1
DOWN IS UP

Flat Mountains

The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be brought low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways shall be made smooth;
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.
—Luke 3:4-6

John the Baptist shouted these words of Isaiah to announce the advent of Jesus. The dramatic pictures portray a revolutionary new kingdom. The Baptist describes four surprises of the coming kingdom: full valleys, flat mountains, straight curves, and level bumps. He expects radical shake-ups to accompany the kingdom. Old ways will alter beyond recognition. John warns us that the new order, the Upside-Down Kingdom, will revolutionize the prevailing social landscape. But in the painful ferment, all flesh will see the salvation of God.

Mary's Magnificat, her song of exaltation sung at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, clarifies her hope for the new kingdom. With John the Baptist, she expects the
Messiah’s arrival to initiate an upside-down kingdom filled with surprises for all.

For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm.
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degree;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.

—Luke 1:49-53, emphasis added

Five types of people are startled and surprised. In Mary’s vision, those at the top of the social pyramid—the proud, the rich, and the mighty—topple. They are stripped of their prestigious seats, dethroned, scattered, and sent away empty. Meanwhile the poor and hungry, those at the bottom of the social hill, take a surprising ride to the top. Mary sings words of hope and judgment. Hope for those of low estate, as she describes herself (Luke 1:48). Judgment for those at the top who trample the helpless.

A poor Galilean peasant girl, Mary expects the messianic kingdom to flip her social world upside down. The rich, mighty, and proud in Jerusalem will be sent away. Poor farmers and shepherds in rural Galilee will be exalted and honored. Mary’s longing and hope reflect the Jewish yearning for a messiah who will usher in an upside-down kingdom.

An Inverted Kingdom

The central theme in the ministry and teaching of Jesus is the kingdom of God, or as Matthew calls it, the kingdom of heaven. This key idea ties his entire message together. The “kingdom of God” permeates all of Jesus’ ministry, giving it unusual coherence and clarity. It is the core, the very essence, of his ministry.

Debates on Jesus’ understanding of God’s kingdom have swirled down through the centuries. On the pages that follow we’ll examine this notion: the kingdom of God points to an inverted, or upside down, way of life that contrasts with the prevailing social order. We can capture the idea of inversion by thinking of two ladders side by side—one representing the kingdom of God, the other the kingdoms of this world. An inverted relationship between the two ladders means that something highly valued on one ladder ranks near the bottom of the other. An inverted relationship appears in the refrain of a Sunday school song. The rain and flood move in opposite directions:

The rains came down, and the flood came up,
The rains came down, and the flood came up.

The Gospels portray the kingdom of God as inverted or upside down in comparison with both ancient Palestinian and modern ways. The Gospels do not, however, see the kingdom as geographically or socially isolated from the rest of society. Jesus doesn’t plead for social avoidance or withdrawal. Nor does he assume that kingdom and world are divided neatly into separate realms. Kingdom action takes place in the middle of the societal ballpark. But it’s a different game. Kingdom players follow new rules. They listen to another coach. Kingdom values challenge patterns of social life taken for granted in modern culture. Kingdom habits don’t mesh smoothly with dominant cultural trends. They may, in fact, look foolish.

The kingdom of God isn’t only upside down. It’s also authoritative for our situation. Kingdom values address
current issues and dilemmas. Kingdom ethics, translated into our modern context, suggest how we "ought" to order our lives. We certainly won't find answers in the Scriptures for all our ethical questions. The Gospels don't offer a cookbook solution for every modern ethical dilemma. But they do raise the right questions. They nudge us toward the big issues that undergird the meaning and purpose of our living.

**A Relational Kingdom**

What exactly is the kingdom of God? The term defies exact definition. It's pregnant with many meanings. This is its genius, this power to stimulate our imagination again and again.

Most biblical scholars do agree that the "kingdom of God" means the *dynamic rule or reign* of God. The reign of God represents God's government, authority, and ruling power. It isn't a territory in a spatial sense. The kingdom doesn't stand on a particular piece of ground. Nor is it static. It's dynamic—always becoming, spreading, growing. The kingdom points us not to the place of God, but to God's ruling activities. The kingdom is present whenever and wherever women and men submit their lives to God's authority.

