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# WHAT'S IN YOUR TEACHING GUIDE

This Teaching Guide has three purposes:

- to give the teacher tools for focusing on the content of the session in the Study Guide.
- to give the teacher additional Bible background information.
- to give the teacher variety and choice in preparation.

The Teaching Guide includes two major components: Teacher Helps and Teacher Options.

## Teacher Helps

### Bible Background

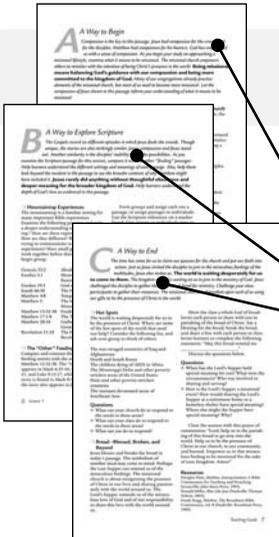
The Study Guide is your main source of Bible study material. This section helps you more fully understand and interpret the Scripture text.



### Teaching Outline

provides you with an outline of the main themes in the Study Guide.

## Teacher Options



The next three sections provide a beginning, middle, and end for the session, with focus paragraphs in between.

### Focus Paragraphs

are printed in italics at the top of the page because they are the most important part of the Teaching Guide. These paragraphs will help you move your class from “what the text meant” to “what the text means.”

## You Can Choose!

There is more material in each session than you can use, so choose the options from each section to tailor the session to the needs of your group.

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### Prepare Before the Session

Read the session for today in the Study Guide. Then read the options in this Teaching Guide, placing checkmarks beside the activities you plan to include. After you have decided which options to use, gather the appropriate materials.

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# HOLINESS AS A STATE OF BEING

*Matthew 5:1-16*

## Bible Background



The Sermon on the Mount appears in Matthew as the first of five sections containing Jesus' teachings. Here at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus explains what life in the kingdom of God is like.

The setting is important. When Jesus saw the crowds, he *went up* on the mountain (5:1). The setting differs a little from the parallel story in Luke 6:17-49. There, Jesus comes down from the mountain and stands on a level place. Thus, Luke's version is often called the Sermon on the Plain. In Luke, Jesus somewhat resembles Moses, who went up on the mountain to receive the revelation from God and then came down to deliver it to the people. In Matthew, Jesus is greater than Moses, for he speaks the revelation himself from the mountain. The revelation he speaks is about the kingdom of heaven and what life is like for those who are a part of it. At the end of Matthew, Jesus speaks on a mountaintop again in the Great Commission (28:16-20) and sends his disciples into the world to teach all nations about kingdom life.

Jesus reveals that disciples are to look at life in a radically new way. He does this by announcing a series of blessings (the Beatitudes). The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin word for blessed (*beati*). The word for "blessed" in Greek is *makarios*. In the Greco-Roman world this term

referred to rich people or the gods who were happy because their lives were free from trouble. In the Old Testament, the term "blessed" refers to people favored by God. The word did not in itself convey a blessing but rather stated one's condition of having been blessed. It could be rendered here as "Congratulations!"

The Beatitudes are either eight or nine in number, depending on how one understands verses 11 and 12, which do not follow the pattern of the first eight Beatitudes in that they are in the first person (Blessed are you...) rather than the third person (Blessed are those who...). The blessing in verses 11 and 12 is also much longer. The subject of these verses is very similar to the eighth Beatitude in verse 10, suggesting that verses 11 and 12 may be an elaboration on verse 10.

The Beatitudes identify those who are blessed and give the reason they should feel blessed. They are people who exhibit qualities of kingdom life. The Beatitudes extend congratulations to people whose experiences might appear to be the very opposite of what many might consider to be "blessed." They appear to live lives of struggle. They are the lowly (poor in spirit, meek), the grieving, and the persecuted. They are also those who pursue a higher spiritual calling (pure in heart, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, showing mercy, making peace). Such persons often find themselves on the losing side in the world's power struggles.

But the Beatitudes offer good news to those who have put their trust in God and who, despite the present hardships, live in the hope-generating light of the coming kingdom.

While the orientation of the Beatitudes points toward the future, the Beatitudes also show that the future has already begun to affect the present. Note that some of them refer to a future change in circumstances (v. 4, those who mourn shall be comforted), but others speak about present realities (v. 3, the poor in spirit already have the kingdom). The kingdom is not yet here in its fullness, but its approach is already changing the shape of life in the present.

Jesus then speaks about what those who have been blessed should do (vv. 13-16). They should be “salt” in the world (v. 13). The salt metaphor can have several meanings, but most likely it refers to salt’s chief use in “preserving” food. Without salt, most food in the ancient world perished quickly. Salt was often mixed with useless materials, so not all salt was of equal value. To be effective, salt had to be rubbed into the food (Smith, 31). For disciples to be effective, they must be in contact with the world. If they refuse to risk exposure to the world, which is impure and perishing, then they become useless as vessels of God’s blessing.

Disciples should also function as “light” (vv. 14-16). The light image appears often in Scripture. Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 state that Israel was to be a “light to the nations [Gentiles].” Jesus spoke of himself as the “light of the world” (Jn 8:12). Paul said that Christians are to shine as “lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). Jesus makes the point that the purpose of light is to illuminate. The blessing received is intended to be a blessing given.

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Jesus’ teaching about holiness in the Sermon on the Mount begins by announcing the blessings he gives to us and commanding us to share them.

