luke 16:1-13
Stewardship in God's kingdom |
| Day 9 | Luke 12:42-48
Service in God's kingdom |
| Day 10 | Matthew 25:1-13
Watchfulness in God's kingdom |

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.

If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The kingdom of God and its culture

- What is the definition of 'culture'?
- What was the origin of human culture?
- How do all people know what 'good' and what 'evil' is?
- What are examples of good and legitimate aspects in your traditional culture? And what are examples of evil and illegitimate aspects in your culture?
- How do you view the kingship of God in your own heart and life?
- What is the relationship between God's Church and God's kingdom?
- What are important areas in which Christians should deliberately introduce the kingdom of God culture?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- "Which area in your body needs to be saved more?"
- "Which part of your body are you going to dedicate to God the coming week?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

SEEK GOD'S KINGDOM Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom
and his righteousness,
and all these things
will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:33 (NIV)

3. Review of the Bible books

The 4 Gospels, 1 book of history and the first 7 letters of Paul: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Acts, Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: Be a good steward in God's kingdom

1. Bible Study

Make use of the method of studying parables (cf. lesson 35) and study:

Luke 16:1-16

¹Jesus told his disciples: "There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions. ²So he called him in and asked him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management, because you cannot be manager any longer.'

³"The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg— ⁴I know what I'll do so that, when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.'

⁵"So he called in each one of his master's debtors. He asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'

⁶" 'Eight hundred gallons (Greek: one hundred batous = probably about 3 kiloliters) of olive oil,' he replied. "The manager told him, "Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it four hundred.'

⁷"Then he asked the second, 'And how much do you owe?'

" 'A thousand bushels (Greek: one hundred korous =

probably about 35 kiloliters) of wheat,' he replied. "He told him, "Take your bill and make it eight hundred.'

⁸"The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. ⁹I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

¹⁰"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. ¹¹So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? ¹²And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

¹³"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

¹⁴The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. ¹⁵He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

¹⁶"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

2. Emphasis

Use your money and possessions to make friends for eternity.

3. Explanation for the group leader

(The parable method of Bible Study)

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is told in a particular context and may have an application or explanation. From these elements we must try to grasp the one message of the parable.

[Step 1] Understand the story of the parable.

➤ *The rich man*

He was probably a landowner. We have to assume that he was an honest man, because he accused his manager of dishonesty.

➤ *The manager*

He was 'an economist or household manager' who managed the estate. He was accused of mismanagement and wasting the property of his master. He was guilty, because he did not protest his innocence.

➤ *The debtors*

They were probably people who rented a piece of the estate. They paid their rent to the owner with a certain percentage of their yearly harvest. They could also borrow money from the owner. They owed the owner a lot of money. How they fell into debts is not related.

➤ *Giving an account*

The owner demanded that the manager should give an account of his management of the estate. He was not accused of deceit, but of mismanagement. It is possible that he wasted his master's possessions or it may be that he was negligent. The owner wanted the bookkeeping completed before he fired the manager.

➤ *The plan of the manager*

At first he did not know what he would do. He was not strong enough for manual labour and he felt ashamed if he would have to beg. So he devised a plan. He would do the debtors a favour, so that they would later in turn do him a favour. He would diminish their debts, so that later they would help him financially.

➤ *The changing of the bills*

A bill was an 'IOU' (i.e. 'I owe you') note, an acknowledgement of the debtor written on a wax tablet and signed. The dishonest manager called his master's debtors one by one, granted them a huge reduction of their debt and allowed them to rewrite their bills. The debtors did not know that the manager was dishonest. It was not uncommon that an owner would reduce the debt in times of draught or a bad harvest. It is possible that the debtors thought that the owner had given these instructions to his manager.

➤ *The lord praised his manager*

'The lord' is the owner of the estate and not Jesus who is telling the parable. He did not praise the manager's dishonesty, but the fact that he had acted cleverly. The dishonest manager had acted with foresight and had planned his future. That was very wise. The owner could not turn events back, because everyone thought that the owner had been very accommodating.

[Step 2] Study the context of the parable and determine the elements of the parable

The context of telling the parable consists of the background (the reason for telling the story or the particular circumstances) and the explanation or application of the story.