Does the kingdom occur when God rules in the hearts of people? This notion suggests that the kingdom is primarily an internal, inward experience of the mind. But the very term kingdom implies a collective order above and beyond the experience of any one person. A kingdom in a literal sense means that a king rules over a group of people. Social standards and group policies order the collective life of a kingdom. Agreements spell out citizens' obligations to each other as well as to their king. The king's ruling activity makes practical differences in the lives and relationships of his subjects. In the words of one scholar, "The kingdom is something people enter, not something that enters them. It is a state of affairs, not a state of mind."

Kingdom living is fundamentally social. It involves membership, citizenship, loyalties, and one's identity. Citizenship in a kingdom entails relationships, policies, obligations, boundaries, and expectations. These dimensions of kingdom life supersede the whims of individual experience. Membership in a kingdom spells out a citizen's relationship to the king, to other citizens, and to other kingdoms. Living in a kingdom means sharing in its history and helping to shape its future.

Although a kingdom is a social order, above and beyond any puny person, individuals do make choices about kingdoms. We embrace or reject them. We serve or mock them. We enter kingdoms and leave them. We pledge our allegiance to them and turn our backs on them.

The sociological distinction between an aggregate and a collectivity clarifies the kingdom idea. An aggregate isn't a group. It's merely a collection of persons who happen to be together in time and space. They don't influence one another. A cluster of persons waiting for the "Walk" light at an intersection is an aggregate. Though they stand side by side, they usually don't interact with each other.

In contrast, the executive committee of a parent-teachers' association is a collectivity—a group whose members are interdependent. They influence each other, formulate common goals, and together decide how to reach them. A kingdom's subjects have a collective interdependence based on the policies of their king.

The kingdom of God is a collectivity—a network of persons who have yielded their hearts and relationships to the reign of God. The kingdom is actualized when God rules in hearts and social relationships. The kingdom isn't merely a series of independent spiritual fax lines linking the King to each subject. The reign of God infuses the web of relationships, binding King and citizens together.
How do we discover what God's reign looks like? What is the shape of the royal policies? Can we translate the lofty idea of God's reign into practical terms? The answer lies in the incarnation. Jesus of Nazareth unveiled God. We begin to grasp the meaning of the kingdom through Jesus' life and teachings. The life of Jesus was God's final and definitive Word. Through Jesus' person and ministry, God's voice clearly spoke, in a universal language understood by all.

The kingdom of God is the common thread woven throughout the fabric of Jesus' teaching and ministry. Jesus frequently introduced parables as examples of the kingdom. The Sermons on the Mount and Plain describe kingdom life. The Lord's Prayer welcomes the advent of the kingdom. The vocabulary of the kingdom is continually on Jesus' lips.

In addition to his words, Jesus' activity and behavior teach us about the kingdom. Jesus of Nazareth provides the most concrete example—the most visible expression of God's rule. His words and behavior offer the best clues to solving the riddle of the kingdom? But in the final analysis, it isn't his kingdom, nor is it ours. Always and foremost Jesus points us to God's kingdom.

Why Upside Down?

If Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God, perhaps we should call it the right-side-up kingdom. Indeed, if we agree that the kingdom portrays God's blueprint for our lives, then surely we ought to tag it the right-side-up kingdom. But let me retain the inverted, upside-down image to focus several issues.

(1) Social life has vertical dimensions. Society has a rugged topography. In social geography there are mountains, valleys, ruts, and plains. Some people stand on high social peaks while others mourn in the valleys. The social clout individuals and groups wield varies greatly. The chairperson of a committee musters more power than the average committee member. Lawyers swing more prestige and influence than grocery store clerks. We don't play the "game" of social interaction on a level playing field. The "upside-down" image reminds us of this vertical dimension of social life.

(2) We forget to ask why things are the way they are. The "upside-down" label encourages us to question the way things are. Children quickly learn common cultural values and take them for granted. Cereal becomes the "right" breakfast food. Socialization—learning the ways of our culture—shapes the assumptions by which we live. We take our way of life for granted. We assume the way things are is the way they ought to be. Eating cereal for breakfast, day after day, makes it seem unquestionably right. We internalize the values and norms paraded on screen and billboard as simply "the way life is." If our economic system sets a minimum wage, we accept it as fair and just without a second thought. If someone trespasses on our property, we happily prosecute. After all, "that's what the law provides for." We demand an 8 percent commission on a sales transaction because "that's just the way it is."

