

THE
JOURNEY

BECOMING
MORE LIKE
JESUS

PARTICIPANT'S
GUIDE

UNIT FIVE
TO BE BLESSED BY HIM



THE JOURNEY



DEAR FELLOW TRAVELER,

Welcome to The Journey. We are so glad you are here. We believe that discipleship is a journey of becoming more like Jesus, and we want to come alongside you on this adventure. Perhaps you are new to following Jesus. Or maybe you've been following Him for many years. Regardless of your place on the path, we believe The Journey is for you.

The Journey is a versatile resource designed with the church and home in mind. The content will contain foundational, biblical teaching presented in an interactive format. It's intended for use in community with other believers. We also have built At-Home Exercises into the content for you to engage in at home throughout the week. We hope that these exercises help to strengthen your understanding of Jesus and hold you accountable for meeting with Jesus daily.

Our lives are radically changed by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit through salvation, but our journey with the Lord shouldn't stop at our salvation experience. We must then embark on a journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. By digging deeper into this relationship, The Journey will help you extend discipleship beyond Sundays. By immersing yourself into God's Word, prayer, and worship, you will fall more in love with the One who loves you most. Remember, there is always more to learn, still room to grow, and always support available for you on the journey.

We have been praying for you. We have had you in mind as we have been preparing this study. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work mightily in your life as you commit to this personal and communal discipleship journey with the Lord.

With you on The Journey,

YOUR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES FAMILY

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT BIBLE TRANSLATION ARE YOU USING?

All scriptures used in The Journey will be the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

HOW IS THE JOURNEY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BIBLE STUDIES?

The Journey is an invitation to say yes to Jesus in every part of your life. Centered around weekly class experiences, the focus of The Journey is on the 6 days you aren't with your group. We want you to grow in knowledge, as all Bible studies do, but we also want you to be transformed by the power of God and become more like Jesus. By connecting, growing in knowledge, daily intimacy with Jesus, and participation in community, we hope that you will experience transformation.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH DISCUSSION?

We believe that the discussion of the lesson with one another is a vital part of learning. It teaches us to think critically about what we are hearing, to be dependent on one another (someone else may have an insight that we need to hear), and to build trust and relationships in the group.

DOES THIS WORK FOR SMALL AND LARGE GROUPS?

Yes! We believe that the flexibility of this resource allows it to function in both settings. It can be easily adapted to fit the needs of any sized group!

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LESSON ONE | BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The Gospel is the cornerstone of our faith. It is our spiritual "daily bread." To understand and articulate the Gospel we must look at Jesus, the One who gave us this gift.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and see, perhaps for the first time, how counter-cultural Jesus and His Gospel really are.

I. THE GOSPEL TELLS US WHO WE ARE

Read: Matthew 5:3

TALK ABOUT IT: Even though God isn't directly mentioned in Matthew 5:3, what can we infer about Him from this passage? Why would He want us to be "poor in spirit"?

THINK ABOUT IT: In this one verse, Jesus explains the Gospel.

To be "poor in spirit" means to humbly realize that you have nothing to offer apart from Christ. True humility means we are conscious of our constant dependence on God.

Being "poor in spirit" is true of all of us, but God, the Father, sent His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, to take on our sin and give us His righteousness.

Our responsibility is to believe this truth and respond in faith. Our consistent acknowledgement that we are "poor in spirit" enables us to come to Christ humbly for salvation and sanctification.

II. THE GOSPEL SHOWS HOW TO FIND THE KINGDOM

Read: Mark 9:17-27

TALK ABOUT IT: After reading Mark 9:17-27, what do you find interesting about this father? Do you identify with him? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT IT: We live in Christ's Kingdom the same way we entered: by intentionally pursuing an understanding that we need Him. We believe not just for our initial salvation; we believe for our life. The believer's story is one that starts with "I need you, Jesus," and continues every day with "I need you, Jesus."

Living the Gospel is a daily surrender. It's a continual handing over of our desires for God's perfect desire.

