

NPWL 2011 - 2012 Bible Study

# *Unexpected BLESSINGS: The Beatitudes Expanded*

A study of The Beatitudes by Debbie Ingram Schmidt

## LEADER'S GUIDE

### GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADING SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES:

Preparing to lead the study:

- Begin your preparation time with prayer. Ask God to help you discern what he wants to teach your group through the lesson.

- Write your answers to each question in your book or on separate paper. For questions that ask for examples from contemporary life, write a few answers that you can use to “prime the pump.”

- Make a note of any questions that arise from your personal study. Try to track down answers ahead of time by talking to your pastor or checking other resources in your church library.

- Be sure you have a clear idea of the main point of the lesson so you can keep your group focused. Decide ahead of time what questions are crucial to the lesson and what questions you may be able to delete if you run out of time with your group.

- Try to look at the passages in more than one translation of the Bible.

- If your group is not accustomed to discussion style Bible study, you can use the questions as an outline for your lecture. If you would like to help your group learn to discuss the lesson together, present the biblical material in a lecture style and ask the group to contribute on the questions that call for personal application. Most people feel less threatened sharing about themselves or their own observations.

- If you would like someone else to pray at the beginning or end of the study, it is good to ask her ahead of time.

Leading the discussion:

As a leader, your primary task is to help engage everyone in the discussion and make sure anyone who wants to has an opportunity to share. As a result, it may be that you share less than you ordinarily would in a group.

Many groups find it helpful at their first meeting to agree that everything shared in the group will be confidential. In other words, no one in the group will share personal information about another group member without that person's permission. This creates an environment of trust in which people feel safe to share their feelings.

- Begin your lesson with a prayer. You might say something like this:

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word and the privilege we have to study it and learn about you. We pray that you would open our minds and our hearts to receive what you want to teach us today. Guide our discussion and help us to learn from one another. Help us not only to hear your Word but to obey it. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.*

- Each lesson begins with a question that serves as an icebreaker to help group members open up more quickly. Give time for a few people to share briefly in answer to this question, but don't let the discussion go on too long—the important part is the Bible lesson!

- Ask for volunteers to read the Bible passages. This gives other people a chance to participate. Assure readers that mispronouncing biblical names is a problem we all share.

- Don't be afraid of silence after you ask a question. People sometimes need time to collect their thoughts. If the silence seems too long, try rephrasing the question.

- Don't pressure people to answer but call on someone by name if they seem to be waiting for permission.

- Try not to let one person dominate the discussion. You may need to gently hurry a story along or call on someone else if one person is always jumping to answer the question. Don't be afraid to be assertive.

- Be firm about keeping the group focused. It's easy to get sidetracked with other issues. Call attention back to the lesson by summarizing what you've studied so far or by reminding the group of the main point of the lesson.

- Try to affirm each answer. Comments such as "Good point!" or "That's a great insight!" can encourage group members to share more freely. If you cannot agree with what a person has said, you may say something like, "That's an interesting way of looking at it." Or you could gently ask, "Where do you see that in the passage?"

- If you're not sure you understand what a person has said, try to rephrase their comment and ask them if that is what they meant. This indicates that you value their input and want to understand them.

- Remember, it is OK for you not to have all the answers. When someone asks a question about which you are unsure of the answer, offer it to the group by asking something like, "Does anyone have any thoughts on that?"

- Don't be afraid to say that you don't know the answer to a question. You can say, "That's a great question and I don't know the answer either but I'll do what I can to find out for you." Follow up by asking your pastor or going to the resources in your church library.

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- End your study with prayer. This is often a good time to let group members share personal prayer requests. If your group is comfortable praying together you can allow time for anyone who would like to pray. Some groups like to divide into smaller groups of two or three for prayer together. Otherwise, you can close in prayer yourself or let the person you've asked ahead of time to pray.

## *Chapter 1: Blessed are the poor in spirit*

### *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14)*

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who feel like they do not deserve God's favor—they are the very people who are welcome in God's kingdom.*

