



WITHIN: GOD'S STORY OF SAVING OUR SOULS

Lesson 8: What Does it Mean to Live in God's Kingdom Paradigm?

Objective

Students will understand what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God and how it is different from the kingdoms of this world. Students will see that Jesus came to rescue our souls from darkness and invite us to live as part of His kingdom of light by loving God, others and ourselves in the way Jesus showed us. **(You can choose to spell the capital words throughout the text for additional practice.)**

Featured Scripture

Your **hearts can soar** with joyful gratitude when you think of how **God made you worthy** to receive the glorious **inheritance** freely given to us by **living in the light**. **He has rescued us completely** from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has **translated us into the kingdom realm** of his beloved Son. Colossians 1:12-13, TPT

Lesson

We've come to our final lesson in this series about our SOULS. I hope you've noticed something important: Jesus used images from everyday life—such as sheep, clay, rivers, wells, trees, rocks, oxen, and fields—to help people understand spiritual life as something intimate, relational, and interdependent. God's TRUTH isn't meant to be

complicated—it's meant to bring us back into harmony with God, with others, and with the way we were created to live in the first place.

Out of extravagant love, God sent His Son into the world—not to condemn it for messing things up—but to SAVE it through Him (John 3:17). He showed we were worth it, and He made us worthy of being cared for as sons and daughters of God!

And what did Jesus talk about more than anything? “The KINGDOM.” “Kingdom” comes from the idea of a king’s domain, or the space, people and reality that are under a ruler’s reign, or influence.

In the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the phrase “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven” appears over 100 times, mostly from Jesus Himself. It was the CENTER of His message. His first recorded public words in Mark were: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the good news.”

Jesus—the King of Glory—came humbly as a man. He showed us what God is like. He died to rescue us from the separation sin brings. He rose again to give us new life and PURPOSE, now and forever. But He doesn’t force His rule on anyone. **We choose to believe Him and we confess, “Jesus is my Lord,” aligning our hearts and actions with His kingdom.**

You may have heard the phrase *paradigm shift*. That means a completely new way of seeing the world. When Jesus began His ministry at age 30, He didn’t just introduce a new idea—He changed HISTORY forever. Roughly 8 billion people have become Christians, and the way His followers treated people with dignity and physical care was very distinct from the culture. His one life on the timeline of human history even inspired a new calendar to be made that split time into BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, “In the Year of our Lord”).

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What topic did Jesus talk more about than anything? **Answer:** The kingdom
2. Name one of the four Gospels? **Answer:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

3. Out of what you have learned through the lessons utilizing sheep, clay pottery, rivers, wells, trees, rocks, oxen, or fields, which was the most memorable for you, and why?

Answer: (Student reflection.)

4. Jesus doesn't force His rule on anyone. Why do you think you are allowed the choice of inviting Him to be your Lord? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. He wants you to want to love Him, not demand it.)

5. What is one way that Jesus shifted the paradigm on how people were typically treated in society that is meaningful to you? **Answer:** (Student reflection)

Some people murmured that Jesus was just the carpenter's son from Nazareth, but yet He spoke about God as His Father and talked about bringing "GOOD NEWS." **In those days, "good news" (or gospel) was a royal announcement—like saying a new king had taken the throne.**

But the people were confused. Jewish people in the first century were living under Roman rule. Rome taxed them heavily and crushed rebellion. Many hoped for a Messiah (anointed and appointed king) like King David who would physically defeat Rome and restore Israel's power and former glory. Instead, they had Jewish regional rulers like Herod Antipas, appointed by Rome, and Jewish religious leaders that ran the temple and were tied closely to POLITICS. **The "kingdom" they experienced felt heavy and discouraging.**

Into that world, Jesus brought something totally different and unexpected. It was not a physical kingdom, but an invisible kingdom.

Actually, it wasn't just a paradigm shift—it was more like an *ecology* shift. **ECOLOGY means how living things relate to one another and their environment.** In nature, everything works together to create life and growth. It's like a whole ecosystem that thrives together.

Jesus described God's kingdom like an ecology where life works together in harmony, built around ideas like family, friends, fields, and feasts. He said, "Seek the Kingdom of

God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33, NLT).