In what areas of your life are you seeking your own way? Are you turning over ALL that you are and have to God? Is your faith a "Jesus plus _____ (you fill in the blank) faith"? If so, you're not just missing out on the blessings God has for you. You are missing the Gospel.

The father in Mark 9 was "poor in spirit." Consequently, he reached out to Jesus, hoping things could be different. And what was Jesus' response? "If you believe, all things are possible to him who believes."



Belief: that's where it always starts. Belief triggers behavior. We will never truly turn to Jesus without that crucial acknowledgment that our way does not work.

III. THE GOSPEL DEFINES "THE BLESSED LIFE"

Read: Matthew 5:3

TALK ABOUT IT: How would you define "blessed"?

THINK ABOUT IT: Until we understand and believe the enormity of this phrase, "kingdom of heaven," it will not be compelling enough to warrant our surrender.

In the Kingdom is where we experience full contentment, joy, and peace, or "blessedness." Surrendering our desires and following Christ's will grants us membership in His Kingdom (see Gal 5:16-26).

We get better at Kingdom living as we intentionally focus on the eternal. God understands how easy it is to get distracted and take our eyes off Him, so He encourages us "not to lose heart" (2 Cor 4:1), and He gives us brief glimpses of the fuller Kingdom. Let us recognize these moments as the gifts they are.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What attitudes, actions, or mindsets prevent us from being "poor in spirit"?
- 2) How does being poor in spirit lead to being rich in the Kingdom of God?
- 3) Discuss how being poor in spirit is difficult in our culture?

4) Do you see being poor in spirit as a blessing? How so?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE:

Psalm 1

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Psalm 1. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) A Christian writer once said, "Only those who admit their spiritual poverty are willing to learn." One way we can experience poverty of spirit is through the discipline of fasting. Fasting (voluntarily giving up something we are dependent on so that we can listen and walk more closely in tune with God) causes us to lean into our weaknesses and rely on God more fully. This weakness is the foundation of our spiritual poverty. Fast one day this week. You could fast all meals (check with your doctor first), a single meal, or you might fast technology or social media. Spend your fasting time in prayer. After you finish, reflect on your experience.

3) Being poor in spirit often leads to putting others before ourselves. Think of three ways that you can actively practice putting others before yourself. During this week, put these acts of selflessness to work. Was it difficult to stop focusing on yourself? What did you learn?

4) What is the Gospel? Spend some time writing down your understanding of the Gospel. Try to find Bible verses to give you the language or words you need.



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LESSON TWO | BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

If you have ever parted with a loved one, whether through death, departure, or dissolution, you may have asked the questions: Where is the good in “goodbye”? What can be fair in “farewell”? We question how there could be anything good or fair in these melancholy moments that break our hearts.

As members of the Kingdom of God, we are fortunate amidst our mourning because we have the promise of being comforted by the Holy Spirit. The comfort we find amidst the mourning is not based on our feelings or emotions but rather on the goodness of God.

I. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Read: Matthew 5:4; Mark 6:34-37

TALK ABOUT IT: With what situations do we typically associate mourning? What does it mean to mourn?

THINK ABOUT IT: Beyond sadness and grief, mourning is more than an emotion. It is a verb. It takes on physical aspects.

Mourning indicates we have an emotional investment in that which was lost. It triggers something within us: compassion. Compassion should then be a catalyst to action.

Jesus tells His disciples that He wants to go across the Sea of Galilee to withdraw and rest for a while. As they go, the crowds follow Him.

Upon seeing the crowds on the shore, rather than becoming frustrated that work “followed Him home,” Jesus is moved to compassion. He mourns the fact that they are like sheep without a shepherd. Instead of ignoring them, compassion catalyzed Him into action.

II. THEY WILL BE COMFORTED

Read: John 14:25-27

TALK ABOUT IT: Do you recall a situation in which you have been comforted? What did that look like? In the passage we just read, Jesus promises that God the Father will send us a Helper. In the situations you mentioned, what comparisons or contrasts do you see to what the Helper is promised to do?