1. This question is intended to help put group members at ease by asking them to share about their own life experience. Give time for a few people to respond but do not spend too much time on this question. The second part of the question is intended to help group members begin to think of the sorts of barriers to belonging we sometimes encounter.
2. There are a number of answers that would work here, for example, “Blessed are those who keep the law,” or “Blessed are those who pray every day.” The point is to explore what Jesus’ audience might have expected in order to understand how surprising his words actually were to his listeners.
3. There are no correct answers to this question. This is an opportunity for group members to share their understanding of this phrase before we look at a parable that will hopefully shed light on the meaning of the phrase.
4. Luke says explicitly that Jesus is telling this story to people who were “confident in their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.” This description is a clue that these are issues Jesus will be addressing in the parable. It also is a clue into the meaning of “poor in spirit” since these are attitudes Jesus is confronting.
5. The main adjective that describes the Pharisee is “self-righteous” but other words such as “proud,” “disdainful,” or “judgmental” are also accurate. The tax collector could be called “penitent,” “repentant,” “humble,” or even “desperate.” Of course, this is not an exhaustive list. Try to affirm all the different contributions your group members share.
6. The Pharisee stands at a distance because he seems to think he is better than the other worshippers. He may also be keeping his distance in order to avoid being “contaminated” by contact with an “unclean” person. The tax collector stands apart from the other worshippers because he does not feel worthy to be included with them. He even beats on his chest in sorrow, a gesture usually only done by women.

The Pharisee’s prayer is really no prayer at all but a sermon about his own righteousness. The tax collector, on the other hand, offers a simple plea, which is usually translated, “Have mercy on me,” but could also be translated, “Make an atonement for me” (Bailey, p. 154).

Clearly, the tax collector is repentant, trusting in God’s grace alone, while the Pharisee is confident in his own righteousness.

7. This is another question with no specific answers. The Pharisee would be a person who believed she was good enough on her own to please God. This might actually include many church-goers! The tax collector, on the other hand, might be a person with a job that has a reputation for dishonesty, like some lawyers or salesmen. It could also be a person with a past history that is shameful to them such as an abortion or an extra-marital affair.
8. Remember the description of Jesus' audience? Those listening to this parable would have seen themselves in the Pharisee. They may have even offered similar prayers! They would have been very disturbed at the rejection of the Pharisee.
9. There are many ways this question could be answered but make sure your group members' answers are rooted in the parable. The main point should center on recognizing our need of God's grace and mercy, having nothing to offer God.
10. We all fit this description but for some of us, our neediness is more apparent. For example, those struggling with addictions, those with failed marriages, or those living with HIV/AIDS might feel as though they are unacceptable to God. Imagine how delighted those people might be to know they could find forgiveness and acceptance with God!
11. Pharisees had an especially hard time with this since they believed that even casual contact with a person who was "unclean" would make them unclean as well. They had also set the bar high, in terms of rules and regulations that would help them keep the law, and they enjoyed their self-appointed role of gatekeepers to God's favor.  
  
Unfortunately, churches also sometimes function as gatekeepers. They can also be places where people are afraid to show their brokenness for fear of being judged.
12. This question gives group members an opportunity to share how they may have personally been impacted by the lesson. Sharing on this level is particularly vulnerable so be sure that you and other group members are attentive and affirming.

## Chapter 2: Blessed are those who mourn

### Mary Anoints Jesus (John 12:1–8)

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who grieve losses or who mourn over their own shortcomings—Jesus walks with them in their sorrow and offers them a future hope with him forever.*

1. This question is intended to give the opportunity for group members to raise the kinds of questions people ask during times of grief without having to admit to asking the questions themselves. Try to discourage group members from passing judgment on these questions.
2. There are no right answers to this question so encourage your group members to use their imaginations to put themselves in the place of those who have come to Jesus carrying grief. Answers might include the illness or death of a child, personal illness, the loss of an ability, a broken relationship, or any of a number of life situations.
3. Jesus offers them comfort. Many of them undoubtedly came expecting healing or a solution to their problem.
4. Many guests are gathered and Martha is serving the meal. The meal is given in Jesus' honor and among the guests is Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha who has recently been brought back to life by Jesus. There is probably celebration over Lazarus' return and his friends may be excitedly asking questions.
5. Mary's actions change the tone of the gathering and may indicate that she was more attuned to Jesus' feelings than anyone else at the gathering. Mary makes an extravagant gesture to honor Jesus while he is living and to honor him even as he goes to his death.

Jesus seems to appreciate this gesture both because it comforts and encourages him and because it shows Mary understands what he has been teaching and knows what is weighing on his mind—his impending death and the horror it will bring.

6. Mary's actions indicate she believed Jesus when he said he was going to die. They also show she believes he is still worthy of honor; he is from God in some way she may not fully understand.
7. Mary goes from being a woman who was paralyzed by grief and questioned God's goodness to someone who could bring comfort and encouragement to Jesus, even as she herself was probably grieving his impending death.

She seems to be at peace and able to trust God with the future in a way that was not true when her beloved brother died.

8. This is another question with no correct answers. Some things to focus on might be the way Mary has moved from despair to a quiet trust and the way she does not deny the sadness or pain of the situation but is not immobilized by it.