The values, beliefs, and norms of our society become so deeply ingrained in our mind that we no longer see the alternatives. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus presents the kingdom as a new order breaking in on old ways, old values, old assumptions. If it does anything, the kingdom of God shatters the assumptions which govern our lives. As kingdom citizens we can't assume that things are right just because "that's the way they are." The upside-down perspective focuses the points of divergence and conflict between God's kingdom and the kingdoms of the world.

(3) The kingdom is full of surprises. Again and again in parable, sermon, and act Jesus startles us. Things in the Gospels are often literally upside down. Good Guys turn
out to be Bad Guys. Those we expect to receive the reward get a spanking instead. Those who think they are headed for heaven land in hell. Things are reversed. Paradox, irony, and surprise permeate the teachings of Jesus. They flip our expectations upside down. The least are the greatest. The immoral receive forgiveness and blessing. Adults become like children. The religious miss the heavenly banquet. The pious receive curses. Things aren’t like we think they should be. We’re baffled and perplexed. Amazed, we step back. Should we laugh or should we cry? Again and again, turning our world upside down, the kingdom surprises us.

Stretching a footbridge across the gulf between the pressing questions of today and the biblical record is precarious. Centuries of water swirl between the cliffs jutting from each shoreline. Detour signs hinder easy passage. Before trekking over the bridge to yesterday, we must stop and ponder four detour signs. We often use these cautions to evade the kingdom message and bypass its relevance for today.

**Detour One: Jesus Is Culturally Bound**

The first sign warns us that trying to bridge the gap between the first and twenty-first centuries is foolish. The cultural landscapes are simply too different. Jesus lived in a small rural village aloof from industrialization, urbanization, technology, nuclear holocaust, and global corporations. According to this detour sign, kingdom ethics might work in small villages where Simon knows Martha. In a simple folk society one can talk of loving enemies and forgiving neighbors. The kingdom blueprint makes sense for gentle shepherds and naive peasants. But not for us. Jesus’ teaching is trapped in a rural culture. We can’t transport it across the footbridge to our modern life in a complicated global system.

According to this caution, we can study the Scripture to learn about biblical ethics. We can describe the “oughts” for living in New Testament times. But we shouldn’t try to drag them across the bridge as “oughts” for today. This detour sign tells us to construct our own Christian ethics from scratch. It tells us to ground them in common sense for the ancient biblical foundation is irrelevant.

It is irresponsible to jump blindly from isolated Scripture texts to the modern era. But if we identify the meaning of a biblical text within its own cultural setting, we can then transport that meaning across the bridge to the modern world. Certainly we must understand the values, norms, and intergroup relations of the ancient setting to grasp the full meaning of a text. We must recognize that Galilean peasant society was strikingly different from modern society.

Nevertheless, similar human habits persist on both sides of the historical chasm: nationalism, racism, economic oppression, greed, violence, abuse of power and arrogant individualism. In short, evil lurks within the social structures of both yesterday and today. As we unravel the meanings of the Gospel stories within their cultural setting, we find that they do indeed address the burning issues of our time as well.

The Gospels’ ancient setting is no handicap when we take time to interpret them in cultural context. Precisely then, in fact, is when the biblical stories become relevant. Contrary to typical thinking, Jesus’ relevance would decrease if his life and ministry had floated above culture. His grounding in a particular culture increases his relevance for today. The cultural rootage of Jesus clarifies rather than hides the message of the kingdom.

**Detour Two: Jesus Goofed on the Timing**

The second detour warns us Jesus himself was mistaken about the timing of the kingdom’s arrival. According
to this argument, he goofed in thinking that the kingdom would arrive during his lifetime. Thus we can't take it seriously today, and it certainly can't tell us how we ought to live.

The issue of the kingdom's timing is one of the stickiest problems in synoptic studies. It has provoked heated scholarly debates. When will the kingdom arrive? Has it already come, or do we still wait? Is the pie in the sky or already made?

Many scholars think Jesus expected the final consummation of the kingdom during his own lifetime. In Matthew 10:23, for instance, Jesus tells those he is sending out, "truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes." In Luke 9:27, after discussing the disciple's cross, Jesus says, "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God." These and other passages suggest that Jesus himself expected the kingdom to come soon.