THINK ABOUT IT: John 14 occurs during the Upper Room Discourse, where Jesus takes the time to give His disciples the last bit of instruction needed to prepare them for His crucifixion and beyond.

Amidst all of this, He pauses to assure them they will not go about this assignment alone. The Father will send a Helper. This Helper will be a Teacher to them just as Jesus was. He will remind them of all Jesus’ words to them. He is going to be the bearer of peace and comfort.

III. MOURNING AND MISSION

Read: John 14:25-27



TALK ABOUT IT: In the John 14:25-27 passage, Jesus gave several reasons the disciples would be able to carry out the mission He assigned them. How do you think the disciples felt knowing the mission would include mourning, but also that they had the promise of abiding presence of the Holy Spirit?

THINK ABOUT IT: The disciples would be continuing the Kingdom mission of the Good Shepherd. They were to carry the Good News of the Kingdom to the world in search of the lost sheep. As they encountered the deaf, diseased, dying, and disenchanting, their hearts would feel the weight. Compassion would compel them to share the Kingdom.

As Christ's disciples today, it is our responsibility to carry on the Kingdom's mission. In seeing the defiling effects of sin on our world, it is only natural to mourn just how far it has fallen. The good news is that in our mourning and our mission, we have the Holy Spirit.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) We all experience times of mourning. What do you find most difficult in these seasons?
- 2) In what ways have you seen yourself blessed during mourning?
- 3) How does knowing Jesus was moved with compassion for others during His own mourning impact how you approach similar seasons of life?
- 4) How does having the Holy Spirit, a comforter, help us to journey through mourning?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE:

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Develop the habit, if you have not already done so, of reading the Word of God daily. Establish a consistent time, place, and pattern. Make this habit a high priority this week.
- 2) Ask the Good Shepherd to open your eyes and soften your heart to become more like His heart as you go about this week. Be watchful for Him.
- 3) Take the time to inventory what causes your heart to feel heavy or to mourn. Is it something you see on the news or in a social media feed? Is it a story you hear from a friend? Is it passing someone on the street corner? Ask the Holy Spirit, as your Helper, how you can respond in compassion moving forward; and ask your Comforter how to trust Him in the situations beyond your control.



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LESSON THREE | BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

The Beatitudes spoken by Jesus are not to be thought of as independent sayings that could have been uttered in any order. Instead, we should see and hear them as rungs of a ladder, leading us ever upward into the likeness of Christ.

The spotlight on meekness looks outward, extending to our relationships with others. Truly meek Christ-followers have surrendered all their presumed “rights” before the Judge of the earth. Gentleness toward others becomes their response to God’s grace toward them.

I. WHAT IS MEEKNESS?

Read: Matthew 5:5

TALK ABOUT IT: Do you think most people view meekness as a positive or negative trait? How does Jesus’ approval of this disposition change the usual way the expression is used?

THINK ABOUT IT: Meekness carries the idea of a powerful stallion being broken and becoming gentle enough to be ridden. Peter used this word as a description of the inner beauty that Christ-followers should manifest, which he says is a great value in His sight (1 Pet 3:4).

It also carries the idea of being humble or considerate of others. It speaks of people who keep their anger in check and place the interests of others above their own. Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Meekness is not weakness. Nor is the term synonymous with cowardice, timidity, or shyness. Neither is it a sign of indecisiveness or absence of confidence. Jesus portrayed meekness as quality of strength. Those who genuinely possess this attribute exercise restraint from crushing others with their words or their actions.

II. EXAMPLES OF MEEKNESS

Read: Matthew 11:29-30

TALK ABOUT IT: Jesus invites us to a lifestyle with Him that is lived in close communion with His gentle heart. He claims such a yoke is “easy,” and His burden is “light.” In what ways do you believe life is easier for those who are meek than for those who are self-exalting and harsh toward others?

THINK ABOUT IT: The greatest example of meekness in human history is seen in Jesus Christ Himself. He not only practiced what He preached, but He also preached what He practiced.

