

KINGDOM CULTURE



Second Baytown Small Groups

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- Join us each week for our Sunday messages beginning February 5 online or in person. Find our service times at SecondBaytown.org.
- Watch our weekly “Kingdom Culture” small group videos on RightNow Media or YouTube. To access YouTube or RightNow Media, scan the QR Code below.
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FROM THE PASTORS

Will we seek to live in “our own kingdom” or the Kingdom “culture” taught by Jesus?

Headlines in a newspaper or your social media feeds will tell you a lot. They inform you of what is coming in the articles or posts you are about to read. If you read the “headlines” in the book of Matthew, specifically chapters 5, 6, and 7, you will see things like “salt and light, an eye for an eye, oaths, murder, giving to the needy,” etc.

When we see those, our minds may often revert to passages we’ve read in other parts of scripture. For instance, we may think of the 10 Commandments given by Moses, or the more specific Levitical Law given to the people of Israel. The Jews listening to these words of Jesus in the book of Matthew would have done the same. That’s why Jesus uses the words “you have heard it said” over and over again.

What’s interesting, is that Jesus used that phrase, “you have heard it said” and then flipped the script. With each instance of “you have heard it said,” he engaged the traditional religious practices and ideals of that period. In so doing, He cast vision for the culture He was seeking to create in His Kingdom.

Meriam Webster defines the term culture as “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization.” It is in these 3 chapters of Matthew that we are given a beginning framework for this new Kingdom that Jesus was bringing. It was a NEW Kingdom, forming a NEW culture, one not based on merit, checklists, good works, or bloodlines, but one built on the foundation of His life lived through His people on the earth.

Join as we discover what it looks like for us to live in this Kingdom Culture.

Your Pastors at Second Baytown

HELPS FOR HOSTS

Top Ten Ideas for New Hosts

CONGRATULATIONS! As the host of your small group, you have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. Few other tasks in the family of God surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to facilitate your group, whether it is one session or the entire series, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

Remember, you are not alone. God knows everything about you, and He knew you would be asked to facilitate your group. Even though you may not feel ready, this is common for all good hosts. God promises, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5). Whether you are facilitating for one evening, several weeks, or a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

- 1.** Don't try to do it alone. Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help you shepherd the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask people to help. You'll be surprised at the response.
- 2.** Be friendly and be yourself. God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people at the door with a big smile.... this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big a step to show up at your house as you are taking to host a small group! Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it and you'll sleep better at night.
- 3.** Prepare for your meeting ahead of time. Preview the session and write down your responses to each question.
- 4.** Pray for your group members by name. Before your group arrives, take a few moments to pray for each member by name. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.

5. When you ask a question, be patient; someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "great answer". Then ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to share anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time. If someone in your group is a wallflower who sits silently through every session, consider talking to them privately and encouraging them to participate. Let them know how important they are to you, that they are loved and appreciated, and that the group would value their input. Remember, still water often runs deep.

6. Provide transitions between questions. Ask if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

7. Break into smaller groups occasionally. With a greater opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of their small group experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.

8. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud may feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.

9. Rotate facilitators occasionally. You may be perfectly capable of hosting each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to facilitate the group.

10. Go through the Small Group Guidelines. This is a very important part of starting a new group. This will help outline and clarify all expectations for your members.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How Long Will This Group Meet?

This study is six sessions long. We encourage your group to add a seventh meeting for a serve project. In your sixth session, each group member may decide if he or she desires to continue on for another study. At that time, you may also want to do some informal evaluation, discuss your Small Group Guidelines, and decide which study you want to do next. We recommend you contact Seth Carnes at scarnes@secondbaytown.org for more information on future studies.

Where Do We Find New Group Members?

Recruiting new members can be a challenge for groups, especially new groups with just a few people, or existing groups that lose a few people along the way. We encourage you to use the Circles of Life diagram on page 8 in this study guide to brainstorm a list of people from your workplace, church, school, neighborhood, family, and so on. Then, pray for the people on each member's list. Allow each member to invite several people from their list. Some groups fear that newcomers will interrupt the intimacy that group's members have built over time. However, groups that welcome newcomers generally gain strength with the infusion of new blood. Remember, the next person you add just might become a friend for eternity. Logistically, groups find different ways to add members. Some groups remain permanently open, while others choose to open periodically, such as the beginning or end of a study. If your group becomes too large for easy, face-to-face conversations, you can subgroup, forming a second discussion group in another room.

How Do We Handle the Child Care Needs in Our Group?

Second Baytown provides children's activities on Sunday night, Wednesday night and Thursday night. You can contact the church office to find out the specific times and arrange your meetings accordingly. One common solution is to have the adults meet in the living room and share the cost of a baby sitter (or two) who can be with the kids in another part of the house. Another popular option is to have one home for the kids and a second home (close by) for the adults. If desired, the adults could rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson for the kids. The last option is great with school-aged kids and can be a huge blessing to families.

SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during the introduction meeting in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience.

WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING VALUES:

CLEAR PURPOSE: To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community

GROUP ATTENDANCE: To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late)

BE CONFIDENTIAL: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: To avoid gossip and to immediately resolve any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17

SPIRITUAL HEALTH: To give group members permission to speak into my life and help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God

LIMIT OUR FREEDOM: To limit our freedom by not serving or consuming alcohol during small group meetings or events so as to avoid causing a weaker brother or sister to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:19-21)

WELCOME NEWCOMERS: To invite friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly

OTHER: _____

We have also discussed and agree on the following items:

CHILD CARE: _____

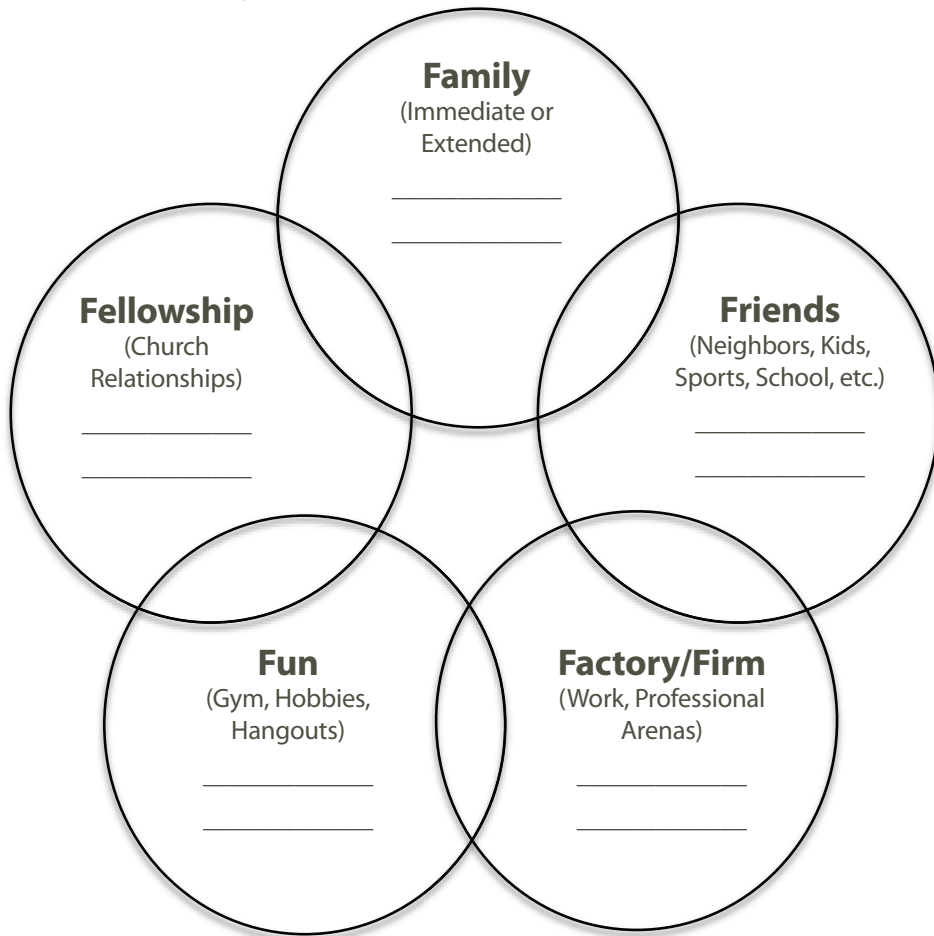
STARTING TIME: _____ **ENDING TIME:** _____

If you haven't already done so, take a few minutes to fill out the Small Group Calendar, which can be found on page 9.

CIRCLES OF LIFE

Small Group Connections. Discover Who Can Connect In Community.

Use this chart to help carry out one of the values in the Group Guidelines, to “Welcome Newcomers”.



Follow this Simple, Three-Step Process

1. List one to two people in each circle.
2. Prayerfully select one person or couple from your list and tell your group about them.
3. Give them a call and invite them to your next meeting. Over fifty percent of those invited to a small group say, “Yes!”

SMALL GROUP CALENDAR

Healthy groups share responsibilities and group ownership. It might take some time for this to develop. Shared ownership ensures that responsibility for the group doesn’t fall to one person. Use the calendar to keep track of social events, mission projects, birthdays, or days off. Complete this calendar at your first or second meeting. Planning ahead will increase attendance and shared ownership.

