

PARTICIPANT NOTES

Learn to see differently, so we can live differently

SESSION ONE — PART 1

KINGDOM vs EMPIRE

Learn to See Differently

Tuesday 7 July

KEY QUESTION

Every day, two kingdoms compete for our allegiance. How do we recognise them?

1. Welcome

Before we open the Bible together — a quick round-the-table check-in. No wrong answers.

In a word or two, how would you describe the world right now — chaotic, hopeful, exhausting, uncertain, something else?

2. Seeing the Big Story

Before we open the Bible, we already carry a story in our heads about what “empire” and “the Kingdom of God” mean — shaped by family, culture, education, media and experience. Tonight we ask whether Scripture tells the same story, or a different one.

OPENING EXERCISE — FINISH THE SENTENCE

Empire is...

Kingdom is...

When I hear “The Kingdom of God”, the images or feelings that come to mind are...

A working definition

The Kingdom of God is not primarily a place, and not just another name for heaven after we die. It is God's rule, reign and authority breaking into every sphere of life — the spiritual, emotional, social, political, economic, cultural and environmental. There is no arena of life from which God is absent.

God is already at work in the world. Our task is not to persuade Him to get involved, but to notice what He is already doing and keep up with Him.

The Bible's big story

The Bible is not primarily a book about religion. It is the story of God's Kingdom confronting empire — two radically different ways of ordering the world, colliding from Genesis to Revelation:

- God's reign — vs — human domination

- God's way — vs — human power
- God's generosity — vs — human scarcity
- God's diversity — vs — human conformity
- God's mutuality — vs — human hierarchy

Empire doesn't always look obvious — it can wear a military uniform, a business suit, the language of politics, or even the language of religion and the Church.

Because we cannot live differently until we learn to see differently.

3. Genesis as God's Alternative to Empire

Genesis was written into a world shaped by empire — Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia — where kings claimed divine authority, power was concentrated in a few hands, and women, children and the poor were treated as property. Genesis is theological resistance: it reveals who the true God is, and who He is not.

Unlike other ancient creation stories (which existed to justify empire and hierarchy), Genesis tells a radically different story: every human being bears the image of God; power is shared, not hoarded; creation is a gift to steward, not a resource to exploit.

READ ALOUD — GENESIS 1

Read the chapter aloud around your table (3–4 verses each). Listen for what stands out to you.

What stood out to you as you read?

GROUP EXERCISE — EMPIRE SAYS... / GENESIS SAYS...

For each statement, discuss how Genesis answers empire's claim.

Empire says...	Genesis says...
Only kings bear the image of God.	
Power belongs to a privileged few.	
Creation exists to serve rulers.	
Rule through fear.	
Violence creates order.	
Domination is strength.	
Difference is a threat.	
People exist to serve the empire.	

GROUP EXERCISE — WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THIS IS TRUE?

Below, each empire belief is paired with Genesis's answer. For each pair, discuss: if this were true, what kind of world would it create, and what kind of people would it produce?

The belief	If Empire is true...	If the Kingdom is true...
Who bears God's image		
Where power belongs		

The belief	If Empire is true...	If the Kingdom is true...
What creation is for		
How we rule		
What creates order		
What counts as strength		
How we treat difference		
What people exist for		
NEED A STARTING POINT? <i>Row 1, Empire: some lives become more valuable than others, the powerful can exploit the weak, some voices are never heard. Row 1, Kingdom: every human life carries equal dignity and worth, leadership becomes service, justice becomes possible because every person matters.</i>		

4. A Story Told in Sevens

In Hebrew thought, seven symbolises completeness, wholeness and perfection. Genesis 1 is saturated with sevens: seven days of creation, seven Hebrew words in the opening verse, “God saw that it was good” building to “very good”. The structure itself is preaching — everything is exactly as God intended it to be.

The first “not good”

In Genesis 2, before sin enters the story, God responds to the only thing named “not good” in creation: “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Human beings are made for relationship — with God and one another. This is the Bible’s first picture of the Kingdom: a world flourishing under God’s loving reign, where authority is stewardship rather than domination, and men and women together reflect God’s image and share His rule.

REFLECT

Where do I see empire shaping the way I think... and how is God’s Kingdom inviting me to see differently?

5. Kingdom Practice — Between Sessions

Keep a simple Kingdom Journal. At the end of each day, spend a few minutes with these three questions. Don’t write pages — just notice, pray, and listen.

- Where did I notice empire today?
- Where did I glimpse God’s Kingdom?
- What is the Holy Spirit inviting me to notice, resist or practise?

Journal space

6. Personal Notes

Use this space for anything else you want to capture from tonight — a phrase that struck you, a question you want to sit with, or something you sensed the Holy Spirit saying.
