

# THE UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM

## Discussion Questions

### CHAPTER 1

#### The Poverty That Makes One Rich

1. The blessings of the kingdom, Chris says, “confront our idols—the gods of comfort, success, and national pride—and promise something far greater.” What are the prominent idols that are currently commanding your allegiance? How might a renewed focus on the riches of Christ’s kingdom help you to reject these idols?
2. “In God’s kingdom,” Chris says, “the valley is the turning point.” How does the valley reveal your poverty, and how does that realization lead you to rely more fully upon God’s enabling power?
3. Christ “fully embraced our impoverishment,” Chris says, even undergoing the ultimate in human poverty—death. Why does a focus on Christ’s death on the cross provide hope and comfort in our darkest days?
4. Spiritual transformation of the broken sinner happens in three areas of life—before God, in our communities, and in the church. Which of these especially resonates with you right now?
5. Why is hope, as Chris says, “a form of poverty”? What is “the only true basis of our hope”?
6. Why might well-intended modern marketing methods sometimes actually undermine a church’s efforts to reach her neighbors? How does Jesus’s call to spiritual poverty provide an answer?

## CHAPTER 2

### When Loss Becomes Gain

1. What are the three dimensions of suffering in this world? Which one(s) do you feel most acutely?
2. When forced to swallow “the cocktail called misery,” do you do so with bitterness, detachment, or faith? Can you cite an example?
3. Against the witness of church history, many Christians today seek to flee heartache and misery. Why is lament an integral part of understanding and worshiping God? How might we begin to reintroduce lament into our churches?
4. Why does reflecting on the brevity of life open a door to deeper spiritual clarity and inspiration? Do you have a *memento mori* in your own life?
5. Describe a time when you tasted death in an experience of fear, intimidation, or angst. What sustained you?
6. Chris asserts that we don’t suffer alone. While friends may fail and comforts flee, Christ abides with us, even to the end of the age. How does the promise of Christ’s presence provide ultimate comfort?

## CHAPTER 3

### Gentleness in a Hostile World

1. Chris writes, “While the world has witnessed inspiring movements of mercy in church history, too often the body of Christ has displayed the resentment of Cain, defacing and destroying brothers and neighbors for all kinds of reasons.” What examples might you identify?
2. How is meekness defined biblically, and how does Christ’s life so vividly illustrate it? Why is meekness not to be confused with weakness?
3. Resisting the extremes of passivity and pugnaciousness, Chris says we need Christ’s model of strength and gentleness. Have you encountered an example of someone who embodies this balance? If so, what did it look like?
4. Why do you think so many men in the church are passive and uncertain about their call to leadership? How should we address this challenge?
5. When we become angry, do we respond like Nietzsche’s Übermensch (superman), or like Jesus, the suffering servant who laid down his life for others? Why is Jesus’s model more powerful?
6. While there are many threats to meekness, Chris identifies resentment (*ressentiment*) as the root issue. How does the false or exaggerated narrative of injury that follows from resentment naturally prevent us from responding in meekness? What alternative is available in Christ?

## CHAPTER 4

### Taste and See

1. Chris speaks of “the kind of hunger that compels us to make sacrifices and to achieve, a hunger that occupies our thoughts, shapes our vision, and gives rise to our ambitions.” Describe in a sentence or two your experience with this kind of hunger. How has this hunger shaped your identity, for good or ill? How can we increase our hunger for kingdom priorities, a longing for the good, the true, and the beautiful?
2. Righteousness begins with God, not our own efforts. “We must work very hard to resist the natural urge to find something within ourselves that deserves God’s favor,” Chris says. “From beginning to end we are saved by divine initiative.” Why is it necessary for God to initiate salvation, and how have you experienced God’s grace in your own life?
3. Describe how righteousness extends *to* us in justification, *in* us through sanctification, and *through* us into the world.
4. How does the righteousness given freely by God deliver us, as Chris says, from “the power and pollution of sin by instilling a hunger for God”?
5. What does it look like to hunger and thirst for righteousness in this moment of history?
6. What are some obstacles to maintaining an appetite for righteousness, and what can you do about them?

## CHAPTER 5

### The Face of Mercy

1. After he was spared from execution and began reading the New Testament, a central question of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky was concerned with “how mercy restores human hearts—indeed, all of creation—to the righteous image of God.” How has mercy restored your heart?
2. How are anger and indignation the besetting sins of those who crave justice (e.g., Javert from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*)? What is the solution?
3. “Try as we might,” Chris says, “we can never secure God’s favor through our moral behavior.” Nevertheless, mercy is a vital element of spiritual life. What does it say about the state of one’s soul?
4. How does a recollection of life before Christ—when we perhaps lived in darkness without hope—engender a deeper appreciation for sharing God’s mercy with others?
5. How does forgiveness of those who have wronged us constitute an act of faith and hope?
6. If you were in the position of Margaret from the story at the conclusion of the chapter, how would you have responded to the confession of your spouse? Why was her response a beautiful example of mercy?

## CHAPTER 6

### Seeing God

1. How does the biblical conception of the human heart differ from the way the heart is understood in popular culture?
2. What does it look like to combat our sick, sinful, and inwardly turned hearts?
3. According to Augustine, what has the power to break the heart's deadly spell over us and begin the process of personal transformation?
4. Chris describes the time when his heart was made new "through the atoning death and triumphant resurrection of Christ." Have you experienced something similar in your life, or was it a more gradual process? If Christ has renewed your heart (slowly or suddenly), describe what happened and how you have been changed.
5. If seeing God is "the greatest possible joy," how does this truth impact your life now and help you to think about the life to come? What are you doing to live in this blessed reality right now? What changes do you need to make?
6. Since God meets us, as Chris says, in "the valley of humiliation," how can we change our outlook on pain and suffering so that we see the valley not as an interruption but as a divine gift?

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Peace Be with You**

1. What keeps us from peacemaking, both in our own hearts and in today's world?
2. Chris writes, "When we search for the kindling wood of Satan's fire, we usually find it in the subterranean levels of our heart, particularly in smoldering fears and apprehensions that question the Father's goodness." What does this look like in your experience?
3. How does anxiety destabilize peacemaking?
4. What is the "Upsilon Vector," and what role does it play in your life?
5. To extend peacemaking to others, Chris commends the tradition of applying the previously stated virtues in the Beatitudes—poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, etc. What beatitude do you sense the Lord is calling you to share with a world longing for true peace? How might you apply it to the hyper-partisanship that has gripped much of the church in recent years?
6. How is peacemaking integral to our identity as sons and daughters of God?

## CHAPTER 8

### Even So, Rejoice

1. In discussing Christ's promise of persecution, Chris notes that the final two beatitudes "describe . . . what happens when we manifest the purposes of Jesus on earth as they are in heaven." This seems to be the very opposite of "the good life" to which most of us aspire. Why is persecution promised for those who follow the Lord? What else is promised?
2. What is the relationship between persecution and gospel flourishing? How does your suffering allow others to enter God's counter-intuitive kingdom?
3. What two reasons are given in these two final beatitudes for when persecution is considered blessed? Can you point to any times in your life when you were blessed in this way?
4. What is the difference between how Christ's kingdom advances and how worldly power structures advance? How willing are you to embrace the former and to reject the latter?
5. Why should Christians be able to experience joy amid persecution? How have you seen this counterintuitive joy in your life?
6. Why is suffering, as Chris says, "a badge of true discipleship"? Are you looking forward to the reward? How can we prepare ourselves now for the reality of suffering for Christ?