This kingdom wasn't just a far-off castle in the clouds for some far-off day. Jesus collected average men (and women) to be His disciples and close friends as He spread the Good News, and taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” He said the kingdom is “near you” and “in your midst.” Luke 17:21 (TPT) says, “God’s kingdom realm is already expanding **within** some of you.” Philippians 3:20 says, “We are a colony (now) of heaven on earth.”



God’s kingdom is meant to CHANGE the way you think about yourself on the inside and the way you live out your faith in the world around you. And you can take it with you wherever you go because it is *in* you!

In God’s kingdom:

- God loves us like a Father. Jesus is His Son and our Savior, and because of Jesus we can be part of God’s family too (**Family**).
- We love our neighbors and show care and kindness to people who might feel left out or forgotten (**Friends**).
- We share life together around the table in community and in communion with Jesus (**Feasts**).
- We grow from small beginnings into something strong and life-giving, both as individuals and as God’s people (**Fields**).

This was very different from the kingdoms people knew.

The “kingdom of this world” runs on force, fear, fame, and fortune. It did then in Rome, and you still see these distortions of success and POWER today. The “kingdom of

darkness” that can creep into our hearts works through fear, falsehoods, fleshly desires, and fractures. But Colossians 1:13 reminds us: **“He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved Son.”**

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) shows what this kingdom looks like. It’s often called the “Upside-Down Kingdom” because what the world sees as weak and humble and forgiving to a fault, Jesus calls blessed and fruitful. **Instead of ruling from the top down and expecting to be served, Jesus showed the importance of lifting people up.** This was living with real authority as His representatives.

Jesus welcomed CHILDREN. He interacted with and healed the disabled and sick. He let women sit and learn with Him. He touched lepers. He freed people from demonic oppression that was keeping them from even thinking straight. He upended the political structure of importance and broke social norms. He said, “Unless you change and become like children... you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

That was the SURPRISE. Jesus didn’t just come to free people from Roman rule. He wanted to free people from guilt, shame, and sin by truly seeing and loving them as whole people—inside their hearts and souls. **Jesus showed that real power is love and that real greatness is found in serving others. Real freedom starts on the inside, and no empire or outside force can take that away.**

Every week, faithful Jews prayed the Shema: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength... and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus stood before them as the One who loved them first, making it possible for people to truly love God and others.

Some people did not receive Him, but others did. Kingdom citizens and the CHURCH began to grow—not only among Jewish people, but among people from every background around the world. The Good News of Jesus Christ as Lord is offered to anyone who is willing to receive Him and follow Him.

In God’s kingdom, you are not measured by how eloquently you speak or how the world sees you. **You are SEEN and known by God. You belong in His love. You are valuable**

because He made you, knows you, and invites you into His kingdom. Jesus came to open a place for you where your life matters.

Do you choose to let Jesus be Lord of your life? Will you love Him with your whole personhood?

SPELLER QUESTIONS:

1. What is another term for “good news”? **Answer:** Gospel
2. What is the study of how living things relate to each other and to their environment? **Answer:** Ecology
3. When God is portrayed as a “Father,” what traits do you think He might have? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g. Loving, caring, kind, provider)
4. What’s the first thought that comes to mind with the term “Upside-Down Kingdom”? What is one example of that from Matthew 5 (The Beatitudes)? **Answer:** (Student reflection; e.g.)
5. Have you made Jesus Lord of your life? If so, please share about when you did that and why. If not, would you like to make Him your Lord? **Answer:** (Student reflection)

If you have never officially made Jesus the Lord of your life so you may enter into His kingdom, and live eternally with Him, do you want to? Maybe you want to recommit?

Pray this simple prayer with a believing heart:

Jesus, I believe You love me. I believe You died for me and rose again. I am sorry for my sin. I receive Your forgiveness. I choose You as my Lord. Help me follow You.

Amen.

Context Clues

THE JEWISH CLIENT KING

The client kings Rome placed over the Jews were not part of the traditional royal line of Israel's kings. Many of them, including Herod the Great and his sons, were actually not from the ancient Jewish royal family descended from King David. Because of this, some Jewish people did not see them as true rightful kings. Their authority came from Roman political power rather than from family heritage or God's covenant with Israel.

For example, Herod Antipas inherited his position through Roman approval and family connections, not because he was chosen by the Jewish people or came from Israel's traditional royal lineage. This helped Rome keep control of the region, but it also caused tension because many Jews hoped for a true king from David's line to lead them.