Date	Lesson	Location	Facilitator	Snack/Meal
	Session 2			
	Session 3			
	Session 4			
	Session 5			
	Serve			

HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME

Transformational Discipleship, a recently published book based on extensive spiritual growth research, found that the most significant catalyst for life transformation is daily time in God's Word. Having a daily quiet time or devotion will literally change your life. It is critical to living a Christ-centered life. So, for this study, we have provided daily devotionals for each week. Here are some tips to help you get started.

- 1. Begin with the right attitude.** As you begin, take a minute to pray. Ask God to show you anything in your life that is preventing you from hearing from Him. Ask Him to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what He wants to show you (Psalm 119:18).
- 2. Be ready to obey.** Sometimes God will show you things that are difficult to deal with. Maybe it's a weakness in your life. Maybe it's something He's asking you to do. Whatever it is, listen and respond!
- 3. Select a special time.** If you don't set a special time to meet with God, someone or something else will undoubtedly take His place. Start by setting aside 15 minutes. As you get more comfortable, add more time. Remember, the important thing is quality, not quantity.
- 4. Set a special place.** Jesus had a special place He would go to spend time with the Father. Why? He wanted to get away from the noise and busyness of life to devote all of Himself to His relationship with the Father.
- 5. Gather your resources.** We recommend a journal and an *ESV Study Bible*. If you're ready for more, see other resources recommended throughout the study.
- 6. Don't make it legalistic.** The enemy hates the fact that you are making this a priority. He will try everything to get you off track. Don't let him. Be careful, however, to avoid having a quiet time "just to check it off the list."
- 7. Don't give up or feel guilty if you miss a day.** That's exactly what the enemy wants. Just pick back up where you can.

SERMON NOTES



WEEK 1: KINGDOM CULTURE

DAY 1—READ LUKE 17:20-21

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

It's easy to misinterpret other people's words, intentions, and actions. Text messages are a good example. A recent study concludes that simple punctuation can get you in trouble. Texts that end with a period are often perceived as passive-aggressive, rude, or insincere.¹

Granted, there was no text messaging in Jesus's day, but the Pharisees were constantly misinterpreting Him. In Luke 17, the question they asked Jesus came out of a misinterpretation. They believed the Messiah was coming to establish an earthly, political kingdom. Basically, they challenged Jesus to go ahead and do what He came for or stop talking about it. He didn't match their expectations about God's kingdom.

The thing is, Jesus didn't come to match up with any human ideas about God's kingdom. God's kingdom isn't about any outward sign or behavior; it's about Jesus and the people who, in faith, turn from their own interpretations of righteousness to a relationship with Him through grace alone. In other words, the kingdom of heaven comes to those who have a relationship with the King. The Pharisees couldn't receive the benefits of the kingdom without trusting in the King, and neither can we. And the King of the kingdom of heaven is Jesus, who is with us and making Himself known.

¹ "Study: Punctuation in Text Messages Helps Replace Cues Found in Face-to-Face Conversations," News - Binghamton University, November 14, 2017, <https://www.binghamton.edu/news/story/873/study-punctuation-in-text-messages-helps-replace-cues-found-in-face-to-face>.

What does it mean that Jesus's kingdom is "in the midst of" us?

Read Matthew 5:17-20. Considering this in light of Luke 17:20-21, what did Jesus mean when He said we must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees?

The kingdom of God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and there is also a future, final fulfillment of the kingdom of God. How does God's kingdom in your midst impact you as you wait for the kingdom still to come?

Thank Jesus for coming to correct every earthly misinterpretation of God's kingdom. Invite Him to help you rest in His presence as you live in expectation of the final fulfillment of that kingdom.

DAY 2—READ ROMANS 10:2-4

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Time and time again, Jesus called out the Pharisees' hypocrisy and used them as a contrast to true righteousness (see Matthew 5:20). At the same time, the Pharisees of Jesus's day stand as a better comparison to most people in the world today. The core of most religions is the belief that people are basically good and can work their way to God. Even in the church, a lot of people fill their lives with religious activities and good morals, thinking these things will give them a connection to God. But being a religious person is not enough.

"Zeal for God" does not make any person righteous before God. That's because zeal can exist apart from knowledge. And zeal apart from knowledge is an arrow shot in the wrong direction. The Jews believed they had good standing with God because of the law, their religious traditions, and their religious activity. They were sincere in their endeavors, but their sincerity was tragically misplaced. No matter how hard they tried, they could never be good enough to earn favor with God.

Neither can we. We can go to church, lift our hands in worship, and do all the "right" things, but God knows our hearts. He knows whether we're banking on our own brand of righteousness or submitting to His righteousness—which is only found in a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

How can a person be passionate about God, and even Jesus, but still not experience salvation?

Read John 14:6. How is Christianity different from every other religion? How are we made righteous before God?

How does knowing what Christ has done for you give you zeal to follow His commands?