- I. Jesus teaches his disciples on a mountain in Galilee (5:1-2).
- II. The Blessing of Holiness Received: The Beatitudes (5:3-12)
  - A. Those who humbly trust in God have already experienced kingdom life (v. 3).
  - B. Those who grieve are assured of consolation (v. 4).
  - C. Those who are humble shall receive the fullness of life (v. 5).
  - D. Those who eagerly seek holiness will find it (v. 6).
  - E. Those who show mercy shall also receive it (v. 7).
  - F. Those who seek God shall find what they seek (v. 8).
  - G. Those who labor for peace are God’s own children (v. 9).
  - H. Those who suffer for their pursuit of holiness already know God’s joy (v. 10).
  - I. Those who experience unjust treatment shall be vindicated (v. 11).
- III. The Blessing of Holiness Given: Salt and Light (5:13-16)
  - A. We should be as salt in the earth, enriching the lives of others (v. 13).
  - B. We should be as a light to the world so that others may see the blessing of God (v. 14-16).

# A Way to Begin

*This unit seeks to help learners find a greater sense of holiness and wholeness by studying the Sermon on the Mount. This session focuses on holiness as a state of being. Much of the Sermon on the Mount deals with what we are to do, but here we are concerned first with who we are. **The teacher's task is to help learners come to a fuller understanding of who they are as children of God.** We approach this goal first by taking inventory. How do we see ourselves? Do we see ourselves as good people, or do we focus on our faults and see ourselves as somehow bad? Jesus' word in the Sermon on the Mount is good news for us. In order to hear the "good" news, however, we must be aware of the bad. It is in our awareness of what is wrong in our lives that we can rejoice in God's good news about what is right with our lives. The aim is to help broaden our vision so that we can see beyond the bad to the good.*

## ○ Measuring Ourselves

Ask the group to name persons they consider "good" people. Write the names they mention on the board. Then ask, "Why do we consider these people 'good'?" Encourage the group to agree on some definition of what constitutes a "good" person.

Then ask them to measure themselves by these people. What qualities in the lives of those they have identified as good are lacking in their own lives? Ask them whether they see these qualities as unattainable or something they might attain if they wanted. Ask them how comparing themselves to these people makes them feel.

Now ask the group to think about accomplishments they can recall that make them feel good about themselves and why. Ask them to think of something they have done in the past week that they would consider a good deed. Why did they do it? Finally, ask them if thinking about the good things they have done makes them feel better about themselves.

## Questions

- Why do we feel bad when we make mistakes?
- Do we let other people's opinions of us affect the way we see ourselves?
- What kinds of achievements make us the most proud of ourselves?

## ○ I Am Somebody

Direct the group's attention to the Reflecting section of their *Seeking Holiness* study guide. Remind the class that Jesse Jackson was born as an illegitimate child. Ask them to think what it meant to Jesse Jackson to stand before crowds and claim, "I am somebody." Then ask them to think about what Jesse Jackson was trying to do by telling poor African Americans to tell themselves, "I am somebody."

Then read the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount in today's text. Ask the class to think about the people to whom Jesus spoke. Most of them were poor, uneducated peasants suffering under the oppression of the Romans. People in power considered many of them insignificant. The religious leaders might have viewed them as hopelessly lost in their sins. Discuss what the Beatitudes might have meant to those people. Ask, "Do you think hearing the Beatitudes would have helped Jesus' listeners to feel better about themselves?" Discuss the reasons they think Jesus' words would or would not have had a positive effect on his listeners' self-image.

## Questions

- Why do people sometimes have a low opinion of themselves?
- Why is it important to have healthy self-esteem?

# B A Way to Explore Scripture

Sometimes, biblical texts are so familiar to us that we fail to hear any new message. The Beatitudes are among the most familiar passages we know. We may assume we already know what they mean. When Jesus first delivered these words, they brought shocking news. They called for seeing the world in a different light. They led his listeners to see themselves differently. **The goal for this session is to let the Beatitudes speak to us with the same freshness they held for their first hearers.** To that end, it is important to point out some aspects of these teachings that may not be known to most learners. Read the Bible Background section of this Teaching Guide carefully, interjecting any points into your presentation that you think will offer a new perspective for your class.

## ○ Hearing the Beatitudes

Bring several translations of the Beatitudes to the class. Try especially to get a copy of Clarence Jordan's translation in the Cotton Patch Version. Have people read the different versions. Discuss any new insights they have received from hearing the Beatitudes today. Use the Outline for Teaching to study each Beatitude. In each Beatitude, Jesus identifies a group of persons who are blessed and then explains why they are blessed. With each Beatitude, try to relate the group identified with the reason given for their blessedness. For example: What does "poor in spirit" mean? Who are the people who "hunger and thirst for righteousness"?

## ○ Comparing Beatitudes

Compare the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 to those in Luke 6:20-23. Note in particular the first and second Beatitudes in Luke's version. Luke reads, "Blessed are the poor" (v. 20) and "Blessed are you that hunger now" (v. 21). Matthew's version has "poor in spirit" (v. 3) and "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (v. 6). Discuss the significance of these differences. Point out that Luke's Gospel seems to have a special concern for the poor. Also note that in ancient Judaism the "poor" represented persons who were close to God. Because of their poverty, they were more dependent upon God than people who were wealthy and tended to trust in themselves.

Some Jews, however, believed that affluence was a sign of God's favor and poverty a sign of God's disfavor. Discuss which view Jesus seemed to have. Point out that Matthew's version highlights the spiritual condition of the poor. They were not "poor" spiritually; they were humbly dependent upon God. Thus, the "poor in spirit" were, in a sense, "rich in spirit."

## ○ Salt and Light

Lead the class to consider what Jesus meant by the metaphor of salt. Talk about the different uses for salt in the ancient world. Consider how each of these uses might be applied to the meaning of "salt" in Jesus' teaching. Then point out that the chief use of salt then was to preserve food. Also, it often diluted with other materials. The Romans levied a tax on salt, so merchants often mixed it with useless materials so that they could sell more. Sometimes purchased salt would have little real preserving power. Discuss what salt as a preservative means for understanding Jesus' teaching.

Discuss the light metaphor Jesus used. Discuss light's function of illuminating things. Ask whether Jesus meant that disciples *should* shine as lights or *would* inevitably shine as lights. Ask: What were the uses of salt in ancient times? How can Christians function as salt? What does it mean for Christians to shine as lights?