Thus the radical character of Jesus' life makes sense. Expecting the world to end in a few years, he offered his ethical teachings as temporary guidelines. They were applicable only to the short interim between his life and the imminent arrival of the kingdom. If you expect the world to end and the kingdom to burst in at any moment, it makes sense to love your enemies and give away your cloak. According to this liberal school of interpreters, Jesus designed his teachings for this short "interim" only. They certainly aren't reasonable for long-term and enduring social relationships.

In contrast, other theologians argue that Jesus thought the kingdom was present in his own ministry. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9) and "The kingdom of God has come upon you." (Luke 11:20). Jesus must have understood that the kingdom was already present in his ministry. This line of scholarly interpretation stresses the presence of the kingdom in the incarnation and in the later growth of the church. However, it downplays a future consummation.

A third position, the dispensational view, relegates the kingdom to a future and literal reign of Christ on earth. In this perspective, Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom at the first appearance of Christ. This forced God to delay the kingdom's actualization until the return of Christ. The futurist bent of this conservative view dilutes serious interest in applying the teachings of Jesus to our lives today. Interestingly, both liberals and conservatives reach the same conclusion: kingdom ethics taught by Jesus are meaningless today.

Other scholars stake out a fourth position. They argue that the kingdom of God in Jesus' teachings integrates both present and future. One scholar notes, "There is a growing consensus in New Testament scholarship that the kingdom of God is in some sense both present and future." There are at least four meanings of the kingdom in the Gospels. (1) An abstract meaning of the reign or rule of God. (2) A future apocalyptic order into which the righteous will enter. (3) The presence of the kingdom already on earth. (4) A realm which persons are entering now.

It's helpful to think of the kingdom of God as a general symbol rather than a specific one. Symbols point us to something beyond themselves. The written word "dog" is a symbol. As we read the word "dog" it reminds us of a certain kind of animal. A specific symbol is one with only one referent—it reminds us of only one thing. A black, female cocker spaniel puppy points us to a specific kind of dog.

In contrast, general symbols have multiple meanings and many referents. The word "animal," for example, suggests many kinds of creatures.

If we think of the kingdom of God as a specific symbol,
this limits us to one meaning. If the kingdom is merely a single event, we’re forced to ask whether or not the event has occurred—yes or no. A single concrete historical act can exhaust such a specific symbol.

Viewing the kingdom as a general symbol offers us many referents with multiple meanings. A general symbol is elastic. It stretches forward and backward, wide and far, to cover many meanings. Thus instead of asking questions about time, we ask what the kingdom evokes or represents. For what does it stand? Toward what does it point us? Furthermore, a general symbol isn’t invalidated simply because a specific event doesn’t occur. The kingdom is more than an ancient or a future event. To see the kingdom as a general symbol enables us to appreciate the many ways God is king of our lives.

This study embraces the kingdom’s diverse meanings. The Old Testament’s hope for it. Its inauguration in the ministry of Jesus. Its power at Pentecost. Its durability in the lives of believers throughout the centuries. And its final future consummation.

Kingdom signs burst forth whenever persons submit their wills and relationships to the way of God. To quote the title of a book, the kingdom is The Presence of the Future among us already.16 The kingdom of God is present today as the Spirit of God rules in the lives of believers. The members of the kingdom even now are those who obey the Lord of the kingdom. Those who follow in the way of Jesus are already part of the kingdom movement. No, Jesus didn’t goof on the timing. He was simply talking about a kingdom that transcends our human understanding of time.

**Detour Three: Ponder the Spiritual Meaning**

A third detour prevents many of us from lugging practical ethical instruction across the bridge from ancient Palestine. This detour encourages us to soften Jesus’ hard social teaching by spiritualizing it. Certain words in our language take on sacred meanings. We sort words into holy and profane boxes. We contrast hot and cold, big and small, in and out. In religious circles the term “spiritual” tops the sacred ladder. By contrast, the word “social” often hangs on the bottom rung.

Spiritual realities, the logic goes, come from God. They are holy. Human effort, on the other hand, drives social affairs. Being far from God’s heart, social realities are suspect. Spiritual is better than social. We hope a certain church activity doesn’t become “just a social event”—implying it would have no spiritual meaning. This unfortunate split between spiritual and social often detours us around kingdom ethics.