Another example of meekness may be viewed in the heroic figure of Moses in the Old Testament. “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3).

How could Jesus and Moses both receive distinct recognition for their meekness? Clearly, Jesus (always) and Moses (most of



the time) were angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. What is the difference? It is never permissible to be angry for any insult or injury directed to oneself. Selfish anger is a sin; selfless anger may be holy.

III. THE REWARD OF MEEKNESS

Read: Matthew 5:5

TALK ABOUT IT: When do you believe the meek will inherit the earth? Is it only in the ages to come in the afterlife, or does this promise extend to our present time?

THINK ABOUT IT: The latter clause of this third Beatitude reveals the reward for gentleness. First, in a very real sense, those who are truly meek own the earth now. Second, there will be a future fulfillment when this becomes a visible reality in Christ's coming kingdom.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) What is your response to humility being both a pre-requisite to being saved, as well as a sign that a person is saved?
- 2) Is meekness necessary to be a faithful witness for Christ?
- 3) When do you find it most difficult to walk in meekness? When does it come naturally?
- 4) Meekness is the ability to control yourself when you want to show others how much you can control. What areas of your life do you want to "prove" your power or exert your control?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES:

Psalm 149; James 1:12-27

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's scriptures: Psalm 149 and James 1:12-27. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) We should acknowledge that even at our best, a gentle and meek spirit may be "imperfectly present" in our hearts. Here are some warning signs to be aware of lest we lose the blessedness of meekness:

- Harshness: (If you treat others mean—an absence of gentleness)
- Grasping: (If you must always have yours first—caring little how your actions affect others)
- Vengeful: (If you are known as someone no one should ever cross)
- Uncontrolled: (If rage fills your soul, so life becomes a series of explosions that boil over)

3) An essential part of meekness is the inward recognition and choice to do God's will, not my will. Prayerfully consider the areas of your life that you tend to choose your own will over God's. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce the fruit of meekness in your heart.



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LESSON FOUR | BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

Hunger and thirst are basic and beautiful. With instinct, we have no choice. With appetite, we do. And our physical health is determined by how we manage both instinct and appetite.

It's the same with spiritual health. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means we inherit a new spiritual instinct and appetite. New spiritual needs. New spiritual desires. When we fill ourselves with God regularly, we live. When we neglect this new instinct, we starve spiritually. We need His righteousness, the way our bodies need food and water.

I. BLESSED BY RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read: Matthew 5:6; Philippians 3:7-9

TALK ABOUT IT: What did Jesus mean when He said we would be blessed by righteousness? How is Eden involved?

THINK ABOUT IT: Blessed: to be living in a state of inner wholeness.

However, this is not to say that blessedness is a purely emotional or circumstantial state. It often affects our emotions and circumstances, but blessedness exists independently of blissfulness.

Righteousness: the sum total of everything God wants for us, AND the way God designed for us to access it.

When we obsess over the "how" part, we

vacuum the heart out of this Beatitude. We forget what God wanted us to begin with and why righteousness is so crucial and beautiful. What God wants is unbroken communion with us in the magnificent world He fashioned for us.

II. RIGHTEOUSNESS DEFINED

Read: Ephesians 2:8-9

TALK ABOUT IT: How does righteousness relate to external behavior? Is righteousness a behavior? Lifestyle? Moral code?

THINK ABOUT IT: Moral codes and behaviors function like rules and chord charts—they help righteous life happen correctly. But they don't necessarily equal righteousness.

Righteousness is bigger and better than mere external conformity to codes. It is a gift bestowed on us through Jesus, based on His own merit. Therefore, righteousness for us is primarily relational and only secondarily behavioral.

The gift of righteousness certainly generates new behaviors, lifestyles, and moral codes. And Jesus absolutely intends for us to prioritize and pursue "righteous" things, like discipline and biblical morality. But Jesus wants us to pursue those things because they protect and enhance our relationship with Him and our connection to His kingdom.