# C A Way to End

Often, as Christians, we busy ourselves with “doing the Lord’s work.” We contentiously try to do good deeds and live morally respectable lives. When we succeed in our efforts, we feel good about ourselves. When we fail, we feel bad.

We are called to do good, as the rest of the Sermon on the Mount will remind us, but we should not forget that the holiness to which we are called begins by recognizing who we are. We are children of God who have been blessed by God’s amazing grace. Our true joy comes from who we are. Holiness is, first of all, a state of being.

**Close this session by claiming God’s affirmation of us as holy children.**

Consider using some of these exercises as you lead your class to affirm themselves.

## ○ Personalized Beatitudes

Ask the learners to compose their own version of the Beatitudes. Have each person write eight different statements that express the meaning of the Beatitudes in contemporary terms. Instruct them not to use any of the words in the actual Beatitudes. They must express their meaning in other terms. Also instruct them to write their Beatitudes in such a way that they communicate what kind of persons they think should be blessed by God. For example, “Blessed are those who pay their tithes, for they find joy in supporting the Lord’s work.”

After they have written their personalized Beatitudes, have them read them aloud and explain why they wrote what they did.

## Questions

- How can we remind ourselves that we carry God’s blessing with us always?
- How can we communicate our sense of being blessed by God in inoffensive ways?
- How can we translate our sense of being blessed into our relationships?

## ○ Closing Affirmation

Ask the class members to join together in this closing litany of affirmation. The litany is also provided on page 23 if you want to make copies.

I am blessed.

I may not know all that I need to know about God,  
but I am blessed.

I may not do all that I should do for God,  
but I am blessed.

I may not yet be all that God wants me to be,  
but I am blessed.

I may disappoint myself, others, and God every day,  
but I am blessed.

I am blessed

because I am a child of God.

# 2

## HOLINESS THAT EXCEEDS OUR EXPECTATIONS

*Matthew 5:17-48*

### *Bible Background*



This section of the Sermon on the Mount contains several of Jesus' most difficult teachings.

This difficulty lies less in trying to understand what Jesus means in the verses than in trying to do what he says. In fact, these verses advocate such demanding Christian behavior that many interpreters have argued that they are impossible to obey. In the early church, many decided that only priests and monks were capable of living by these rigid standards. Others have suggested that they are ideals and that Jesus never expected people to be able to keep them. Still others have said that because Jesus himself expected the world to end soon, he thought that his disciples would have to live according to such strict guidelines only for a while. Finally, some have decided that the ethical ideals Jesus teaches here will only be kept when God's kingdom arrives in its fullness (see Nash, 1-5).

If we assume that Jesus did not give teachings that were irrelevant or inapplicable for our lives, then we must try to understand what he said and try to heed his words. Much of what he said in this section concerns the law of Moses. Some interpreters have seen Jesus' teachings here as a new law intended to replace the law of Moses. More likely, though, Jesus was advocating a new approach to holiness that transcends law altogether.

What Jesus said about the law should be seen in light of the role the Mosaic law played in the life of ancient Judaism. Jews considered the law to be God's great gift to them. It defined the way of life they were to live as God's people. If they obeyed the law, they believed, they would enjoy the righteous life that God intended. Sometimes, the teaching of the law was clear, but at other times considerable differences arose about its interpretation. Also, the law did not directly address every situation they faced. The task of interpreting the law fell to the scribes and other legal experts. Some of these were rabbis with circles of followers. A council of elders, the Sanhedrin, rendered decisions about applying the law. The Sanhedrin contained members of particular groups such as the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees, who considered the five books of Moses to be the most authoritative Scripture, tended to be more conservative in their interpretation of the law. The Pharisees, who considered the books of the Prophets to be authoritative along with the Pentateuch (first five books), tended to be more liberal in their interpretations. The Pharisees (and others) also gave great weight to respected scholars who had given their interpretations of the law. Sometimes these rulings, which were passed down as oral tradition, were considered as authoritative as the written law itself.

Different schools of thought had developed about the interpretation of

specific parts of the law, such as divorce. The most famous schools were those of Shammai and Hillel. Regarding divorce, Shammai said that Moses' law allowed for divorce only in cases of infidelity by the wife. Hillel, however, argued that almost any "impurity" on the wife's part could constitute legal grounds for divorce. Jesus' teaching on this subject (5: 31-32) clearly sides with the more conservative Shammai in that he said that anyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality (*porneia* in Greek) causes her to commit adultery. Interestingly, in Mark 10:11-12 and Luke 16:18, Jesus is even more strict, saying that no legitimate grounds exist for divorce. It appears that Matthew added the "except" clause, perhaps to align Jesus' position with the famous view of Shammai and to stress that Jesus had a high regard for the law.

Clearly, Jesus did regard the Mosaic law highly. He said, "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (5:19). He stressed that he had come to fulfill, not to abolish, the law (5:17). He also said that his disciples' righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, the very people recognized as most devoted to the law (5:20).

The rest of this section (5:21-48) gives Jesus' radical reinterpretation of the law and describes what "exceeding righteousness" involves. His six teachings here are called the Six Antitheses. That is, they are antithetical to the law. Jesus fulfills the law by calling for obedience that exceeds the written word. He redirects our attention beyond the written words of the law to the deeper, inner intentions of the law. In doing so, he shows us that true holiness involves more than simply keeping the rules. True holiness is a matter of aligning our hearts and minds with the purpose of God. This purpose is pointed to in the law, but it cannot be wholly contained within any set of rules.

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

Introduction: Jesus' teachings are demanding. We are called to pursue a kind of holiness that exceeds normal expectations by redirecting our lives and transforming the way we relate to others.