9. Encourage people to be specific about what they mean. It is easy to give a simple answer such as, “Just pray.” If this happens, ask clarifying questions such as, “What sorts of things would you pray?” or, “How would you expect Jesus to meet you there?”
10. These questions try to give people in the group the opportunity to share things that have been helpful while giving space for those who may be in the midst of grief to acknowledge that. This is tender territory—set the tone for the group by making sure to respond positively and sensitively to each person who shares.
11. Again, encourage group members to be specific in their answers. You may even want to bring index cards to class with you and give them out at this time for people to write some of the steps they are resolved to take.
12. This is a fairly open-ended question that helps the group begin to unite what they have learned from Mary with the earlier beatitude. Hopefully, some of their answers will include:
  - confidence that God is trustworthy
  - the presence of Jesus
  - knowledge that Jesus understands our suffering and grief
  - knowing that Jesus has secured salvation for us through his death and resurrection

## Chapter 3: *Blessed are the meek*

### *The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard* (Matthew 20:1–16)

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those so beaten down by life they have stopped believing good things could happen to them—they are beloved children of the God who made and orders the world and who knows their needs.*

1. For this question, encourage your group to think beyond the biblical images of meekness and reflect on some of our cultural stereotypes—the person who cannot stand up to a bully, a wife who simply endures abuse, or other such examples. Some of those answers might easily lead to the second part of the question about things we value rather than meekness—some of those things might include standing up for oneself, assertiveness, or the ability to make things happen.
2. This study could become a little confusing because it deals with two different definitions for the same word, *meekness*; definitions that are both in use. I have tried to make sure that each question is clear about which definition is under discussion, but make sure your group keeps the distinction in mind.

This question focuses on the more negative definition of meekness; the kind of meekness that comes from giving up hope. There are no correct answers but make sure that the examples focus on the kind of meekness that grows out of hopelessness rather than the positive form of meekness that chooses humility and gentleness.

3. For people who have given up on expecting good things to come their way, learning that someone else has secured an inheritance for them would be good news indeed!
4. The landowner agrees to pay a fair wage to everyone he hires during the day.
5. The workers hired at the last minute unexpectedly received a full day's wages. They would have been impressed by the generosity of the landowner.
6. The workers hired at the last minute had no way of securing a job or good wages—they could not and did not fight for their rights. Yet their master was more than generous toward them and gave them what they could not have gotten for themselves.
7. Surely, as they watched the landowner giving a full day's wages to those who worked only a short time, the workers who had worked all day would have begun to expect an increase in their own wages as well. As you discuss the second half of this question, make sure group members feel like it is safe for them to share any reaction they might have to the story.
8. If the workers who had worked all day responded with Christ-like meekness, they would first of all be able to appreciate the landowner's generosity. They may also see the need of their fellow workers to provide for themselves and their families and rejoice that their needs had been met.

9. This is a question that invites group members to share their own reactions and identify with particular groups in the story. This is very vulnerable sharing so be sure not to judge one another's responses. It is necessary to see ourselves as we really are before true repentance can take place, but this kind of sharing can be scary!
10. Feelings of jealousy when others prosper, envy, and comparisons may be some of the answers people in your group offer. Hopefully, in the parable, they will be able to see that God deals fairly and lovingly with them as well and that God's generosity is limitless.
11. The landowner delights in his generosity and spends his time hiring as many workers as he can, wanting to extend his blessing to as many workers as possible. Knowing God's generosity and his desire to bless should help us to trust him with our needs.
12. There are no right answers to this question but hopefully members of your group will take time to begin integrating what they have learned in the parable with what they read in the beatitude. Here are a few suggestions of how your group members may answer:  
The meek: those who do not demand what they want, those who trust God's goodness and generosity, those who are totally dependent on God's goodness and generosity  
Inherit the earth: receive the good things of God, have their needs met, receive from God the things they could never secure for themselves.

## *Chapter 4: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*

### *The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31–46)*

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who long for justice in the world and righteousness in their own lives—those very things are on the heart of God and God will accomplish them.*

1. This study will focus on the desire we have to see justice in the world and in our own lives. We will see that this is not something God is unconcerned about; instead, it is part of God's character and something he longs for as well. This should be good news to people who are concerned about these things.

The opening question invites group members to share some of their own concerns for justice and righteousness.

2. Encourage your group members to use their imaginations, based on the background information provided in the introduction to the passage. Answers might include things like:
  - “Longing for freedom from Roman rule.”
  - “Times they may have been taken advantage of in business transactions.”
  - “Longing for righteousness before God but unable to pay for the sacrifices that were necessary or unable to keep the time-consuming laws of the Pharisees.”

For the second part of the question, encourage group members to be as specific as possible.

