



- 🎯 **OBJECTIVE:** To introduce the concept of God's kingdom in a way that makes students reconsider how they interact with the world.

TEACHING OVERVIEW:

1. Embrace your true identity by knowing who you are and whose you are.
2. Participating in God's kingdom is countercultural.
3. Participate in God's kingdom because he is worthy.

TEXT: Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Matthew 5–7

💬 Say Something Like:

God invites us to rise above the kingdom of the world and participate in his against-the-flow, up-side-down, counter-cultural, world-changing kingdom. Jesus ushered in God's kingdom when he came to earth, but that kingdom has met opposition. Satan is trying to build a kingdom, too. We live in a tension between these two kingdoms, these two ways of life. When Jesus comes back, God's kingdom will take over completely, and Jesus will reign as king. But for now, we live in the time in between. How do we participate in God's kingdom as we await Jesus' return?

INTRODUCTION:

Option 1: Content

Help students understand the two paths that are marked out for us: the world's way and God's way.

💬 Say Something Like:

On your journey following Jesus, you will find that many of the things Jesus says and does totally crash through the rest of the world's perspective. In order to discover this idea in-depth, you must understand that even though there are a lot of countries in the world today, there are really two primary kingdoms at war: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world.

Option 2: Questions and Brainstorming

? Ask Students:

- What are some messages that you hear from the world?
- What are some of the promises that companies make in advertising?
- Possible responses:
 - You deserve this product.
 - Partying is fun.
 - Obey your feelings.
 - You have the right to be happy.
 - You will be happy if you buy this.
 - People will like you if you wear these clothes





Say Something Like:

Coca-Cola's launched their Choose Happiness Campaign in 2015, encouraging people to go beyond seeing the glass half-full, but to take action and fill the glass up themselves. Here are some of the findings from their "teen happiness study":

- *78% of European teens agree "Choosing to be happy is more important than anything else you can do in your life."*
- *Happiness is higher on the agenda for teens today than for previous generations.*
- *Experience happiness now, not in the nearly-now.*

? **Ask Students:** *How is Coca-Cola's advertising campaign different from what God says we should live for and do with our lives?*

Say Something Like:

For the next couple of weeks, we are going to discuss the countercultural teachings of Jesus. Today, we are going to unpack the idea of what it would look like if Jesus were king in your life, if you chose to participate in his kingdom.

TEACHING:

1. Jesus is king and wants us to participate in his kingdom.

Read: Help students understand that even before Jesus came onto the scene, one of the main messages of John the Baptist was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:1-2). Explain that repent means "turn away from." John was calling people to turn away from sin and sinful lifestyles to a different, better way of living."

Read: These are the first recorded words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand," (Mark 1:15; This is also found in Matt. 4:17).

Key Thought: *If this idea of kingdom is so important that it was one of the first things Jesus preached about, then what is it?*

Say Something Like:

For a long time, the world followed its own way. Ever since Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, humans have followed their own selfish desires. They continually choose to live for themselves, rather than their loving creator. This lifestyle defines the kingdom of the world. In the kingdom of the world, people only care about pleasing themselves. It is a kingdom built on the foundation of showboating, self-preservation, and me-first attitudes. Jesus came into the kingdom of the world to share the good news of the kingdom of God. The world was living in the darkness, but he offered a light: himself.

A. He frequently spoke about the kingdom.

Read: "But he said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose,'" (Luke 4:43).



B. He was praised and worshipped as a king.

Read: “As [Jesus] was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 19:37–38a).

Say Something Like:

Even with all this talk about the Kingdom, not even some of Jesus’ disciples fully understood what it meant that Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. They knew that Jesus had the supernatural power to overthrow kings and kingdoms. One of them, Peter, was ready to fight when they came to arrest Jesus as he drew his sword and cut off a soldier’s ear. But Jesus was coming to usher in the kingdom of God. It was not yet to be fully established.

Transition: *We’ve seen that Jesus came to talk about the kingdom, but what does it look like to live in the kingdom?*

2. Participation in God’s kingdom is countercultural.

Optional Illustration: Jesus lays out the directives.

The United States has a Constitution and a bill of rights—certain beliefs and principles this country stands for. By reading them, you can start understanding why the U.S. was established. In his first recorded sermon, Jesus cast a vision for the heart of what his Father’s kingdom looks like. Jesus built on the Old Testament and provided the fulfillment of those commandments. He pointed his listeners to the heart of his Father.