➤ *The background of the parable* is contained in Luke chapters 15 and 16.

In Luke chapter 15 Jesus tells three parables (the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son), in which he exposes the wrong attitude towards *lost people*. God's attitude towards lost people was very different than that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law towards tax-collectors and public sinners. In three parables Jesus exposes this wrong attitude towards people!

In Luke chapter 16 Jesus tells two parables (the unrighteous manager; and the rich man and Lazarus), in which he exposes the wrong attitude towards *possessions!* According to Luke 16:1 this parable was told to the disciples, but it was overheard by the Pharisees and it was also intended for the Pharisees (Luke 16:14).

In Luke 16:1-13 Jesus exposes the wrong attitude towards possessions.

In Luke 16:14-18 he exposes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

And in Luke 16:19-31 he reveals the terrible consequences when people mismanage other people and other people's possessions (thus: a combination of the theme's in chapter 15 and 16).

➤ *The story of the parable* is contained in Luke 16:1-8a.

➤ *The explanation or application of the parable* is contained in Luke 16:8b-13.

16:8. Explanation of the expression: 'the children of this world' and 'the children of the light'.

These are idiomatic expressions in the Hebrew language. They prove that the person or object stands in a very close relationship to the word (world and light) following the words 'child of' or 'son of'. The relationship may express 'belonging to' or 'similar to'. For example, 'the children of the light' are the people belonging to the Light (Jesus Christ) and who look like him. These are Christians. They are contrasted with 'the children of this world' who live according to the norms and values of the (evil) world and look like the evil world. They are unbelievers.

16:8. Explanation of the expression: 'the dishonest manager'. This proves that Jesus does not extol dishonesty, but rather condemns it. Also Luke 16:10-12 proves that Jesus does not recommend dishonesty.

16:9. Explanation of the expression: 'the unrighteous Mammon'. The expression is a personification of 'worldly wealth': possessions and money. Jesus does not contend that money or possessions by itself is 'unrighteous' or

bad. He intends to point out that the accumulation of money and possessions often are accompanied by much injustice and dishonesty. 'Worldly wealth is called 'the unrighteous Mammon' because it is often gained by dishonest means: by usury, bribes, extortion, stealing and robbery (1 Timothy 6:9-10)! It is contrasted with 'the true riches' (16:11).

16:9. *Explanation of the expression: 'You will be welcomed into the eternal dwellings'.*

The expression says that people who profited from your investment on earth will welcome you in heaven (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:1). They are the opposite of those people who would welcome the dishonest manager into their homes on earth (16:4), because they received advantage from his dishonesty.

16:8b. *Christians should conduct their business with forethought just as the people of the world.* "The people of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." The owner praises his dishonest manager, not because he had acted dishonestly, but because he had acted with forethought (deliberation). He had planned ahead of time and had made provisions for his future.

This is what Jesus wanted to teach his disciples in this parable: Acts with forethought (deliberation). Plan and make provisions for the future. Christians can learn things from non-Christians, because in general non-Christians are shrewder in dealing with temporary, earthly possessions and money than Christians are in dealing with everlasting, heavenly matters!

Of course there is another difference: while non-Christians do not hesitate to act dishonestly, Christians must always act with honesty.

16:9. *Use your possessions and money to make friends.* "Use worldly wealth (unrighteous Mammon) to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings." Jesus teaches his disciples to act with forethought, to plan ahead and to make provisions for the future.

The people of this world make 'friends' by means of their possessions and money: they give bribes, relationship gifts, sumptuous dinners and visits to night clubs, etc. They build a network of contacts so that later they may draw advantage from them.

Christians ought to make 'friends' by means of their possessions and money: they ought to invest their money to extend the kingdom of God in the world. The people who draw advantage from this will later welcome them in heaven!

16:10. *Always be trustworthy or faithful*

Jesus emphasises trustworthiness in small matters. Whoever is trustworthy with 'very little' will also be trustworthy with 'much'. The 'very little' represents your possessions and money on earth. The 'much' represents God's possessions and interests. To such Christians God will give everlasting results. The money and possessions you invest in people on earth will cause people on earth to become Christians and later welcome you in heaven. Think of support of the poor, the oppressed and the workers in God's kingdom.