3. Again, encourage group members to use their imaginations. Some suggestions relating to the examples given above might be:
  - “Owning and governing their own land.”
  - “Justice, recompense, or retribution where they have been wronged.”
  - “Assurance of their righteousness before God.”

The introduction to the parable makes reference to three other parables that precede the one we will be studying. The first is a parable about two servants entrusted with feeding the household while their master is away. One servant cares well for the household; the other beats his fellow servants and squanders the household resources.

The second parable is the story of the ten bridesmaids waiting for the bridegroom. The wise bridesmaids took extra oil and kept their lamps burning while the foolish ones let their lamps go out. The lesson of both these parables: Be alert because you do not know the day when the Lord will come.

The third story is about the master who leaves on a journey, entrusting funds to three servants. Two of the servants handle their funds in a way that brings increased returns. One servant

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simply buries the money and goes about his business. That third servant receives punishment instead of reward when the master returns. The lesson for the listener is to be faithful in doing the work of the Lord. These parables set the stage for the final parable about the sheep and the goats.

4. Jesus is identified as the Son of Man, as King, and as Lord while he also serves as judge of all the nations. This is not a picture of Jesus, the man his disciples knew, but of Jesus in his glory as the reigning king who is entitled to judge the earth. He alone is the final arbiter of who enters his kingdom.
5. Jesus bases his judgment upon whether each person has fed and clothed those in need, has offered hospitality to strangers, has cared for the sick and visited prisoners.

He could have based his judgment on belief in him or on more spiritual activities like praying or knowing God's word. He could also have focused on moral purity such as keeping the commandments.

6. None of these activities require any special qualifications. They can be time consuming or costly in other ways but they are all services anyone can perform.
7. If you do not know of ways your church is ministering to those in need, you may want to do some research before your study to bring that information to the group.
8. Both groups thought they were serving ordinary people. For the sheep, it is clear that they were serving out of compassion for the needs of others. The goats, on the other hand, ignored the needs of others. They imply they would have done something had they known it was Jesus who was in need, but that response reveals their true motives as self-serving—they would have served in order to impress Jesus and not out of true compassion.

The motives of each group seem to reveal their hearts—hearts of compassion or hearts of selfishness. These heart attitudes are what Jesus is judging.

9. The main idea with which Jesus is confronting his listeners is not that these works alone bring salvation but that anyone who is earnestly following God will be doing these things in some way. All things are on God's heart and therefore should be on the hearts of his people.
10. Kay Warren's story is intended to 'prime the pump' for this sharing. The story of hymn writer Frances Havergal is also inspiring. After writing the words, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold," she felt convicted to sell all her jewelry and give the proceeds to the work of God's kingdom. Less dramatic examples might include:
  - Recognizing and repenting of greed when confronted with the hunger of so much of the world.
  - Confronting the feeling of entitlement when we see how little others have.
  - Repenting of selfishness over our time when we begin to make ourselves available to help others.

11. This story shows us God is a god of compassion, generosity, and justice. He loves and cares for everyone, even those who are overlooked and marginalized.
12. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness in society would take heart that God is compassionate and wants his people to be actively meeting the needs of those around them. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness on a personal level might find encouragement in the fact that God desires righteousness for them as well. Though it is not explicit in the parable, elsewhere in scripture we can see that God calls us to righteousness, gives us the righteousness of Christ, and equips us to do works of righteousness in his name.

## *Chapter 5: Blessed are the merciful*

### *The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21–35)*

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who absorb the cost of being merciful—they can be assured that they will receive mercy from God.*

1. This question is intended to “put a face” on mercy, to help your group begin thinking about what true mercy looks like in an individual.
2. A merciful person may have been caring for the sick (Pharisees would likely have avoided those who were sick because they would become unclean through contact with them and also because they often believed illness was a sign of God’s judgment). A merciful person may have forgiven a debt owed to them or cared for extended family that had no one else to support them. The point of this question is to see mercy as more than simply being nice and to think of tangible expressions of mercy.
3. There is not one correct answer to this question. One possibility could be that merciful people sometimes give up their own rights, to an extent, as they offer mercy so God assures them they will receive mercy from him.
4. There is nothing clearly stated in the story about this servant but we can deduce some things about him. He seems to be reckless and irresponsible in his lifestyle to run up such a huge debt. He has also been willing to take advantage of the kindness of his master who continues to lend him money. He seems to hope the master will forget his debt and so he asks for more time to pay it back, not facing the fact that he is hopelessly unable to fulfill his commitment.

It is not surprising that a person who was so unrealistic about the huge debt he owed might also be unrealistic about the mercy he owed to others.

5. The servant pleads for more time but the master offers forgiveness of the debt.
6. The two servants’ pleas are identical. The first servant receives mercy while the second servant is punished to the full extent of the law.

