

Simple Sundays

Who is God?



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Main Idea

God's relationship to the church is multifaceted. No one image is complete enough to capture who God is for us and who we are to be for God, but as a starting place this session explores the image of God as our king. This metaphor depicts the all-powerful nature of God's rule over our lives.

You Will Need

Bibles, newsprint and markers, old magazines and newspapers, poster board (optional), scissors, glue stick, pens or pencils, markers

Faith Statement

The Spirit . . . binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

Human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). In grateful response, we learn to see each person as belonging to the same family. We seek to live our lives reflecting God's image as we see it in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is the concrete image of God, gives us the context in which to understand God when he speaks of the "kingdom of God." The idea of God as king means that the world is under the reign and care of God. Central to Jesus' message is the necessity of acknowledging God's rule over us. The emphasis is on the kingly (or sovereign) rule of God rather than on the sphere of operations for this rule. God is not merely one power or reality among others; God is the first and only reality. God governs all things directly, and, consequently, all political organizations, churches, and individuals are directly responsible to God.

The parable of the yeast refers to both the hiddenness and the extent of God's rule. Just as the yeast is unseen but leavens the whole loaf, God's rule, though hidden, remains the prime reality behind, and in, all reality. When Jesus declared that the kingdom had come near, he was referring to himself. In Jesus Christ, God's hidden rule had not only been revealed, it began a new phase of activity in the world, continued after Jesus' death and resurrection by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' words to the rich ruler indicate the new direction that life must take when one recognizes the presence of God's rule in one's life and in the life of the world.

The church has always viewed the sovereign rule of God under three aspects. The first is as an eternal fact. God is the creative and sustaining power behind and in all things whether humans recognize it or not. The second is as a present manifestation on earth when humans recognize and accept God's rule. Humans have the freedom to reject God's presence and rule, and they often do. The third is as a final consummation when God will "be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Much of what Jesus had to say about the kingdom of God referred to the end time and what God would bring in. In Jesus Christ we know that the character of God's kingly rule is not terror and fear but grace, mercy, and love.

You and Your Youth

This session explores the image of God as our king. Though it is a powerful metaphor for God's power and direction over all creation, it is also an intimidating image. In leading the session, affirm that while Almighty, God desires an intimate relationship with each person. Without a doubt, that is very, very good news. In preparation for this session, take time to center yourself in prayer, asking for the Spirit's wisdom. Then pray for the members of the group by name, that they might respect the power and authority of their good and loving God.



Enter

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Leadership Collage

Magazine, newspapers, tape or glue, poster board or newsprint

Look through magazines and newspapers for pictures of people whom you would consider leaders. Tape or glue these pictures on poster board or newsprint. As you work together on this project, discuss who these people are and what personal attributes they possess as leaders. Other questions for discussion include the following:

- Who is most influenced by this person's leadership?
- What kind of a public reputation does this person have?
- How did this person become a leader?

Opening Prayer

Sovereign God, you have created all of us in your image and you guard our ways. Give us courage to acknowledge your rule over our lives and to honor you with obedient lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.



Explore

Study the Bible

Bibles

If possible, form groups and let each group study one of these passages: Genesis 1:26–27; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 9:11; 13:20–21; 18:24.

Write the questions below on a piece of newsprint so that each group can use them in discussing their particular Scripture passage:

- What do you learn about God or God's kingdom from this passage?
- How does the image of "kingdom" seem out of date with your experience?
- In what respect does the concept of God's reign clash with American ideals of democracy?
- What does it mean for the church to believe that God is sovereign?



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then modify them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue

Set up the following scenario and then discuss it using the questions below:

Gina and Fergie are new Christians who were originally invited to church by friends from their school's jazz band. At first, Gina really enjoyed the music in the contemporary worship service, but lately she has been paying more attention to the words and she is really uncomfortable with the number of songs that use "kingdom" images. She talks to Fergie about her experience because she wonders if Fergie feels the same way. She realizes that part of her discomfort is that the language for God is gender exclusive, but the thing that disturbs her most is how oppressive the idea of a monarchical God seems to her. This has not been Fergie's experience, but she respects Gina's feelings and suggests they come to you for advice because you are not as new to the church scene as they are.

- In what ways is Gina's discomfort with kingly images of God justified?
- How is it backward for us to impose the mistakes and imperfections of human kings onto our image of God who is a righteous and perfect ruler?
- How is any image or metaphor for God limited in some sense by our humanness?
- Should the church stop using hymns or Scriptures that make reference to a particular image if that image is uncomfortable for some people?

Action Steps

Collage from Enter

Share these instructions with everyone:

Look at the collage you put together earlier in the session. Ask yourself which one of these leaders you would be most honored to work for. It is okay to choose a leader who is not pictured in the collage. Share with one another how you would feel if that person were to call you up to ask you to be her (or his) personal assistant.

- What is it about this person's leadership that draws you?

After you have spent some time in discussion, introduce the concept of Jesus' call to serve.

- How does your desire to serve a worthy human leader compare to your willingness to serve Jesus?

Spiritual Practice

Bibles

Read the following paragraph as an introduction to the spiritual practice:

Throughout the psalms the people of Israel declare the majesty and power of God as king. Specific examples of this are found in Psalms 46, 93, 96, 97, and 99. The Psalms use four elements in depicting the sphere of God's reign: (1) God has dominion over all other gods; (2) God rules over all the world and all that is in the world; (3) the Lord is king over every nation and people; and (4) the Lord is king over Jerusalem. The psalms clearly ascribe to Yahweh, who alone is King, the sovereignty over all that has ever been, all that is, and all that ever shall be. There is a sense in which the all-powerful reign of God is terrifying, but the psalms also affirm God's goodness and loving-kindness. Because God is a good king, we can trust God to lead us with justice and mercy and grace.

Read Psalm 46 aloud together, and then write your own psalm using the theme of God's reign. Do this exercise in silence so that there is an attitude of prayer as everyone writes his or her psalm.



Closing Prayer

Good and powerful God, we boldly come before your throne because you rule our lives with justice and mercy, with guidance and grace. Make us so confident of your love that we have distaste for anything that keeps us from your presence. Fill us with such joy in serving you that we drop anything you ask of us in order to be with you. In the name of the Prince of Heaven, we pray. Amen.