Ask God to give you the opportunity to share your faith with others who are not Christians, and pray for a zealotness for the gospel.

DAY 3—READ LUKE 16:14-15

The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.

Most of us are people-pleasers. At the very least, we want to make the people we love happy. Sometimes, we even want to please people we aren't close to—or don't even like very much—so that they will appreciate us and our work.

The problem is that when our primary aim is to please people, we will fail to hit the ultimate target of pleasing God. That was the story of the Pharisees in Jesus's day. They were wealthy and had no intention of being generous with their money, except in occasions when it raised their esteem in the eyes of the public. They were setting aside and redefining God's commands to suit their own earthly purposes (see Matthew 5:19). And Jesus, who didn't just know the law but was the fullness of the law, knew that about them.

God is a loving Father who wants to connect with our hearts. He is not impressed by the same things as the world. He is the perfect Father, desiring what is best for us. Submitting every single area of our lives to Him is for our best. But to do that, we have to acknowledge that we fall short of His standard, come to Him seeking forgiveness and transformation, and walk in honest and loving relationship with Him.

Why do you think the Pharisees' actions seemed favored among men but were actually detestable in the sight of God? Since God loves us, how can it be that what people esteem is revolting or detestable to God?

What are some ways Christians are tempted to set aside and redefine God's commands today? What will be the end result?

In what relationships or situations are you tempted to live for the approval of people instead of giving your heart completely to God? How does Luke 16:14-15 speak to you about that?

Thank God that He knows your heart and still loves you unconditionally. Acknowledge your tendency to seek the approval of people. Invite Him to teach you how to faithfully follow Him with a clean and pure heart.

DAY 4—READ ROMANS 13:8-10

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

You can be a faithful spouse, upstanding citizen, and ethical employee and still come up short in your relationship with the Lord. The emphasis of Jesus's teachings was never on what we do; rather, it was on why and how we do what we do—our love for God and love for people.

Paul quoted Jesus when he challenged the Christians in Rome to love one another well. That's because Jesus is the fulfillment of the law, and Jesus fulfilled the law in love. Many of the commandments—do not commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet—are related to neighborly love. Many view the law as restrictive, but the law boils down to loving God and loving others. In the same way our relationships must flow from love and not obligation. It is only through loving God and loving one another that we can have healthy relationships.

The point of the Christian life is not to simply keep from living poorly. Imagine how it would sound if we bragged about not stealing. What would you think of someone who came to small group and proudly stated, "Yesterday, my neighbor left his garage door up. I didn't steal his lawn mower. I'm pretty great, right?" If we love our neighbor, we would never choose to wrong them. Instead, we would seek to serve them however we can. By treating our neighbors in this way, with love, we also show our love for God and connection to Jesus in living according to the fullness of the Law.

What is the one expectation God has of you in your earthly relationships?

Read Philippians 1:9-11. Love without knowledge of God is just sentimentalism. Give one example of how the world defines love differently (sentimentally) than the love described in God's Word.

What would it look like this week for you to love your neighbor? How would your relationships be impacted by following this command?

Thank God for His love that gives you the opportunity to love Him and others. Ask God to continue to grow you to the point that all your relationships are defined by love.

DAY 5—READ ISAIAH 40:7-8

The grass withers, the flower fades

when the breath of the Lord blows on it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

but the word of our God will stand forever.

In the fall, nature begins to experience some dramatic changes. Leaves fall from trees, summer flowers die, the grass goes from lush green to dirt brown. These times of transition remind us that all seasons of life eventually come to a close. Even our life on earth is fragile like this; it begins and ends. But one thing is eternal and stands secure no matter the weather or season: God and His Word.

Think about it in terms of personal finances. Many of us make investments, putting our money away in hopes that it will have a great return on its value. In life we do the same thing; we put our time, money, and efforts toward different things, hoping for a big return that will be worth it in the end. This verse teaches us that the things we invest in outside of God's Word will all fade away.

When we follow the Word of God and live our lives according to it, we make the ultimate investment. Jim Elliot summarized this truth well when he said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."¹ The Word of God will be completely accomplished (see Matthew 5:17-18)! What that means is that the investment you make in Scripture and following Jesus will never be in vain; it will always hold its value.

1. Justin Taylor, "He Was No Fool," The Gospel Coalition, January 9, 2010, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/he-ws-no-fool/>.

Why do you think Isaiah was told to remind the people that all humanity is grass that fades quickly? How does your perspective change when you realize your life is brief?

Think about all the advertisements you see in a day. How many of those have eternal value? Why do we invest so much time and effort in things that will fade away?

What are some ways you invest your time? How can you use these things for God's glory? How do you invest time in the Word?

Thank God for His Word that will never fail and will stand forever. As you commit to treasure His Word, ask Him to give you direction for how to invest the resources He has given you.



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