III. THE APPETITE CYCLE

Read: Isaiah 55:1-2

TALK ABOUT IT: What comes to your mind when you hear the phrase: "Appetite Cycle?"

THINK ABOUT IT: The Appetite Cycle: You eat most what you want most because you want most what you eat most.

Jesus wants to retrain our Appetite Cycle to fight for us and His kingdom. When we pursue righteousness, we are pursuing relationship. And as we pursue that relationship, more and greater righteous realities bloom in us. New righteous appetites are trained up to replace old sinful ones.

Jesus' encouragement is simple: "hunger and thirst for righteousness." Eat and drink your fill!

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How would you define righteousness?
- 2) In what ways can our righteousness become more about actions instead of a posture of the heart?
- 3) What can you do to help foster a healthy "appetite cycle" of righteousness in your own life?
- 4) We all know and experience physical hunger pains. Do you ever experience spiritual hunger pains? What are they?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE:

John 4:1-26

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study John 4:1-26. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) Meditating on scripture is another way that we can grow spiritually. Meditating on a text allows the words of each verse to gently fill our minds. When reading a text this way, choose a shorter passage and read it several times rather than reading once and moving on. The purpose of meditation is to hear the words of scripture and begin to prepare our hearts to obey in our lives. It is hearing and responding (see Matthew 7:24). Set aside some time to try this out this week.

3) What kinds of appetites define your life? Spend some time this week performing an appetite assessment. What do you spend your time doing? What most often catches your attention? What kinds of things satisfy you? What is one area that you can open up to the influence of Jesus?



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LESSON FIVE | BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Humans tend to focus and judge life based on what will make their lives easier. Life is about self-fulfillment and being “happy.”

Yet, the kingdom of God operates and functions differently. In the Kingdom, there is a change of attitude and character that is different than the inward-focused system of the world.

I. MERCY SHOWS ACTIVE COMPASSION

Read: Matthew 5:7

TALK ABOUT IT: What does it mean to be merciful? What does that look like on a daily basis?

THINK ABOUT IT: To be merciful is to be FULL of mercy. So, what does that mean?

Mercy is an action word. It is a tender mercy that is given and displayed toward someone who does not deserve or merit it.

When Jesus says that the citizens of the kingdom of God are blessed because they are merciful, He is turning our instincts upside down.

Mercy is not self-centered. It is active compassion that moves beyond the mirror into the lives of others.

II. MERCY IS SENSITIVE TO OTHERS' NEEDS

Read: 1 Corinthians 13:4-5: Psalm 145:8

TALK ABOUT IT: In 1 Corinthians 13:5, the Apostle Paul wrote that love “does not seek its own.” In light of the understanding that mercy does not focus on one’s self, how is it related to what Paul says here about love?

THINK ABOUT IT: Mercy is an expression of love. It is love in action. It is sensitive to and sees the needs of others ahead of its own.

The Psalmist describes the Lord as being great in mercy. Mercy is one of the attributes and characteristics of the nature of God. He is full of mercy. Jesus’ life mirrored those attributes and characterized a merciful person.

A beautiful example of this “love in action” is seen in chapter 8 of John’s Gospel.

III. MERCY SEEKS WAYS TO EXPRESS ITSELF

Read: Matthew 25:31-40

TALK ABOUT IT: If mercy is active compassion, sensitive to the needs of others, then what are the implications for those who want to follow Christ?



THINK ABOUT IT: As we have learned, mercy is not just a noun. Biblically it is a verb. It is active compassion. It is compassion that is in motion.

For the believer that is growing in faith, part of that growth is moving beyond personal needs and desires and seeing others' needs. Not only is mercy sensitive to others' needs, but it also goes beyond that. It intentionally looks for ways to express itself to others.