- I. Holiness as Exceeding Righteousness: Holiness and the Law (5:17-20)
  - A. Jesus came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it (vv. 17-19).
  - B. Our holiness must be more than "law keeping" (v. 20).
- II. Holiness as the Redirection of Life: The Six Antitheses (5:21-48)
  - A. We must control angry feelings as well as harmful actions (vv. 21-26).
  - B. We must control immoral thoughts as well as immoral acts (vv. 27-30).
  - C. We must value marriage as a holy institution (vv. 31-32).
  - D. We must speak the truth, plainly and clearly (vv. 33-37).
  - E. We must respond to injustice creatively, not vengefully (vv. 38-42).
  - F. We must love those who do not love us (vv. 43-48).

# A Way to Begin

*This section of the Sermon on the Mount has probably created more anxiety on the part of Christians than any other part of the Bible. Critics of the church often point to these verses as evidence that Christians are not sincere in their commitment to Jesus because they do not do what he says to do. For these verses to be meaningful to us, we must recognize the tension they can create. **One goal we have in appreciating these verses is to explore why they create tension and anxiety.** What is it about Jesus' teachings here that makes them so hard to understand? More importantly, what makes them so hard to obey? Can we, or should we, even try to obey them?*

*As you introduce your class to the tension in these verses, consider the options below.*

## ○ Exceeding Our Expectations

Read the story of the professor's surprise at the generosity of the small country church in the *Seeking Holiness* study guide. Ask the members to recall times when they have received more than they were expecting. Point out that this can involve any kind of experience, not only receiving more money than was expected.

After they have shared their experiences, ask them today's central question: "Do you expect too much or too little of yourself?" Ask them to be specific in explaining in what ways they expect too much or too little of themselves. Then ask them to think about why their expectations are too high or too low. Ask them if they hold others to the same standard of expectation that they have for themselves.

## Question

- Why do we often have low expectations of ourselves? Of others? Of God?

## ○ The Gospel as Gift and Demand

Frank Stagg wrote, "Salvation is God's gift in mercy and forgiveness, but his demands are not thus relaxed" (108). In his teaching, Stagg often insisted that the gospel is both gift and demand. Salvation comes as a free gift of God's grace, but it carries with it a strong demand for godly living. Stagg took Jesus' demands in the Sermon on the Mount very seriously. He tried to do as Jesus said, and he tried to persuade his students to do the same.

Ask the class to consider whether Jesus' teachings in this section are realistic. Point out that many interpreters have argued that Jesus was only giving us an ideal set of ethical teachings and that he never expected people to be able to keep them. Remind them that the medieval church distinguished between "precepts" that were binding on all Christians and "evangelical counsels" that were binding only on priests and monks. They considered Jesus' teachings in this section to be the latter. Tell them also that Albert Schweitzer said that Jesus gave these instructions as an "interim ethic" because he did not think the world would remain long before the kingdom came. Therefore, disciples could keep these demands for a short time. Inform them that C. I. Schofield held that Jesus' teaching would only be applicable at some time in the future when God's kingdom does come in fullness.

After some discussion, read the statement made by Frank Stagg above. Explain Stagg's view that the gospel is both gift and demand. Ask them to discuss this view and then relate it to the teachings in today's text.

## Questions

- Why do some people think Jesus' teachings in this text are unrealistic?
- How can we take Jesus' teachings seriously if we think they are unrealistic?
- How demanding do we think the gospel should be?

# B A Way to Explore Scripture

*These verses contain plenty of topics for fruitful discussions. **The discussion will be more productive if the class can appreciate the role of the Mosaic law in Jewish society.** Christians have often attributed the Jews with certain attitudes toward their law that their own writings expose as false. The Jews saw the law as a blessing, not a curse. Here in these verses, Jesus affirms the authority and respect that Jews gave to this law. Christians must decide what their attitude toward the law of Moses should be. They must also see that Jesus went beyond the demands of the written law and focused on God's intention behind the law. In exploring the Six Antitheses, the class can begin to see what Jesus was trying to teach us about God's intention.*

*Getting a sense of what these verses actually teach will help prepare the class to consider what application they should make of these verses to their own lives. To that end, consider these approaches to studying the text.*

## ○ The Law of Moses and Jesus

Jesus said that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (v. 17). He also said that no one should break that law or teach others to do so (v. 19). Read the Ten Commandments aloud (Exodus 20:1-17). The Ten Commandments were only a small part of the Mosaic law. Faithful Jews believed that God had given them the law as a special gift so they could enjoy the full life God intended. They didn't see the law as a burden God had placed on them. They believed God gave them the law because God loved them and wanted them to have the best life possible. Keeping the law was a joyful blessing, even though it was often difficult to do.

Ask the class to explain what they think Jesus meant when he said that he had not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Then ask them to consider whether or not Jesus expected his followers (including us) to keep the law. Ask them, "If we are to keep the law, how much of it should we keep?" Finally, ask them to explain what they think Jesus meant when he said that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

## Questions

- How did Jews view the law of Moses?
- What did Jesus mean by "fulfilling" the law?

- What should be the attitude of Christians toward the law of Moses?

## ○ Exploring the Antitheses

Explain why Jesus' words in Matthew 5:21-48 are called the Six Antitheses. Focus first on the first and second of these teachings (vv. 21-26 and 27-30). These deal with anger and lust. Ask the class to consider whether it is ever right to be angry. Have them explain their answers. If time allows, focus on the fifth and sixth (vv. 38-42 and 43-48). Explain the idea of *lex taliones*. This was the law regarding retaliation in the Mosaic law. Before the time of Moses, Middle Eastern societies waged "blood feuds." If anyone harmed a member of a tribe, it was the obligation of the members of that tribe to avenge the wrong by killing the offender. The law of Moses curbed that practice by limiting revenge to a like action: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Point out that the purpose of the law was to contain retaliation, not to promote it. Then, for the last antithesis, point out that while Leviticus 19:18 calls for love of the neighbor, the Mosaic law does not call for hatred of the enemy. Ask them to discuss why they think Jews would have added these words to the commandment about loving the neighbor.