Jesus also emphasises faithfulness in small matters. The 'very little' also represents your responsibilities (tasks) on earth. Whoever is faithful in 'the little' will also be faithful in 'much'. To such Christians God will give greater responsibilities on this present earth and later on the new earth. Think of being faithful in working hard with the talents God has entrusted to you and gaining five more talents (cf. Matthew 25:14-30).

16:11-12. 'The unrighteous Mammon' (16:9) is equated with 'someone else's property' (16:11), because earthly possessions and money always only belongs to God. He entrusts his possessions and money to people and expects them to make responsible and wise use of it.

Explanation of the expression: 'The true riches'

The true riches (verse 11) are equated with 'property of your own' (verse 12). When a Christian shows that he is trustworthy or faithful, that is, he acts with forethought (deliberation) with respect to earthly possessions and money (which always belongs to God), then God will give him 'true riches' as his inheritance. The really important things in life are the things pertaining to the kingdom of God (Matthew 25:34; Hebrews 12:28). Jesus teaches his disciples that there is a close relationship between how people manage their entrusted possessions and money here on earth and what God will entrust to them later in heaven and on the new earth (i.e. in the eternal kingdom)!

It is true that God already entrusts matters (people and tasks) to trustworthy or faithful Christians here and now. Also here on earth God may increase the responsibilities of trustworthy and faithful servants. But the emphasis in this parable is not on the present kingdom of God, but on the future kingdom of God, because Christians are taught to fix their eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18) and to live by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

16:13. *Application: "You cannot serve both God and Mammon."*

Jesus emphasizes that no human can love and serve God and his material possessions at the same time. The psychological pressure to serve two masters will become

untenable. His attitude, words and behaviour will finally reveal who is really his master. One cannot use God to become rich (cf. the prosperity gospel) (1 Timothy 6:5). But you can use your earthly possessions and money to make friends for God and his kingdom.

[Step 3] Identify the relevant details in the story of the parable

➤ *The rich man*

He does not represent Jesus, but only a wealthy person in the story. This is not a relevant detail.

➤ *The manager*

He is the central figure of the story in the parable and thus a relevant detail. But he does not represent a Christian, because a Christian must always be honest! He is contrasted with Christians and is held up as an example for Christians.

➤ *Recommending the dishonest manager*

This is relevant. The lord (e.g. the owner of the estate) does not praise his manager because he had acted dishonestly, but because he had acted shrewdly! This is a relevant detail.

➤ *The debtors and their debts*

They have no special significance in the story. They are needed to tell the story. They are not relevant details.

[Step 4] Identify the message of the parable

A parable has only one message. The parable of the dishonest manager teaches us about stewardship in God's kingdom.

The message of the parable.

“Christians must act with forethought (deliberation) with respect to their earthly possessions and money. They must use these to make friends for eternity. They must invest their earthly possessions (money, time, abilities, etc) to enhance the kingdom of God.”

Stewardship is a foundational characteristic in God's kingdom. People who really belong to God's kingdom use their earthly possessions and money to enhance God's kingdom: to win people for Christ, to disciple people for Christ, to plant congregations and to have Christian influence in society (e.g. among the lost, the poor, the hurting, the sick, the destitute, the oppressed, the persecuted, in politics, in the justice system, in education, in health services, in families; in the youth, in children, etc.)

God entrusts more responsibilities to Christians here and now who prove to be trustworthy and faithful. Nevertheless, the emphasis is on what God will entrust to them in heaven and on the new earth.

[Step 5] Check the message with cross-references

Matthew 25:21. His master replied, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness.”

The faithful servant who made use of the abilities and opportunities (talents) (verse 15) entrusted to him is praised and receives greater responsibilities.

1 Corinthians 3:10-15. “¹⁰By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

The Christian who builds with good materials on the foundation will be rewarded.

2 Timothy 4:8. “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

All Christians who look forward to the coming of Jesus Christ will receive the crown of righteousness.

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.