

## Session 4: The Counter-Cultural King

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** Jesus disrupted the earthly culture focused on power, self, and excluding outsiders, and now calls us to embrace his new kingdom centered on service, love, and acceptance.

**Head Change:** To know that God's grace is more important than any earthly power, status, or possession, and to remember that Jesus is with us through every occasion.

**Heart Change:** To feel joy because God loves us and invites us into his family.

**Life Change:** To interact with the world in a Jesus-like, counter-cultural way: with kindness, respect, dignity, and sacrificial love.

### OPEN

**When have you participated in or been the recipient of a random act of kindness?**

Kindness is out of the ordinary. When we see it, we react in delight, surprise, or wonder. When we behave like Jesus, we stand out among a me-first crowd. Why? Because Jesus is always looking out for others first. With his grace and forgiveness, he turned the world upside-down, and now it's our turn to keep surprising people with selfless love. In this session, we discover Jesus as the counter-cultural king.

## **VIEW**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Derwin Gray's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Derwin answers the following questions.

**What was counter-cultural about Jesus's visit with the Samaritan woman?**

**What's the only way we can be accepted into God's kingdom?**

**What does it mean to love ourselves correctly?**

Watch Session 4: The Counter-Cultural King (15 minutes).

## REVIEW

“Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright.” The familiar Christmas carol paints a deceptive picture of how the birth of Jesus happened. The first Christmas was far from peaceful. It began with a stressful search for a place where Mary could give birth. A week later, she heard disturbing prophecies about her newborn baby from Simeon in the temple. Months later, her little family had to flee to Egypt to save her baby’s life. The Christ child did not enjoy a peaceful early life. But he did not come to live a peaceful life—he came to disrupt the status quo, shake things up, and introduce his kingdom.

Derwin said, “Christmas was a holy disruption.” **What sorts of behaviors or events would you like to see disrupted or shaken up so that God’s way might have more room to flourish? What part can you play in disrupting the bad to make way for the good?**

Jesus ate with rejects and sinners and conversed with a woman from the “wrong side of the tracks.” Just eating and talking with certain people sidelined by their ethnicity, history, or employment was enough to get him blackballed by the religious leaders. **Why would Jesus’s acceptance of the marginalized threaten the ruling class?**

**How can you mimic Jesus’s counter-cultural behavior in your own life?**

Derwin said the kingdom of God knocks down barriers of racism, sexism, and other divisive, tribal tendencies. **Who might be considered outsiders today in your world? In your church or faith tradition? What makes them objectionable? How do you think Jesus sees them?**

We live in an imperfect world, full of moments of pain and regret but also sweet moments of grace. **What glimpses of God’s kingdom do you see in your life? Where is it evident that we are not experiencing the kingdom fully?**

God’s not looking for perfect people to invite into his kingdom. We do have examples—like the apostles, Paul, Mary Magdalene, Jesus’s mother—of those who have gone before and lived like Jesus. They weren’t perfect, which is comforting. God gives us grace to help us imitate

him. **How you have experienced God's grace to empower your own daily life?**

Derwin said Christmas is bigger than our cultural tradition because it is connected to our redemption. We celebrate the coming of our savior. **In what ways does your Christmas celebration include thoughts of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross? How does thinking of his greater purpose make Christmas more meaningful?**

Derwin said that peace is not found in calm circumstances but through seeking God. **How does Derwin's definition change the way you think about peace? In what ways have you experienced peace the way Derwin defines it?**

Christians are representatives of God's kingdom. We are called to love others, including our enemies—a very counter-cultural way to behave. **How can you communicate God's love to your family, neighbors, and opponents?**

## BIBLE EXPLORATION

The counter-cultural king died and rose and went back to his throne in heaven. But he sent his Spirit to empower and equip his people with the truth and with the power to love well. We can imitate Jesus and become counter-cultural in our spheres of influence, often through our response to hardship.

Derwin mentioned that Jesus's love brings peace even in difficult circumstances, contentment regardless of comfort, and joy in our eternal hope. Turn to Philippians 3, where we will explore Paul's encouragement to a generous church.

Read Philippians 3:20–4:1.

Paul describes the Philippian believers as citizens of heaven who eagerly awaited their savior who would, by his power, transform their humble bodies into glorious ones. He then encouraged them to stand firm in the Lord because of what they knew was coming for them. **When you feel hope, how does it influence your thoughts? How does the anticipation of something good help you through a difficult season?**

Read Philippians 4:2–3. Paul described Euodia and Syntyche as women who “contended for the gospel” at his side like his other coworkers. He used the same word, coworkers, to describe his colleagues Prisca and Aquila (Romans 16:3), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Timothy (1 Thessalonians 3:2), Philemon (Philemon 1), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25).

Euodia and Syntyche were not having a catfight, but they did have a significant disagreement. They were both respected leaders whose argument was so well known that Paul heard about it in prison. **What do you think people outside of the church think of our internal arguments? What message does division within the church send to non-Christians?**

**How might a unified church be a counter-cultural force in your community?**

Read Philippians 4:4–9. Note the seven commands that Paul gives to the church. **Which of these commands is**

**most meaningful to you right now? How does obeying them require you to live counter-culturally?**

Paul encourages the Philippians to correct poor behavior by changing their thinking: if worried, pray with gratitude. Worry focuses on what is wrong, what seems impossible, or what is feared. But prayer puts the burden back on the shoulders of the one who has the power to do something about the problem. **Why do you sometimes struggle to talk to God about your worries? In what ways is praying a counter-cultural response?**

Review verse 8. **How well do the descriptors Paul lists in verse 8 describe our world today? What could it look like to focus on counter-cultural truths instead of the values of our culture?**

Read Philippians 4:10–14. Paul thanks the church in Philippi for sending resources, likely money and goods, to help him. Did you know that Paul was in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians? **How does knowing that Paul was in prison influence the way you understand his words in verse 11, “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself”? How do you think you would feel if you were wrongfully imprisoned?**

Read verses 12 and 13 together. Verse 13 may be one of the most well-known verses today. Yet it is often applied wrongly to trivial matters. Paul is celebrating his Spirit-empowered ability to deal with whatever circumstances he experiences, good or bad. **How do Paul’s contentment and faith inspire you? What could it look like to imitate his response when you face a difficult situation?**

Believers in Philippi, even with internal strife among their leaders, generously sent gifts to help Paul in his time of need. Generosity in the face of hardship mimics our loving savior who came to serve us. **In what ways can you, and your group, show generosity?**

Skim back over Philippians 3:20–4:14. **In what ways does this passage remind you of Jesus and his life? What could it look like to apply one of the truths from this passage to your life this week?**

## LAST WORD

Part of our mission as Christians is to make earth look as much like heaven as possible. God wants us, citizens of heaven, to turn our earthly cultures upside down. How? Through the power of love. Love offers grace and forgiveness, and love seeks justice. Love brings different people together, breaking down walls that divide us.

Love also results in joy, hope, and contentment—none of which depend on current circumstances. So even when the world is tough, we can be sure that God’s way is still the best way and continue to live with gratitude.

## DEEPER WALK

**Read:** Read Philippians 4:1–14. Notice the relationships mentioned throughout the passage. Take note of the seven commands from Paul in verses 4–9.

**Write:** Review Philippians 4:8 and write out tangible truths in your life that match each of those descriptors. Spend time rejoicing over the blessings in your life.

**Pray:** Spend time thanking God for all that he has provided for you.

**Memorize:** Memorize Philippians 4:8. “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things.”