## C A Way to End

*Discussing the tension in Jesus' teachings is one thing. Trying to apply them to our lives is a far more difficult task. **The challenge for the class in the end is to make the teachings meaningful for their lives.** If we accept that Jesus' teachings should be taken seriously, then we must also accept some obligation to live them out in our lives. Doing that is never easy.*

*In bringing this session to a close, try to help the class find ways to apply Jesus' teachings. The first option below suggests one way to take a particular part of this text and apply it to problems we face. The other option calls for serious reflection on a major problem facing our nation and how we should view that problem in the light of Jesus' words.*

### ○ Creative Nonviolent Resistance

Walter Wink has suggested that the fifth antithesis actually prescribes a way to resist domination nonviolently (Wink, 175–84). He points out that while a strike on the right cheek could be made with the fist by a right-handed person, the strike on the left cheek, which Jesus calls us to allow, can only be made by the back of the hand. Later Jewish law, which may reflect the custom in Jesus' day, levied a greater penalty for the back-handed slap than for the full punch with the fist. In a similar way, poor defendants in lawsuits were protected from having their garments taken by their creditors. To give the undergarment to an oppressive creditor who had seized the poor person's outer garment would have been an indictment of the creditor's character. He had shamelessly forced a poor person to become naked, thereby exposing the creditor's greater shame. And the willingness to go a second mile when compelled by someone (probably a Roman soldier impressing a peasant into service) would have made that person liable for breaking the law regarding impressment. Thus, Jesus was not advocating passive submission to domination by others. He was teaching how to resist such domination in ways that would lead the oppressor to see the error of such oppression.

Invite the class to think of creative ways resistance can be accomplished.

### ○ Jesus Speaks

The fifth and sixth antitheses can speak to American Christians struggling in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Our nation is currently engaged in a "war on terror." Deciding how these verses speak to us now is as difficult as it is important. Ask them to consider what his command to "love our enemies" means as it relates to persons we identify as enemies.

## 3

HOLINESS IN  
RELATION TO RELIGION*Matthew 6:1-18**Bible Background*

Jack Kingsbury has identified today's section of the Sermon on the Mount as the central section in the sermon (136-42).

When we look at the design of the Sermon on the Mount, we see that before this section comes an introduction (5:3-16), identifying those who practice holiness, and a major section devoted to teachings about practicing holiness toward others (5:17-48). After today's text comes a major section dealing with practicing holiness in various parts of our lives (6:19-7:12) and a conclusion containing several diverse commands about practicing holiness (7:13-27). Today's text discusses practicing our holiness before God (6:1-18). Furthermore, this central section has three parts: teachings on almsgiving (vv. 2-4), prayer (vv. 5-15), and fasting (vv. 16-18). The major part here has to do with prayer, and within this part, the Lord's Prayer holds the central position. In a sense, then, the Lord's Prayer stands at the very center of the Sermon on the Mount.

This section begins with Jesus' warning that certain perils lie in wait for us as we attempt to put our holiness into practice. "Beware of practicing your piety before others," Jesus warned (v. 1). Jesus' words here become clearer if we observe the role of personal piety in Jewish tradition.

For most Jews of Jesus' day the center of their religion was the temple in Jerusalem. From the time that Solomon built the temple in the tenth century BC until the time it was destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC, it had stood as a visible reminder of God's presence with the people of Israel. There, the people as a nation offered up sacrifices to God and performed rituals that demonstrated their devotion to God. The Babylonian destruction of the temple was a national calamity and the cause of deep mourning. The temple built by the Judeans who returned from Babylonian exile near the end of the sixth century was a modest structure, but nonetheless it functioned as a unifying institution for all descendants of Israel wherever they were scattered. When Herod the Great refurbished the temple beginning in the first century BC, he converted it into a magnificent complex that served as a source of pride for Jews throughout the world. This temple embodied the Jewish sense of being elected by God as a special people. The activities that occurred at the temple, however, were essentially public displays of national piety, not personal devotion to God.

Personal piety was expressed through devotion to the law of Moses and to the kinds of pious deeds discussed by Jesus in these verses. Individuals prayed, gave alms, and some fasted on a regular basis. The law of Moses prescribed the giving of alms to help the poor (Deut 14:28-29).

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

Every three years tithes were to be collected and stored for distribution to the poor. Also, when crops were harvested, some was to be left for the poor to glean (Deut 14:19-21). Providing alms for the poor came to be considered a meritorious act. One might earn favor with God or even receive forgiveness of sins by giving alms. Wealthy persons could also demonstrate their devotion to God by generous giving. According to later Jewish tradition, Herod's temple contained a room called the Chamber of Secrets. Persons could drop off their alms secretly, and the poor could maintain their dignity by secretly withdrawing funds from the chamber. The practice of almsgiving, therefore, contained potential for truly magnanimous generosity and giving for enhancement of one's image.

The Jewish customs regarding personal prayer also held opportunities for sincere personal devotion and for pompous self-aggrandizement. There were set times for prayer (9:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M.). Jews could pause and pray set prayers or personal petitions at these times wherever they were. If they happened to be in a group gathered in the synagogue or among crowds of people in the market, then they had a ready audience if they chose to make their private prayer a public display of piety.

The law of Moses contains no requirement for regular fasting. The tradition developed, however, that people should fast on the Day of Atonement in the fall of the year. Certain Jewish groups, such as the Pharisees and the group led by John the Baptist, adopted the practice of regular fasts. The Pharisees fasted weekly on Mondays and Thursdays. Fasting was also customary on an individual basis in times of grief or personal spiritual struggle. The purpose of such fasting was generally to express sorrow, remorse, repentance, and commitment to God.

Jesus warned that any of these ways of expressing genuine devotion to God could become occasions for abuse toward selfish ends.

Introduction: Jesus warns us that certain perils lie in our path as we try to practice our religion.