The contrast emphasizes the heartlessness of the first servant—he does not even recognize his own words in the plea of his fellow servant.

7. The entire household is appalled at what they are witnessing. One of their own members is dealing so harshly with his fellow servant that they feel compelled to take action. They report the behavior of the forgiven servant to their master.

As you discuss the final part of this question, try to allow for differing opinions in your group but also encourage your group members to let the information in the sidebar inform their opinions.

8. Jesus wants his followers to extend mercy and forgiveness to one another. When we extend mercy, it shows we understand the cost of our own forgiveness. It also represents the character of God to those around us.
9. Forgiveness is always costly. When we forgive we give up our right to hold the other person responsible for any hurt they may have caused us. When we forgive a debt we absorb the cost ourselves. If someone has deeply hurt us, forgiveness can feel as though we are letting him or her off the hook. Forgiveness is especially difficult in cases when the other person does not admit to having wronged us.
10. Jesus wants his hearers to understand that the debt they have been forgiven is greater than they could ever hope to repay on their own. He wants them to see the great mercy of God.

When we see ourselves in this way, it is sometimes easier to see that we have no right to hold on to grievances we have with others—they and we are both forgiven by the same heavenly Father.

11. One of the things about true mercy is that it is offered to those who do not deserve it. When we think about these missions of mercy--soup kitchens, clothes closets, homeless ministry--there is a complicated relationship between those on the giving end and those on the receiving end. Over time, those who are giving can begin to feel taken advantage of while those on the receiving end can feel mistrusted and sense that things are given grudgingly. This question invites your group to discuss this dynamic and how Christians involved in mercy ministries can avoid burnout and compassion fatigue even as they deal with people who may not show gratitude.
12. There are no correct answers to this question but it is intended to help your group process both the parable and the beatitude. Some possible responses could include:
  - Since God's character is merciful, any act of mercy reflects the character of God and pleases him.
  - There is an ongoing process in our lives; as we grow in our awareness of the debt we owe we become more and more able to extend mercy to others.

## Chapter 6: *Blessed are the pure in heart*

### *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl* (Matthew 13:44–46)

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who earnestly long for God—God will reveal himself to them.*

1. This question lends itself to many different kinds of responses. Answers could include anything from sacrificing to get a college education to saving for a special purchase. Give space for sharing but try not to let it go on too long.
2. These phrases are difficult to define. The question invites your group to share specific characteristics of people they have known who fit these descriptions. Encourage group members to be as specific as they can about these characteristics. Some characteristics that might be mentioned are integrity, purposefulness, whole-heartedness, and sacrificial giving.
3. This is not an easy question and is designed to help group members grapple with the meaning of this phrase. Hearing from God in prayer is certainly one way we “see God.” We can also see God in others as they serve us or we serve them. Some of your group members may have experiences of visions, dreams, or encounters with Jesus during times of meditation. Try to find ways to validate each person’s experience.

4.

	FIRST MAN	SECOND MAN
Life situation	Poor laborer (see Mounce’s comments)	Merchant, presumably of pearls
What does he find?	Hidden treasure	A very valuable pearl
What does he do in response?	Sells everything to buy the field	Sells everything to buy it
What motivates him?	Joy	Not clear, possibly desire to possess the pearl

5. One man is poor, laboring in someone else’s fields, the other probably wealthy and successful. In these two examples, we can see that social status and wealth are not things that determine who is welcome in God’s kingdom.
6. Jesus seems to be saying the kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we may be chasing after or desiring in life. I think every believer knows this but it is also

easy to lose sight of this truth in the midst of our daily life. As group members reflect on their own experience, make sure there is an atmosphere of grace in your discussion—we all have moments when we truly see the value of God’s kingdom but we can also easily be drawn into the values of the world. Try to help your group focus on those positive moments and celebrate them rather than berating themselves for how infrequent they might be.

7. In conversion, people often hear something in the gospel that is a new insight for them. Usually this is good news, cause for rejoicing. But the actual step of conversion is a sacrifice; turning away from the old life to respond to the call to follow Jesus.
8. Our conversion is not the only time we say ‘yes’ to God. Throughout our lives as believers, God continues to call us to a closer walk with him and new steps of obedience. This process we have been discussing can also take place at any one of these turning points. Encourage your group members to share about their own conversion or about an experience in their lives when they have been challenged to take a new step of obedience.
9. Each of the men in the parable recognized the value of what they had found. How can we help people see the value in having a relationship with Jesus? Does our own life demonstrate that value? In the case of the pearl merchant, he recognized the value of the pearl because of his personal experience with pearls. How can we present the gospel in ways that connect with people’s personal experiences, with their own longings and needs?