E. H. Chapin: "Mercy, that is the gospel. The whole of it in one word." The result of extending mercy is that it will be returned to us in good measure.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Have you ever thought of mercy as "active compassion"? Does this meaning inspire you?
- 2) Talk about a time you experienced mercy. Why was it important to you?
- 3) "When we as believers do not mercifully minister to the least of these, we are withholding that form of worship from the Lord." How does this statement challenge you?
- 4) What are two ways that you can extend mercy in someone's life this week?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE:

Hebrews 13:1-17

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Hebrews 13:1-17. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's

Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2. "Mercy is not self-centered. It is active compassion that moves beyond the mirror of self into the lives of others." This week, ask the Lord to open your eyes to needs that are around you. Seek to move beyond your personal prayer needs and pray for those whom the Lord brings to your mind. Be mindful of the times your prayers have centered solely upon yourself.

3. "Mercy continually looks outside of itself to see where the love of the Lord could be given." Do something intentional this week to express mercy to someone's life. We all feel sympathy at times but put action to your concerns. Serve at a relief center for the homeless, visit with a shut-in, write a card of encouragement to someone who is struggling. Put your love into action this week.

4) To become a person of mercy and active compassion requires us to see and know the needs of those around us. That requires us to listen and pay attention. This week, when you are waiting for school pickup or standing in line at the store, don't let yourself become distracted by impatience or technology. Instead, listen and watch those around you. Let God begin to show you the needs of others. Be brave and respond.



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LESSON SIX | BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Purity is a quality that is greatly desired in various substances. There is a global interest in developing strategies to maintain and preserve clean air and water.

Sadly, however, the pursuit of maintaining and possessing pure hearts is often neglected and even belittled.

I. A PURE HEART IS GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

Read: Matthew 5:8; Exodus 25:17-18, 22; Psalm 24:3-4a; Matthew 5:48

TALK ABOUT IT: Do you have a favorite room or space in your home? Describe what you like about the place?

THINK ABOUT IT: Seeing God, or having unlimited access to His presence, is a widely-accepted concept among believers today. But to the Jewish audience Jesus taught, the idea of seeing God was something unattainable and unbelievable.

The surprising statement Jesus makes in Matthew 5:8 was communicating a change in God's choice for His dwelling place. God was revealing His desire to inhabit the hearts of His children.

Jesus' bold declaration, however, was not communicating a shift in God's standard for that location. The idea that the pure in heart will see God is not simply a future vision of Him in Heaven; it's an identification of those

who are qualified and enabled to dwell in the presence of God here on earth.

II. HOW TO ACHIEVE A PURE HEART

Read: Matthew 23:25-28; 1 Samuel 16:7; Isaiah 29:13

TALK ABOUT IT: Have you ever encountered someone who flattered you, but you sensed they were not genuine? Have you ever realized someone did a favor for you only because they were expecting something in return? How does that make you feel?

THINK ABOUT IT: During the time of Jesus, a Jewish sect called the Pharisees were considered by many to be the holiest and purest in Jewish society.

The Pharisees became so consumed and obsessed with the Law's outward works that they missed the heart of God behind His commands.

We, like the Pharisees, can falsely believe that by working hard enough at doing good deeds, we will earn God's love and approval. It's important to remember that Jesus did not say, "Blessed are those who do good deeds, for they shall see God."

III. A PURE HEART PRODUCES GOOD WORKS

Read: Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 7:16-18; Jeremiah 17:9-10; Proverbs 20:9



TALK ABOUT IT: We have all heard the old adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Why is this important? How do we apply this to ourselves and other believers?

THINK ABOUT IT: Purity is a matter of the heart, but it is not limited exclusively to the heart. Good works could never produce a pure heart within us, yet we will eventually and consistently produce good works and pure actions if we have a pure heart.

God does not want simply to change our behavior. He wants to transform and purify our hearts.

Jesus' declaration that God could be seen by anyone with a pure heart must have caused the listening crowds to wonder in disbelief.

Salvation is possible not only because Jesus shed His blood, but because His actions were the product of a truly pure heart. Now, hearts made pure by the blood of Christ produce Christ-like character and actions.