- I. Holiness Expressed in Giving (6:2-4)
  - A. Seeking the praise of others for our giving has a limited reward (v. 2).
  - B. Giving without regard to self brings God's reward (v. 3).
  
- II. Holiness Expressed in Praying (6:5-15)
  - A. Using prayer to win praise brings no reward from God (vv. 5-6).
  - B. Using prayer to persuade God is unnecessary (vv. 7-8).
  - C. Jesus gave a model for praying (vv. 9-13).
  - D. For forgiveness to be received, it must also be given (vv. 14-15).
  
- III. Holiness Expressed in Fasting (6:16-18)
  - A. Fasting to draw attention to ourselves has a limited reward (v. 16).
  - B. Fasting without regard to self brings God's reward (vv. 17-18).

# A Way to Begin

Often when we think of holiness in relation to religion, we think of persons who are devout in performing certain actions. They may spend long hours in prayer and meditation. They may be fastidious in observing ethical principles. Today we may identify holy people in our midst as those who are faithful in church attendance and stewardship. They may be the ones who devote themselves to Bible study and visiting the sick and homebound. We may judge them to be holy because we can see what they do.

**In today's study we will try to understand the relationship between those outward actions that we usually associate with religion and the inner motivations that come from a genuine devotion to God.** Asking the class to discuss whether or not they consider themselves to be "religious," as well as what they understand being "religious" means, should help bring this issue to the surface.

## ○ Religion and Spirituality

Begin by asking the class: "Do you consider yourself a 'religious' person?" As they begin to discuss this question, lead the class to try to define religion. Try to arrive at a consensus about a definition.

Then point out that many people today prefer to say that they are "spiritual" rather than "religious." Point out also that the Knight Ridder newspaper network used to have a Saturday morning section in all their papers called "The Religion Section." Several years ago, they changed the name simply to "Spirituality." Then they changed the name again to "Life and Style: In Faith." Ask them why they think the newspapers made these changes. What message were they conveying? Ask them to discuss what distinction they would make between religion, spirituality, and faith.

## Questions

- Why do some people avoid the term "religion" in regard to Christianity?
- Why do some people claim to be "spiritual" but not "religious"?
- What negative characteristics do we associate with religion?

## ○ When Religion Becomes Evil

Baptist scholar Charles Kimball wrote a book titled *When Religion Becomes Evil*. It became a best seller.

Distribute page 24 to your group. This resource page includes Kimball's list of symptoms of religion that has become evil and ask the class to discuss each of the five statements. Ask them to consider ways in which Christianity has been guilty at times of having some of these symptoms. Point out that many critics of the church believe that all religion is inherently evil. They can easily cite instances in which great atrocities have been committed in the name of religion. Some argue that religion itself is the problem. Ask the class to name some problems existing in the world today that have to do with religion. Then, ask them to discuss whether they think the charge that religion itself is the problem is correct.

## Questions

- What's wrong with religion?
- Why do religious people engage in violent and destructive behavior in the name of their religion?
- How can we keep religion from becoming corrupted?

# B A Way to Explore Scripture

*In this text Jesus describes appropriate and inappropriate expressions of religion. Learning about Jewish customs in the first century can help us better understand what Jesus meant. Read the Bible Background section carefully to gain an understanding of the difference between public and private religion in ancient Judaism. The kinds of religious behavior that Jesus condemned in this passage were private practices that people performed as if they were public displays.*

*As you and the class read through this passage, pay careful attention to what Jesus stresses. He directs us to examine our inner motives when we express our devotion to God. Trying to keep our focus on God is not always easy, even when we are doing things intended to show our love for God.*

**The options given below are intended to help the class come to grips with the importance of keeping our focus on God in all of our outward expressions of our inner religious feelings.**

## ○ Using Religion to Gain Rewards

The word “religion” comes from a Latin word that means to “bind again.” The idea is that religion involves “bringing together” the divine and the human realms. Religion is how we “connect” with God. In antiquity, people wanted to connect with the gods so the gods would do something for them. Maybe they desired good health or rescue from danger. Religion was seen as a means to connect with the power of the gods and use that power for human purposes. They were seeking some kind of reward.

Ask the class to focus on what Jesus says in these verses about the “hypocrites” (vv. 2, 5, 16). Point out that the word “hypocrite” comes from a Greek word referring to actors in a play. They wore masks to hide their true faces. How does this image fit the persons Jesus described? Jesus said that hypocrites were people who used their religion to seek rewards.

## Questions

- What kinds of rewards were the hypocrites seeking? Are these legitimate rewards for a person to seek? Is it acceptable to seek these rewards through non-religious means?
- What kinds of rewards are appropriately sought through religion? What

kinds of rewards do you expect from your religion?

## ○ Exploring the Lord’s Prayer

Form six groups. Ask each group to study one of the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer. The six petitions are: (1) Hallowed be your name; (2) Your Kingdom come; (3) Your will be done; (4) Give us this day our daily bread; (5) Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors; and (6) Do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one. Allow at least ten minutes for them to discuss their petitions together, addressing these specific questions: What does this petition mean? How can it be fulfilled? What is this petition asking of God? What is it asking of us?

Then ask each group to share their responses for each question. Ask the class to discuss briefly the differences they have found in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew’s Gospel and the traditional version usually recited in churches. Observe that we usually say “trespasses” rather than “debts.” Ask them to discuss what they think about these differences.

The two verses that follow the Lord’s Prayer (vv. 14-15) speak about forgiveness, and this time Jesus refers to trespasses. Ask the class: Is God’s forgiveness of us conditional on our forgiveness of others?