Joy is a motivator for the man who sold everything to buy the field with the treasure. Joy should also characterize our presentation of the gospel and life with God.

10. Use this question to explore the nature of sacrifice. Sometimes it may be *costly* but when the end result is important enough to us, it may not be a *painful* sacrifice.
11. “Selling everything” could mean sacrificing many different things—relationships, dreams, goals, or the dreams and goals we have for our children. It is a matter of giving every part of our lives to God, putting it all at God’s disposal and under his control and letting God’s priorities become our priorities.

This wholehearted submission to God’s purposes for our lives is very similar to the idea of being “clear at center” or “pure in heart.” It is a single-minded focus on the purposes of God.

The parable implies that the reward is the treasure itself; it becomes ours.

12. This question is intended to help your group members personalize what they have learned. It is possible that not everyone in your group will feel comfortable sharing their responses to this question so don’t pressure anyone to respond.

## *Chapter 7: Blessed are the peacemakers*

### *Dealing With Sin in the Church* (Matthew 18:15-20)

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who wade into the difficult work of bringing true peace to relationships and to their community—they demonstrate God’s character and concerns.*

1. This question is intended to introduce the subject of conflict and peacemaking in a way that is personal and relational. It can be a good opportunity for group members to learn a little more about one another.
2. The most obvious way Jesus made peace was the peace with God he brought to humanity. Although it is not explicitly stated, in calling his disciples he seems to have brought peace to a group of people from varied backgrounds. Encourage your group to think creatively about some of the different interactions Jesus had with groups or individuals that had elements of peacemaking.

In thinking about peacemakers in our time, your group may mention people like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, or Mother Theresa. Be sure you talk about the activities they were involved in and not simply the names of peacemakers.

3. God is a peacemaker, making peace with us through Jesus. At Jesus’ birth, the angels proclaimed “Peace on earth” and the Messiah was called the Prince of Peace. The peace God brings is not simply an absence of conflict but the shalom in which every relationship is reconciled and harmonious and every individual is loved and cared for.
4. Jesus instructs us to confront another believer who sins. We should go to them alone and discuss it one on one.

This is not a step we take for every small offense or grievance but for an activity on the part of another Christian that dishonors the name of Jesus, particularly if it is something that is happening publically. Situations may include abusive behavior, an extramarital affair, or dishonest business practices.

5. Jesus describes a clear, straightforward process. First, we go alone to the individual and discuss the issue. If the person is not responsive, we go again with other trusted parties who know about the problem. If the person remains unresponsive and unrepentant, we should bring the issue before the church (in our current church context, this may not mean the entire congregation but probably the church leaders such as the session). If even this fails to bring a change of heart, Jesus instructs us to treat the person as a “pagan or a tax collector.” This has sometimes been interpreted as an injunction to distance ourselves from the unrepentant person. For a more sympathetic interpretation, see the sidebar from Barclay.

The goal of such confrontation, at every stage, is to restore the person to a right relationship with God and with others.

The goal is loving because it has the person's best interests at heart. The process is loving because it protects the person from gossip or shame before the whole community by keeping any discussions of the issue as private as possible.

When mishandled, this process can result in shaming, false accusations, and witch hunts. Sadly, these mishandlings of Jesus' process has often made the church reluctant to put Jesus' instructions into practice at all.

6. This question is designed to give an opportunity for group members to share about any personal experience they may have had with this process. It might also open the door for people to bring up the misdeeds of public Christian figures and how those situations were handled. Try to keep the focus on first hand experience.
7. We function as agents of God's grace in the world. We can offer forgiveness in God's name with the confidence that it is accomplished.

Eugene Peterson rephrases verse 18 in this way in his translation, *The Message*:  
"Take this most seriously: A yes on earth is a yes in heaven; a no on earth is a no in heaven. What you say to one another is eternal." This can serve as a model for the way you and your group re-word the verse.

8. As Protestants, we do not have a formalized ritual of confession and absolution but this can take place in informal ways in interpersonal relationships as we share about mistakes or regrets with one another. We sometimes dismiss "confessions" of this sort with dismissive replies like, "Don't worry about it," or "We're all human." Think about the healing power we could offer by saying instead, "God has forgiven you for that."

If time allows, this might be an opportunity to role play the kinds of conversations in which forgiveness could be naturally offered.

You may also want to call attention to the way our liturgy gives us an opportunity to receive forgiveness during our worship service. Confession is always followed by an Assurance of Pardon, words of forgiveness spoken to each worshipper.