History often remembers Herod Antipas as a small but complicated ruler – someone who held power without strong popular support, and whose name is mostly connected to the stories of beheading John the Baptist and absolving himself from accusing Jesus.

Then & Now

In the Roman world, there were no hospitals and no organized care for the poor, sick, or orphaned. If someone was very ill, they depended on family or paid a private doctor. If a baby was unwanted or unhealthy, it was common to leave the child outside to die or be taken into slavery. But Christians believed every person was made in God's image, so human life had value no matter how weak or unwanted someone seemed.

During deadly plagues, believers stayed behind to nurse the sick – even when others fled. As Dionysius of Alexandria wrote, Christians cared for the sick “heedless of danger,” while many others avoided even close friends.

Christians also rescued abandoned infants and raised them as their own. By the fourth century, leaders like Basil of Caesarea organized large centers that cared for the sick, the poor, and orphans – early models of what would become hospitals and orphanages. In a culture that valued power and usefulness, Christians built communities around mercy, showing that in God's kingdom the weak were not disposable but deeply loved.

By the late 1800s, historians estimate that a majority of American hospitals were founded by religious organizations, especially Catholic orders. In some regions, nearly every early hospital had church roots. Churches still stepped into needs that cities and

states were not yet structured to meet. Imagine how many lives were saved by the care of Christians following Christ's kingdom values.

Memorize: Write this on your heart

"Seek first the kingdom of God...." Matthew 6:33a

Go Deeper (Optional)

- Watch "Matthew 5: The Upside-Down Kingdom" (7:33)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zTIW_aMDPI
- Watch Bible Project's "Gospel" (4:30)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41M013X3A>
- Watch "Intro to Ecology" (4:46)
<https://youtu.be/GlnFylwdYH4?si=yJ2ZBF59mwQSfaqa>
- Listen to the hymn, "This Is My Father's World" (3:52)
https://youtu.be/EMAsxu_HwaA?si=R06dmlvSQ64KINP_
- Read the story behind the hymn "This Is my Father's World"
https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/this-is-my-father-s-world/#google_vignette
- BONUS: Watch John Ortberg's "Who Is This Man: Session 1" (17:32)
https://youtu.be/LeXROyxzUc0?si=K44TD_i_cTRixidX

Options for Expression (Assignment for Open Spellers)

Choose **one** (or more) of these ways to demonstrate your understanding of the yoke:

1. **Make a 2-Column List, Write a Prayer**
 - Read John 10:10: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

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- On a piece of paper, Communication Partner draws a line down the middle. On one side write “STEAL, KILL, DESTROY” on the other side write “RICH AND SATISFYING LIFE.”
 - Speller, make short statements about your current life situation and sort what fits under each category for you—what’s going not so well, and what’s working. It’s okay if it’s lopsided—just be honest!
 - Knowing what you now know about Jesus wanting to free you from the kingdom of darkness and bring your life under the rule and care of His kingdom of light, write a heartfelt prayer about how you want to present these cares before Him and ask for keys for living a more satisfying, full, free life from the inside out.
 - Keep this list and use it again and again for your prayer requests, and notice what God does!

2. Poem / Acrostic / Song Lyrics

- Write a poem or song about the kingdom of God, Jesus as Lord, or the ecology of the kingdom (family, friends, feasts, fields),.

3. Make a Kingdom Ecology Map

- Draw a circle in the middle of a page, and write the word “Kingdom Ecology” inside.
- From the circle make four spokes that go out and write the words FAMILY, FRIENDS, FEASTS, FIELDS.
- Choose one of those categories to spell out a list of who or what is already in your kingdom ecology. (Family and friends, might be self-explanatory. For feasts—you might write your favorite meals or restaurants to enjoy with others, for fields—you might list the environments where you are thriving.) If you’re feeling ambitious, fill all of them out. You or your partner can even add stickers, stamps or art to it. Hang it on your wall and remember to thank God for it! .

Spelling Words to Practice This Week

1. TRUTH
2. SAVE
3. KINGDOM
4. CENTER
5. PURPOSE
6. HISTORY
7. GOOD
8. NEWS
9. POLITICS
10. ECOLOGY
11. FAMILY
12. FRIENDS
13. FEASTS
14. FIELDS
15. CHANGE
16. CHILDREN
17. CHURCH
18. SEEN
19. LOVE
20. SOULS

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