

Eternity Here and Now

The Big Questions:

- How has God's kingdom already come on earth?
- How does God's kingdom still need to come on earth?

Break the Ice:

- **When I Get to Heaven**

- Give each participant an index card and a writing instrument.
- Say: *Write your first and last names on this card and then*

number from one to three to answer the following prompts. Don't let anyone see what you write:

1. *Besides Jesus, who is a Bible character with whom you would like to speak when you get to heaven? Why?*
2. *Who do you know who is already in heaven and you would like to see? (Besides Bible characters)*
3. *Which of the following features in heaven would you like to see first?*
 - *The host of angels;*
 - *The River of Life flowing from the throne;*
 - *The precious stones—jasper, crystal;*
 - *The tree with twelve crops of fruit and leaves that heal the nations.*

- Divide participants into groups of six to eight and designate a leader for each group.
- Ask leaders to collect cards, shuffle them, and then read cards aloud so group members can guess who wrote each card. (Each correct guess earns one point.)

Look at the Book:

- Distribute handout: **Look at the Book** (attached).
- Say:
 - *Already, but not yet—this is a strange concept to understand. It's a little bit like an engagement and a marriage. In the engagement, two people are **already** committed to marriage, but **not yet** fully together. It's a little bit like a pregnancy and a birth. In a pregnancy, the baby is **already** here—*

- **Supplies**
 - **Decorative large, wide-mouth vase per group of 10 - 12**
 - **Bowl of water per group of 10-12**
 - **Several white cloths per group of 10-12**
 - **2 index cards per participant**
 - **Writing instrument per person**
 - **Instrumental music to play**
- **Copies:**
 - **Look at the Book**

*alive and right here with us—but **not yet** fully seen. Over and over while Jesus was on earth he said, “The kingdom of God is at hand,” but, obviously, many things were still wrong on the earth.*

- *Let’s read more about this kingdom that is already, but not yet.*
- *Say: I will read the regular print, and you read the bolded print.*
- Invite participants to work in small groups or partners on the Probing exercises.

Interact and Pray:

- Say:
 - *Until the kingdom comes in fullness, people will have trouble. I wonder—how many people all over the world are crying—right at this instant? I also wonder—how many times have you already cried throughout your life?*
 - *Did you know that God collects tears? David prayed in Psalm 56, “**You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.**”*
 - *Since the ancient times of David, people have memorialized grief by preserving tears in glass or terracotta bottles called lachrymatories.*
 - *During funerals, ancient Romans wiped the tears of a mourning friend with a cloth and then squeezed the tears into a lachrymatory or tear bottle. The tear bottle was preserved as a memorial. A filled bottle signified the high value of a person.*
 - *The use of tear bottles continued. During the Victorian period, mourners collected tears with stoppers that allowed the tears to evaporate. When the tears had evaporated, the mourning period ended. Some wives of American Civil War soldiers preserved their tears in bottles to show their returning husbands how much they were missed. Today some people give tear bottles created by glass artists to people in grief. Many tear bottles are shaped like a tear drop and topped with a decorative cap.*
 - *Remember the prayer in the lesson scripture?—**Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***
 - *When you pray for people who cry, you help people to feel God’s kingdom on earth.*
- Arrange participants in circles of not more than ten or twelve.
- In the center of each circle place a wide mouth vase, a bowl of water, and a few white cloths.
- Give each participant an index card and a writing instrument.
- While music plays, have participants think about places and people in which evidence of God’s kingdom is missing.
 - What injustice is making God sad?
 - Who is sad or in sin?
 - What is a conflict that keeps peace away?

- Who is having a spiritual struggle?
- Ask participants to write one of their concerns on their cards.
- When the time seems right, read the following prayer:

We will now bring our woes to you. Thank you that you are strong enough, caring enough, and wise enough to receive our woes. As we bring these to you, help us to release our woes to you. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth.

- Invite participants one at a time to recognize one of their sorrows by dipping a cloth in the water, and then squeezing the water into the vase. Welcome participants to do this silently or to share with the group the reason for their sorrow.
- When the time seems right, read the following prayer.

God, we have brought these sorrows to you. Thank you that you value us enough to collect our tears and to record them in your book.
- Invite participants to repeat these phrases after you:
 - *Your kingdom come. (Your kingdom come.)*
 - *Your will be done. (Your will be done.)*
 - *On earth (on earth)*
 - *As it is in heaven. (As it is in heaven.)*