# C A Way to End

*In many ways this part of the Sermon on the Mount is the most personal section. It deals directly with our personal relationship with God. **Studying this text should give us guidance in expressing our sense of devotion through concrete actions.** It reminds us that inner motive is crucial.*

*The goal of our study has been to understand Jesus' teachings so that we can apply them to our lives. As we close this session, we will accomplish this goal if we try to translate what we have learned into specific deeds. The text speaks specifically about giving to help the poor, praying, and fasting. Praying tends to be a normal part of our private devotion. Giving to help the poor and fasting are often not part of our lives. Translating Jesus' teaching on these two matters into concrete action is usually more demanding.*

*With this in mind, select one of the first two options below and encourage the class members to try to put into practice what they have learned from this study. Then close with prayer as described below.*

## ○ Alms for the Poor

Ask at least three members of the class to volunteer to serve on a task force that will investigate needs of poor people in your community. Ask them to propose to the class a mission project that will seek to provide assistance for the group they decide needs help. Inform them that the project should not be one that the church is already involved in, nor should it be one that class members can fulfill only by giving time and effort. It should be one they will seek to minister to chiefly by giving financially. Preferably, it will be a project in which the recipients of the class's generosity will not know who has helped them. The giving will be "in secret," as Jesus instructed. Schedule a time for the task force to present its findings and proposal to the class.

## ○ Try Fasting

Several years ago, largely through the influence of such books as Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, many Christians began to include fasting in their lives. If possible, read the chapter on fasting in Foster's book. Ask the class to discuss the merits and benefits of fasting. Also, allow them to express their concerns about the practice. Then, invite members of the class to try fasting one meal during

the coming week. Have those who agree to do this also agree on the meal they will skip. Ask them to commit to spending this mealtime in prayer and meditation instead of eating. Ask them specifically to pray for their fellow "fasters" during the appointed time. Then, ask them to be prepared to share something from their experience with the class at a future time.

## ○ A Closing Prayer

Bring the class session to a close with prayer. First, read to the class Clarence Jordan's Cotton Patch Version of the Lord's Prayer.

"Father of us, O Spiritual One,  
Your name be truly honored.  
Your kingdom spread, your will prevail  
through earth, as through the heavens.  
Sustaining bread grant us each day.  
Forgive our debts as we forgive  
the debts of all who cannot pay.  
And from confusion keep us clear;  
Deliver us from evil's sway."

Then, ask group members to pray silently for the Lord's guidance in helping them stay centered on God in all their expressions of holiness. Finally, close the prayer time by reciting together the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer.

## HOLINESS AND THE PRIORITIES OF LIFE

*Matthew 6:19-34*

### Bible Background



This section of the Sermon on the Mount describes how our quest for God's holiness should affect the various dimensions of life. This section actually continues to Matthew 7:12, but we will limit our focus to the rest of chapter 6. Much of chapter 7 deals with judgment: judging others (vv. 1-5), judging how to use God's gifts (v. 6), knowing to whom to look for guidance in judgment (vv. 7-11), deciding which road to follow (vv. 13-14), discerning true spiritual leaders from false ones (vv. 15-20), discerning true believers from false ones (vv. 21-23), and choosing which foundation on which to build our lives (vv. 24-27). Judging is also a concern here in our text for today. We must decide where we are going to place our priorities in life and to what we will give our ultimate trust. What or whom we trust in determines where we will place our priorities. Once again, Jesus calls us to center our lives on God.

Matthew 6:19-34 is rich in details that conjure up images of life in ancient Galilee. The land in which Jesus grew up and ministered is a fertile land filled with high, rolling hills. To the north and east are high mountains often shaded by fog. To the south is the widening vista of the fertile Jordan Valley. To the west lies the Carmel mountain range and beyond that the Mediterranean Sea. In the center of it

all is the beautiful lake called the Sea of Galilee. Villages by the lake were teeming with fishers peddling their catches. Rural peasants farmed the small fields of the valleys and the terraced groves on the slopes. Merchants and skilled craftsmen sold their wares and plied their trades in the villages and small towns. A few cities also stood in this area, but Jesus seems to have avoided those places. He spent his time in Galilee among the poorer folks who filled the land.

Much of the imagery Jesus used in his teachings contains elements of the life they experienced every day. For example, he spoke of earthly treasures being consumed by moths and rust. People in that humid climate knew the constant danger of having their clothes consumed by insects. Even if they could afford to possess more expensive garments, they ran the risk of losing them to the same insects that devoured their modest everyday apparel. Other treasures could also be consumed. He spoke of the threat of "rust." The term used in verses 19 and 20, *brōsis*, actually means "eaten away." Often the term was used to refer to food. Food stored in bins, such as grain, could be eaten away by vermin, and the residue of their visit spoiled what was left. Metal objects, which would have been highly prized since most vessels would have been made of ceramic material, were also subject to being eaten away by the elements. They could rust quickly in that

climate. Thieves could take what creatures or the elements did not consume. When Jesus spoke of thieves “breaking in” in verses 19 and 20, he used a word that literally means to “dig through.” Thieves could easily penetrate their homes, digging through mud, brick, and adobe to carry off what was hidden inside.

When he spoke of slaves, Jesus also used an image they knew well (v. 24). Even in Galilee, especially in the many Gentile villages and towns that were there, slavery was part of the fabric of life. People owned people. Some lives were at the disposal of their masters.

When he spoke about food, drink, and clothing, he knew that for many of his listeners securing enough of these basic necessities of life was a constant struggle (v. 25). Asking them not to be concerned about these matters was tantamount to asking them to cease from the efforts that occupied most of their waking hours.

He also talked about the birds of the air and the flowers and grasses of the fields (vv. 26, 28). These things were visible all around them. Green vegetation, bright flowers in the mountains and valleys, and flocks of gulls and songbirds were evident everywhere.

Jesus spoke in tangible terms when he talked about the priorities of life. He did not discuss the matter in abstract, philosophical language, though his words get to the heart of what many lofty philosophical discussions are really about. He spoke of priorities in the very context of life as most people know it, down in the trenches where it sometimes becomes difficult to keep our sights set on God.

