

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Theirs Is the Kingdom*

by

Robert D. Lupton

1. Robert Lupton strings together a series of anecdotes about poignant moments he has encountered while living in the inner city. Which story stands out in your memory? Why?
2. Lupton contrasts a life of order with the inevitable chaos that confronts the urban dweller. In what ways can one continue to uphold a sense of order while living in chaos? Is it even possible? Or should a person abandon the hope of order altogether?
3. On page 4, we read about the effects of the survival mentality on the human soul. How do these effects assault human dignity? Have you or others you know

ever experienced a situation like this? What was the effect?

4. People often equate having insurance and protecting one's property with being "good stewards," according to Lupton (p. 9). Do you agree or disagree that this is a misguided notion? Would you invite a homeless, unwashed person into your home? Why or why not?
5. On page 17, Lupton relates his alarm at discovering a man sleeping in his car during a cold night. How would you have reacted? What might be the best way to address this difficult moment?
6. Have you ever considered that Christmas boxes prepared for those in need only deliver another blow to their dignity (p. 22)? Is there an alternative way to show generosity? Does reading this book change how you will approach your Christmas generosity in the future? Why or why not?
7. Lupton talks about the effect of leaven on bread. He then cites his wife's work in the city school system and its transformative power (pp. 27–28). According to this model, what does it take to introduce leaven into an urban situation? Is there an example in your faith community where you have seen leaven at work effectively? Do you see an opportunity where leaven might be introduced? What would it look like?
8. What do you make of Lupton's conviction that driving a good-quality car, albeit received as a gift, reflects the "appearance of evil" (p. 36)?

9. Lupton advocates for a system of reciprocity when serving and otherwise giving to the poor. Why is this idea important? What might this look like in your faith community?
10. In a kingdom playground, “adults become children and learn to play again. They bring their best tools and talents . . . and dream together” (p. 88). Is this idea alive and well in your faith community? If not, what might be done to change that? If so, what does it look like in practical terms?
11. Lupton says that Jesus’s teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are suicidal for the successful. He defines the notions of success as including “diligence,” “upward mobility,” and “the competitive edge” (p. 104). Why would Jesus’s teachings overturn these notions? Do you agree with this assertion? How can successful people use their success in positive ways?
12. “The whole world is moving to the city,” Lupton concludes (p. 119). Do you agree? He adds that the “institutional church” seems “baffled” about how to address this. What do you think? Are there any models effectively addressing this? If not, how can your faith community be proactive and effective in addressing the urban challenge? Is this something *all* churches must undertake?
13. Lupton has painted a complicated and emotionally charged picture of life in the inner city—especially as experienced by an outsider. Has his story opened your

eyes to something you haven't seen before? Has it encouraged you? Or has it left you feeling unsure about your role in transforming urban settings? Can any of his principles be applied in suburban or rural settings? What are some practical steps you can apply to your life?