9. Jesus promises his disciples that the resources of God will be at their disposal as they carry out this work of reconciliation. When Jesus followers pray for peace in a relationship, God is with them and working among them.
10. Jesus' instructions are very easy to translate into our current culture. This question will give your group members an opportunity to envision what Jesus' instructions would look like in their own churches.
11. We are called to be not only lovers of peace but people who are actively engaged in making peace a reality in our relationships with others. We do this with humility, gentleness, and respect for the dignity of others. We also do it with the guidance and power of God.
12. We do not have to go looking for sins to confront in our sisters and brothers in Christ. We should begin by examining ourselves—are there people we have wronged? We

should go to them with an apology. Are there people we are avoiding because of an offense? We should go to them with our hurt. God may call us to intervene in other broken relationships but we must begin as agents of healing and peace in our own families and among our friends.

# Chapter 8: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness

## Jesus Sends Out His Disciples (Matthew 10:16–23)

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who experience hardship because of their loyalty to Jesus—they are citizens of the new kingdom Jesus ushered in, a kingdom they experience in part now and in full when Jesus returns.*

1. In this study, we will be talking about how Christians are persecuted because of their association with Jesus. As part of that, we will also spend some time on what persecution for righteousness sake looks like as opposed to being persecuted or snubbed because we may be needlessly pushy in witnessing or seem judgmental. This question is intended to set the stage for that discussion. There are no right or wrong answers—let group members spend a few minutes sharing their thoughts.
2. Persecution can take many forms. We may be excluded from some social circles because we do not participate in behavior that would not be pleasing to God. We may lose opportunities for promotion or even jobs if we refuse to participate in unscrupulous business practices. Our children may feel persecuted if they have to miss sports activities to attend church. We can encounter persecution as we take unpopular stands on issues such as abortion. When we think globally, many Christians are in danger for their lives if they make a public profession of their faith. In other places, people could lose jobs, family, or marriage prospects because they are followers of Jesus.
3. For anyone who is suffering because of their loyalty to Jesus, it is helpful to be reminded that their reward is not only a future reward but part of what God is doing in the world here and now.
4. The animals mentioned are sheep, wolves, snakes and doves. You may want to bring newsprint for your group or use a chalkboard if there is one in the room you use to make a chart for this question:

Sheep	Wolves	Snakes	Doves
Docile, easily led, harmless, vulnerable	Aggressive, predatory	Shrewd or wise (from the text) Stealthy, self-protective	Innocent (from the text) Peaceful, harmless

When we put all these characteristics together, Jesus seems to be saying we should not be on the offensive as we go out in his name. We should be peace-loving and vulnerable but not naïve about the situation nor about our enemy, the devil.

5. The three scenarios in this verse could be broken down in a few different ways. The ones I had in mind were:

- Being handed over to authorities for corporal punishment
- Being arrested and having to give a defense of our beliefs
- Fleeing from persecution

Betrayal and hatred are also part of several of these scenarios.

Some of the situations you discussed in Question 2 would serve here as examples of persecution people might experience in our culture. Let the group discuss examples outside their own experience but also encourage them to think about their personal experiences of persecution.

The sidebar from Barclay serves to show that the early Christians were persecuted for things that were not true about them. This might also be something you would want to discuss—how are we misunderstood because of uninformed images people might have of Christians?

6. Jesus says clearly that the disciples' persecution is because of their association with him. When we are in a time of persecution, it can be helpful to evaluate whether the resistance we are experiencing is a resistance to the gospel or whether it is a resistance to our methods of sharing.

7. Jesus assures his followers that he will be with them through the presence of the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit will give them the words they need at the time.

Jesus seems to presume that his disciples' greatest fears will be about what they should say under pressure. Those fears could include not being able to speak out of fear, caving into pressure and renouncing their faith, or not being able to state their case clearly in the stress of the moment.

Give group members an opportunity to think about their own fears about this issue.

8. This question is asking about a very specific focus—whether persecution today comes from the claims that Jesus is the only way to God. Try to keep your discussion centered on this question and not on the other reasons Christians may experience persecution.
9. This is a companion question to Question #8. These are not mutually exclusive questions. It could be that your group will decide that Christians are persecuted for both the unique claims of Christ and for the things they stand for as Christ's followers.
10. Christians are called to stand firm in their faith but we are not called to take unnecessary risks without a clear leading from God. Jesus gives his followers permission to leave situations where they are in danger or persistently persecuted. For Christians today this may involve distancing ourselves from hostile relationships or changing jobs if our company is involved in unethical practices. These steps, however, should not be taken lightly but prayerfully and carefully. We are not called to cloister ourselves away from any contact with the world.
11. Jesus expects that, as his disciples flee from one community to another, they will not keep a low profile but will continue to proclaim the gospel in every location, thus furthering the purposes of God to spread the good news of his saving grace.