Spiritual realities involve great metaphysical truths. They include our beliefs about God, salvation, and the mysterious working of God’s Spirit in our lives. Social realities, on the other hand, point us to earthly, mundane concerns—housing, fellowship, salary, recreation, and our social needs for approval, love, creativity, and satisfying relationships.

This false split between spiritual and social leads to a warped reading of the Scripture. It tempts us to turn Jesus’ hard sayings into sweet, spiritualized syrup. This dilutes his teaching, making it harmless. We marvel at the atoning death of Jesus but forget he also demonstrated a new way of living.

Any gospel which isn’t social isn’t gospel. God’s love for the world produced social action. God didn’t just sit in a great theological rocking chair and muse about loving the world. God acted. God entered social affairs—in human form. Through Jesus, God lived and interacted in a real social environment. Jesus, in essence, disclosed God’s social habits. In the incarnation, the spiritual became social.

To put it another way, this definitive social event was a
spiritual word. It communicated God's spiritual mysteries to us in a practical social form. Word and deed blended into a single reality in the incarnation. In these last days God has spoken to us not through Greek or English but through a Son—a social event (Hebrews 1:2). The genius of the incarnation is that spiritual and social worlds intersect in Jesus Christ. To separate them is to deny the incarnation. Social and spiritual are inextricably woven together in the Gospels' account of Jesus' life.

One scholar argues that repentance "is a purely religious ethical act... an act involving only on oneself and God and neutral regarding other human beings and the world." This view mistakenly assumes repentance is a personal spiritual experience with no social implications. Moreover, why is Jesus relevant for repentance if not for ethics? Such a cleavage misrepresents the gospel. We don't have two gospels. We don't have a spiritual and a social gospel, a salvation and a hunger gospel. We have a single, integrated gospel of the kingdom. This gospel fuses social and spiritual realities into one.

Jesus binds the spiritual and social into an inseparable whole. On the one hand he says true faith is anchored in the heart—not in tithing, sacrifice, cleansing, and other external rituals. In this sense he spiritualizes religious faith.

On the other hand, Jesus argues that faith in God is always expressed in tangible social acts of love for the neighbor. He was, in short, smashing our categories of social and spiritual. In Jesus' view they're inseparable—a seamless fabric.

A pastor once spiritualized the story of Zacchaeus. After telling the story he reminded the congregation that Jesus can help us out of our spiritual trees. If we are spiritually "treed" we can by Jesus be freed. The sermon overlooked the profound economic dimensions of the story. It trivialized the social impact of the encounter with trite spiritual applications. A realistic reading of the text discovers a greedy tax collector who meets Jesus, repents, and immediately corrects his economic wrongs. Spiritual repentance and social retribution form one story, a story Jesus describes as a "visit by salvation."

To ferret out the social implications of the gospel isn't to deprecate or neglect spiritual insights. It's rather to assert that spiritual insights always have social ramifications. The integration of social and spiritual into a whole isn't a humanistic way of doing theology from below. It affirms an incarnation that moved beyond the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple to the social realities of Palestine society.

When we spiritualize biblical texts we extract them from practical human experience. We dilute their social meaning. When, on the other hand, we explore the social context of a biblical text, its cargo of meaning becomes pertinent to our situation today.

**Detour Four: Only Change Your Character**

The next barricade tells us that the kingdom only makes a difference in our personal character. In other words, the teachings of Jesus help build private character and personal—but not social—ethics. One scholar concludes that Jesus primarily desires righteous character. Conduct, he notes, should be a manifestation of such righteous character. But "it is of course true that there is little explicit teaching on social ethics in the Gospels."

The distinction between personal and social ethics is tidy. But it's also problematic. It suggests that personal decisions and actions do not have social consequences. And it assumes that individuals operate in a social vacuum, detached from social forces.

Jesus, according to this view, was concerned with the private matters of the inner life. He cared primarily about character, attitudes, motives, emotions, personality traits.
Hence the ethics of Jesus apply only to inner feelings which have little impact on others. What Jesus touches is our emotional outlook—our sense of hope and inner peace.