Thus, the primary concern for those who want to see God is to trust in Christ rather than strive for good behavior.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Is it possible to do the right things for the wrong reasons? Have you ever discerned or discovered someone doing this? Should we call this commendable or deceptive?
- 2) Do you ever take for granted the access you have to God's presence through salvation?
- 3) If our actions can't produce a pure heart, how do you avoid the temptation of finding pride in your good deeds?
- 4) What are the kinds of things that the Lord loves—things that the Spirit of God is

specifically telling you—that He wants you to love?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES:

Ephesians 5:1-21; Psalm 51

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study Ephesians 5:1-21 or Psalm 51. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.

2) "We can be tempted to rely solely on outward behavior as the ultimate indication for purity...But God does not want simply to change our behavior. He wants to transform and purify our hearts." This week, spend time considering the purity of your life. Have you found yourself relying on good works to confirm your purity? Or do you lean into the finished work of Jesus? Allow the conviction and assurance of the Holy Spirit to renew your heart.

3. Being pure in heart requires us to confess when we have fallen short. Spend time each day in prayer confessing any known sinful attitudes and actions and asking for forgiveness. Having confessed and asked for forgiveness, we have God's assurance that He has forgiven us. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12).



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LESSON SEVEN | BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Jesus invites us to live according to the laws of the Kingdom of the heavens. The Beatitudes don't point to some future reality, some unattainable goodness we may enjoy if we're good enough. Jesus declares that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and these Beatitudes are His invitation to pledge allegiance to a new King and His Kingdom.

I. GOD'S CHILDREN DON'T MAKE NICE

Read: Matthew 5:9

TALK ABOUT IT: Peace was Jesus' parting gift to His disciples (see John 14:27). Is peace a "nothing:" the absence of conflict or trouble? Or is peace a "something"? Is there a difference between peacemaking and peacekeeping?

THINK ABOUT IT: We might confuse peacemaking with peace-possession, but Jesus doesn't consider those who have inner peace or contentment blessed.

Jesus also doesn't bless the "peaceable," the kind of person who avoids quarrels and keeps to himself. That results in a false peace, one that pretends no conflict exists.

Peacemaking is different from peacekeeping.

Even from a spiritual perspective, God's commitment to peace in Jesus Christ is absolute. We who are beneficiaries of this peace, who enjoy God's fellowship and

friendship as a result of Jesus' sacrifice, cannot keep it perfectly. Our sanctification is an ongoing peacemaking on our behalf with a perfectly peaceful God.

II. WE MAKE THE KIND OF PEACE GOD MAKES

Read: Hebrews 9:11-15

TALK ABOUT IT: How does this passage relate to peacemaking? After reading it, how would you describe Jesus' way of making peace? Can you think of examples of peacemaking from Jesus' ministry?

THINK ABOUT IT: All the Beatitudes are an invitation to participate in the divine life that Jesus announces. With this beatitude, then, Jesus invites us to join Him in imitating the Father's peacemaking.

God's idea of peace is far richer than our own. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, suggests a deep sense of wholeness and safety.

The peace that comes through Jesus, as the passage from Hebrews illustrates, is costly and complete, as opposed to cheap and incomplete.

Peacemakers in God's kingdom pursue this sort of peace. They are not content to "live and let live." Instead, they are willing to sacrifice time and treasure to see peace realized.



III. WE MAKE PEACE LIKE JESUS

Read: Ephesians 2:11-17

TALK ABOUT IT: How does Jesus make peace? What actions do you see mentioned or suggested in the read-aloud passage?

THINK ABOUT IT: Peacemaking takes courage. Peacemakers often take blows from both sides. They are accused of compromise and cowardice because they are not afraid to approach and understand all parties. It takes courage to bear these wounds, as Jesus well knew.

Peacemaking requires conviction. True peacemakers love peace and harmony and unity but never abandon their allegiance to Jesus and His Word. But while we look with hope toward a final, eternal peace, sometimes we cannot achieve temporal peace.