12. This is an opportunity for your group members to write their own amplified version of our beatitude. Responses might look something like this:

Blessed (favored by God, fortunate) are those who are persecuted because of righteousness (those who lose friends or jobs or family relationships because they are followers of Jesus), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (because they have a hope for the future and the opportunity to be part of what God is doing to bring reconciliation, compassion, peace, and justice to the world today).

\*\*\*While it is best if your group members prepare ahead of time for the lessons, this may not always be the case. If your group tends to be lax about their preparation, you may want to remind them to prepare ahead of time for Chapter 9. It concludes with some exercises to summarize the entire study and advanced preparation is needed.

## *Chapter 9: Blessed are you when you suffer for Jesus' sake* *Jesus Prays for His Disciples (John 17:13–26)*

**Main Teaching Point:** *There is good news for those who suffer because of their allegiance to Jesus—Jesus knows them by name and intercedes on their behalf before the throne of God. \*\*\*Even if your group has not been incorporating the Lectio Divina exercises into your study time, you may want to use the **Reflecting on God's Word** of this lesson since it serves as a summary of the entire study. Be sure to allow enough time to include this exercise. \*\*\**

1. If your group is very talkative, you may want to remind people to share a brief version of their story in order to give the opportunity for several people to share.
2. Jesus says his disciples can expect to be insulted, persecuted, and slandered because of their association with him.

These are all things people in your group may have experienced themselves. Again, encourage sharing but also encourage people to keep their stories brief. If your group has difficulty finding responses, the sidebar from Dale Bruner can be used to “prime the pump.”

3. Jesus gives two reasons for rejoicing in persecution—reward in heaven and the association with other faithful followers who have also been persecuted.

These things can remind us that God sees what we are going through and that our sacrifice will be honored. They also remind us that we are not singled out for ill treatment, others have gone before us, and still more stand with us today. Their testimonies of God's faithfulness to them in persecution can be an encouragement to us.

4. Jesus wants his disciples to have joy in spite of the difficult circumstances they may face. He wants them to go into the world as agents of his grace and, as they go, he wants them to be protected from spiritual attacks and temptations and to continue to grow in Christ-likeness.
5. God's word is what we have received from Jesus—it is the message we carry. It is also a tool for us as we grow spiritually; it is our guide for holy (sanctified) living.
6. This question is designed to help your group think creatively about what it means to be in the world but not of the world and to be called to love a world that hates us.

[Verse 19 raises an interesting question: If Jesus was perfect, why would he need to purify (sanctify) himself? This may not come up in your discussion, but if it does, F.F. Bruce offers an interesting insight into the meaning of this verse. He reminds us that Jesus is preparing to offer himself as the sacrifice for the sins of the world; a priest always sanctified sacrifices. Here we see Jesus serving as both sacrifice and priest. (pp. 334–5)]

7. Jesus' desire for us is that we would be united in our purpose to further God's kingdom in the world and that this would be a testimony to the world that God is behind our mission. He also desires that we would have a deepening relationship with him and with the Father and the Spirit, a relationship that gives us glimpses of the majesty of God.
8. The church is such a diverse group of people that natural affinities could not explain our unity. Testimonies of friendships between Christians whose countries may be enemies are powerful witnesses to the power of the gospel.

When we face persecution, we can draw courage from the support and encouragement of other believers, some who have suffered much more than we do.

9. You may want to encourage the people in your group to remember a particular individual who has been an encouragement to them. If your group is made up of long time members of the same church there may be church leaders who have died or are homebound who people would like to share about. You may even want to bring postcards or note cards for group members to send notes of encouragement and thanks to those they talk about during this time.
10. There are many possible answers to this question. We can see Jesus' glory as we meditate in his presence, as we see his plan unfold for us, or as we look at creation and recognize the hand of the creator.

Jesus says he has given us his glory and links it specifically with our unity. This seems to indicate that Jesus' glory is visible in us as we work together in his name and as we enjoy true community with other believers.

11. While Jesus' love for us cannot be increased by anything we do, our *experience* of that love can grow as our relationship with God deepens. Knowing God and experiencing his love, grace, and favor is the greatest reward we can have. It hearkens back to the blessing in our introduction:

*God bless you and keep you,  
God smile on you and gift you,  
God look you full in the face and make you prosper.*  
(Numbers 6:24–26, from *The Message*)

12. Encourage your group members to be specific in their responses and in their reasons for choosing their responses.

## REFLECTING ON GOD'S WORD

Decide ahead of time what way of breaking up for prayer will work best for your group.

You may also want to have extra index cards on hand in case some of your group members did not write down their prayer requests.