The problem with a personal/social split is that virtually all behavior is social. Are any actions purely "personal"? Perhaps scratching one's leg would pass the test. But even this creates problems. The proper way to scratch a leg is learned in a social context. Cultural norms determine the time and method of scratching. Woe to national leaders who scratch their legs during press conferences!

Even ideas, values, and character traits have a social origin. They don't just fall from the sky. They're learned in a social context: discussions with friends, reading a book, listening to tapes, observing parents for fifteen years. This doesn't mean the individual contributes no originality or creativity. Nor does it mean individuals are culturally programmed robots. Our minds are the crucible in which a variety of influences are processed and mixed together. Each person blends these social influences in his or her own beautiful and unique way.

Not only do inner feelings and motives have social roots, they have social ramifications. Feelings of despair affect how we interact with others. The attitudes Jesus pinpointed were social attitudes—feelings directed toward other persons. Hating someone in your heart is equivalent to murder; sexual lust is tantamount to adultery.

Inner feelings and emotions aren't sealed off from others. They emerge out of social experiences and direct themselves toward others. It's difficult to think of any so-called character traits outside of a social context. Someone stranded on a desert island might ponder the meaning of integrity, honesty, and meekness but would find it an empty and frustrating experience apart from other people. If Jesus had cared only about internal character, he could have spent all his time in the wilderness lectur-

ing the stones on the virtues of inner harmony.

The fact that ideas and feelings have social origins and consequences doesn't negate the role of the Holy Spirit. God created us as social beings and his Spirit uses others to minister to our needs and to stir our caring for the needs of others. Beliefs and thoughts may be social products with social implications, but that doesn't mean our inner life is meaningless—just the opposite. To see its linkage with others around us is to understand just how important it is. Thoughts do influence behavior. Jesus stressed the need for genuine internal righteousness in contrast to hypocritical ritual. He also knew the inner life yields social fruit.

Kingdom social ethics, taught and lived by Jesus, can be transported over the bridge linking the first and twenty-first century. This book resists the notion that Jesus should return to his own time since "He does not provide a valid ethic for today." By contrast, the following pages echo the concern of other scholars that Christian social ethics be tied to the kingdom of God. The Gospels don't offer a full-blown system of formal ethics to cover every conceivable situation. I don't espouse a sentimentalist mentality of simply "walking in his footsteps." But the Gospels do provide us with episodes, stories, and pictures rife with insights applicable to our modern situation. The pictures of the good and the right lodged in the kingdom stories aren't impossible possibilities or romanticized ideals. They intersect at ground level with the knotty problems of human existence today.

The kingdom vision outlined in the Gospels doesn't spell out a specific program for social ethics or political action. The New Testament vision does, however, clearly tell us what the kingdom is not. It also introduces us to basic principles of the right and the good that undergird the kingdom. The specific applications, of course, are the work of the church—over the centuries—as directed by the Holy Spirit.
The remarkable thing about our attempts to understand the kingdom is the way we dice it into categories. Our questions and categories fragment the kingdom into bits and pieces. Is it present or future? we ask. Personal or social? Abstract or concrete? Earthly or heavenly? Spiritual or political? Tied to the church or encompassing the world? A gift from God or enacted by us?

Our human propensity to pull the kingdom apart into logical, manageable categories shatters its integrity. The kingdom of God should instead shatter our puny human categories. It’s not an either/or, a yes/no. It’s all the above—both/and. It is indeed God’s kingdom, not ours!

We want to understand it, examine it, and analyze it. But God enjoins us to enter it. God calls us to turn our backs on the kingdoms of this world and embrace an upside-down home. Underlying all Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom is a call to respond. He invites us not to study but to join; not to dissect but to enter. How will we respond?

Questions for Discussion

1. What do John the Baptist’s and Mary’s prophecies regarding the kingdom tell us about the nature of the kingdom?

2. In addition to the ladder and the ball game, what other images might help us to visualize and symbolize the upside-down kingdom?

3. What difference does it make to view the kingdom of God as an aggregate or a collectivity?

4. Which detours provide the easiest by-passes for avoiding biblical teaching?

5. What other detour signs prevent us from applying biblical ethics today?

6. Provide other examples of “spiritualizing” that weaken the concrete social meaning of the gospel.