Read or summarize these passages from Matthew 5–7:

- Matthew 5:39–42: Don’t seek revenge. Be generous even to those who steal from you.
- Matthew 5:44: Love your enemies.
- Matthew 6:1–4: Give to those in need, but don’t make a show of it.
- Matthew 6:5–7: Pray quietly. Don’t babble long, loud prayers so everyone knows how pious you are.
- Matthew 6:14: Forgive others when they sin against you.
- Matthew 6:16–18: When you fast, don’t draw attention to yourself.
- Matthew 6:19–21: Don’t hoard wealth or treasures for yourself
- Matthew 7:1–2: Don’t judge others.

Optional Illustration 1: Life application

Ask Students: Where can you see the tension between the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of God? What does it look like in real life?

To find a real life example, look no further than the school lunchroom:

The world: You cut in the lunch line and complain about the quality of food.

Kingdom of God: You wait patiently for your turn and are thankful for the food you have.

The world: You gossip about a girl who is rumored to be pregnant.

Kingdom of God: You pray for that girl and extend friendship to her.

The world: You make fun of a kid who doesn’t fit in and sits by himself.

Kingdom of God: You invite him to sit at your table to get to know him.



Optional Illustration 2: Jesus' message was very different from the way the world lives!

If you have ever kayaked or canoed on a river, then you know that it is easiest to travel with the current. When you go with the current, your paddles slice into the water and propel you downstream. Now, suppose you need to travel upstream in your kayak. That is a totally different experience. If you catch your breath for a moment and stop paddling, you don't just stay in the same place. Instead, the river sends you downstream. You have to paddle hard to go against the flow in the direction you want to go. That is what it can feel like to live in the kingdom of God. You are living in a way that goes against the flow of the rest of your culture.

Transition: *Though Jesus came to earth to establish God's kingdom, Satan is still at work here on earth. Until Jesus returns, the kingdom of the world will try to silence the kingdom of God. So, if you really want to live in God's kingdom, prepare for an uphill battle.*

3. Participate in God's kingdom because he is worthy.

Optional Illustration: Would you buy it?

Can you imagine seeing an infomercial like this: "If you follow what our product says, you may not feel good or get rich or gain attention or have an easy life. Actually, if you follow the advice from our product, there is a good chance you will be persecuted or mocked. In fact, our product comes with a warning label that says it will probably make you meek, last, and poor instead of flashy, first, and rich." Would you buy this product? Most people probably wouldn't.

? Ask Students: *If God's kingdom isn't focused on happiness, why would anyone want to live in God's kingdom? If the world is against the kingdom of God, whom can I turn to for help as I try to live in God's kingdom?*

A. Why should we live in the kingdom of God?

Read: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many," (Mark 10:45); and "Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted," (Hebrews 12:2-3).

Answer: *Because Jesus is worthy of our lives. He did not owe us anything. In fact, we owed him. Jesus always practiced what he preached. He's God's Son and had every right to be served, but he gave up his life for us!*

Read: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me," (John 14:6).

Answer: *Because it is true. The world offers us false promises and lies, but God and his kingdom are the truth.*

B. Who can help us live in the kingdom of God?

Read: "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son



of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need," (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Answer: *Jesus. He is the one who ushered in the kingdom of God. Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God, and we can run to him whenever we need help living in his kingdom.*

Read: "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me," (John 17:20-23).

Answer: *Other believers. Before Jesus was crucified, he prayed for those who would become Christians in the future. He prayed that they would have unity in the face of persecution and hatred that would come their way.*

Final Thought: *As you faithfully seek to follow our king, Jesus Christ, know that the day is coming when there will no longer be two kingdoms. There will only be one kingdom: the kingdom of God. We will stand in front of the King, and if we chose to participate in his kingdom, we will hear his say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."*

CLOSING:

Option 1: Silently

Have students meditate on these questions:

- What kingdom do you serve? Who is king of your life, you or God?
- How can you tell? What evidence is there in your life to show which kingdom you're a part of?
- If you find yourself always following the kingdom of the world, what needs to change for you to embrace the kingdom of God?

Option 2: With a friend

Have students pick a friend and ask each other these questions:

- What would it look like for you to participate even more in the kingdom of God?
- What are things that God desires for you to do that you haven't been doing?

? Ask Students: *Have students share their answers with each other and pray for each other. Have them make a commitment to hold one another accountable for participating in the kingdom of God.*

***Any reference within this piece to Internet addresses of websites not under the administration of LeaderTreks is not to be taken as an endorsement of these websites by LeaderTreks; neither does LeaderTreks vouch for their content.

¹ "Why Generation Z is choosing happiness: A teen happiness study commissioned by Coca-Cola," *The Coca-Cola Company*, May 2015, accessed July 5, 2017, http://www.coca-cola.ie/content/dam/journey/ie/en/hidden/PDFs/Coke_Choose_Happiness_Ireland_Research_Study.pdf.