Peacemaking aims for communion, not compromise.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) How is peacemaking costly? What does it require from us?
- 2) What practical things can we do to encourage peace?
- 3) What do we do when other individuals do not reciprocate our efforts at peacemaking?
- 4) Have you ever experienced a conflict that required you to actively build peace? What did you do?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURE:

Romans 5

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Use the Bible Study Handout and Worksheet to study this week's At-Home Scripture: Romans 5. Bible study is an essential part of your life with God. Paying close attention to the verses you read offers the greatest opportunity of hearing God's Word speak to your life. Don't rush as you read. Take your time.
- 2) Begin memorizing the Beatitudes this week. This keeps their words firmly planted in your heart.
- 3) Pray. Prepare your heart. Reach out to a friend or family member that you often experience conflict with and have a conversation with them. Pray for God's blessing to overflow into their life. Seek reconciliation and unity.



THE JOURNEY

LESSON EIGHT | BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

Persecution is a striking reality for many Christians around the world, but it's important that we think about persecution realistically. Ridicule does not equal persecution.

I. EXAMPLES OF PERSECUTION

Read: Matthew 5:10-12

TALK ABOUT IT: What is your response to the following facts?

- Every day, eight Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith.
- Every week, 182 churches or Christian buildings are attacked.
- Every month, 309 Christians are imprisoned unjustly.

THINK ABOUT IT: Matthew 5:10 highlights a powerful and often misunderstood statement. Jesus challenged His audience by declaring a different perspective of those facing difficult times. Jesus didn't want Christians to hope for opposition. He wasn't inviting His followers to chase rejection or live with self-pity.

Jesus provided a viewpoint on the possibility that following Him might lead to insults and punishment, but the persecuted ones can rejoice because their eternal reward is great.

II. ATTITUDES DURING PERSECUTION

Read: 2 Timothy 3:12-13

TALK ABOUT IT: What are your feelings regarding the opening conversation with the church friends? What are your feelings about Amber's story? What has been your attitude toward persecution? What are your thoughts when you hear Jesus' comments about persecution and Paul's remarks in 2 Timothy 3:12-13?

THINK ABOUT IT: Instead of returning persecution with hate, our response is to choose instead to live a godly life.

III. OUTCOMES OF PERSECUTION

Read: 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

TALK ABOUT IT: How do we often let struggles or persecution influence our relationships with Jesus? What can we learn from Paul's perspective to bring better outcomes?

THINK ABOUT IT: What do we learn when we face persecution? That we are in God's hands.

Though there is pain from these experiences, we can know we are blessed by God's protection and provision. No matter how we are treated, we are blessed as we bless others.

It's important that we remember the global church when we think about persecution. Christians in more than 60 countries face



persecution from their governments or neighbors because of their faith. At least 7,100 Christians were killed for faith-related reasons in 2015, up from at least 4,344 in 2014.

Let us remember that the apparent “blessings” of this world are not always the same as “blessings” in the kingdom of God.

CONVERSATION STARTERS:

- 1) Can we have attitudes like Larry, regardless of the level of persecution we face?
- 2) What can we do to remind us of persecution throughout church history and in the present?
- 3) How can we intentionally pray for the persecuted church?
- 4) What specific ways can we support ministries that are structured to assist those being persecuted?

AT-HOME SCRIPTURES:

1 Peter 3:1-4:6; 2 Corinthians 13:11

AT-HOME EXERCISES:

- 1) Glance at an image of planet earth—on your phone, computer, or a physical globe. Pray for people around the world who need to know of God's love.
- 2) Look again at the statistics of persecution. Pray for those being persecuted.
- 3) After Jesus spoke on the Beatitudes, He encouraged His audience to let their lights shine, so others would notice their good works and give glory to God (Matthew 5:16). How can followers of Christ be shining lights in a world of darkness? How can persecution, ridicule, rejection, and mockery motivate God's children to show kindness instead of

hate?

- 4) What five areas of your life can you display the light of Christ better? What five people do you know (who are not followers of Christ) you can intentionally show more of His love toward? What five nations should you begin praying for daily? What five missionaries can you support in some way?