As we study this passage today, we would do well to keep in mind that living out our holiness before God occurs amidst the demands of daily life. The sights and sounds that compose our everyday world are the pieces of that life we seek to live for God.

# Outline

## FOR TEACHING

Introduction: The Sermon on the Mount guides us to seek holiness by having the right priorities in life. Centering our lives on the wrong things, rather than centering our lives on God, prevents us from experiencing the fullness of life in God’s kingdom. We are called to trust in God to provide us with what we really need.

- I. Holy Priorities: Seeking the Right Things in Life (6:19-24)
  - A. Seek those heavenly treasures that have eternal worth (vv. 19-21).
  - B. Seek a life of integrity and wholeness (vv. 22-23).
  - C. Seek to serve God with undivided loyalty (v. 24).
  
- II. Holy Trust: Grounding Our Lives in God’s Goodness (6:25-34)
  - A. Do not worry about securing those things that sustain life (v. 25-27).
  - B. Do not worry about securing those things that adorn life (vv. 28-32).
  - C. Seek God’s kingdom and trust in God’s goodness (vv. 33-34).

# A Way to Begin

*This text compels us to examine our own lives to discover where we really place our priorities. Such examination will expose what truly matters to us. When we have seen what really matters to us, then we can compare the truth of our lives with Jesus' teaching in this section. Introspection of the kind called for by this text may be difficult. It will be important to engage the issues of this text in a way that persons are not threatened so much that they will refuse to hear what the text is saying. At the same time the penetrating truth of this text must be allowed to speak. Making the text personal will make it more meaningful. **This text has the power to transform our lives, if we are willing to let it speak.** Consider using one of the options below for beginning the class session.*

## ○ Composing Our Own Epitaphs

Read the epitaphs from the Rose Hill Cemetery found in the Reflecting section of the *Seeking Holiness* study guide. Ask the class to share any interesting epitaphs they may have seen. Then, ask participants to compose their own epitaph. Plan to bring enough paper and pens for all class members. Distribute these, and then allow a few minutes for them to compose the epitaphs. Tell them that the epitaph should express how they would want to be remembered.

After sufficient time, invite individuals to read their statements aloud. Encourage them to explain their reasons for writing what they did.

## Questions

- Why do some people have epitaphs engraved on their tombstones? Why do some people choose not to have epitaphs?
- What do epitaphs reveal about a person's life?
- What makes for a truly revealing epitaph?
- What are some ways we can get a sense of what is important to persons without reading their epitaphs?

## ○ Calendars and Checkbooks

Phillip Guedalla wrote a biography of the Duke of Wellington. The hardest part of writing the book, he said, was trying to get a sense of what kind of person

Wellington actually was. He found the key to determining this when he discovered the duke's old checkbooks. The stubs of the checkbooks gave him insight into Wellington's character. They revealed what really mattered to him.

Perhaps a look at our checkbooks would reveal a lot about us, too. Reviewing our pocket calendars would also tell us a lot about what we spend our time doing. These records reveal what truly matters to us.

Tell the story about Phillip Guedalla's experience. Ask class members to think about their own calendars and checkbooks. Perhaps some of them even have them with them in class. If they do, invite them to take them out and look at them. Whether they have them with them or not, ask them to think about whether or not these documents give an accurate picture of who they are. Use this question to begin a discussion about priorities in life.

## Questions

- What do our calendars say about how we spend our time?
- How do our calendars reveal what is important to us?
- What do our calendars say about our relationship with God?
- What do our checkbooks reveal about how we spend our resources?
- What do our checkbooks reveal about our priorities in life?
- What do our calendars and checkbooks say about the kind of people we are?

# B A Way to Explore Scripture

*We all struggle with setting the right priorities in life. We may have good intentions, but the demands of life too often shape what we do with our time, energy, and resources. The pressures of life create anxiety. Often, despite our good intentions, we focus on the needs of the moment and forget where our lives should be centered—on God.*

**Studying today’s text will remind us that it is important to keep life centered on God.** *It will remind us that many of the things we think are so important now really are not so important in the end. It will remind us that we can deal with the pressures of the moment if we can keep life’s demands in the right perspective. Ultimately, what truly counts is our relationship with God. Consider these options for guiding the study of today’s text.*

## ○ Earthly Treasures and Heavenly Treasures

Jesus spoke about not storing up treasures on earth, but rather storing up treasures in heaven. Paul’s letter to the Colossians is helpful for identifying the difference between some earthly treasures and heavenly ones.

First ask the class to consider Jesus’ words about earthly treasures (v. 19). Ask them to identify the kinds of treasures they think Jesus may have meant. As they name items, write them on the board. Then, ask them to name what they would consider legitimate goals to pursue. Write these next to the items already listed. Ask them to include tangible items in their list, such things as a nice home, a trustworthy car, appropriate clothes for work, and so on.

Then, ask them to identify what they think Jesus meant by heavenly treasures (v. 20). Write these on the board, too, as they name them. Then ask them to name dreams, goals, and objectives they find themselves working for that they would consider to be heavenly treasures. Write these on the board.

Now, direct the class’s attention to Colossians 3:1-17. Have someone read the text aloud. Then, ask them to identify what Paul would consider things of the earth. These are the things he says we should put to death. Ask if any of the things Paul names are things they would identify as earthly treasures. Then, ask them to identify the things Paul would consider things from above—the things he

says we should “put on.” Does Paul’s list match up with their list of heavenly treasures? Discuss what it would mean to store up in heaven the items that Paul names.

## Questions

- What did Jesus mean by earthly treasures? What did Jesus mean by heavenly treasures?
- How should we store up heavenly treasures?

## ○ Was Jesus a Cynic?

One New Testament scholar, John Dominic Crossan, has called Jesus a peasant Jewish Cynic. By Cynic he means a particular kind of wandering philosopher that was known in the world of Jesus’ day. Cynics questioned society’s standards and customs and believed human beings had become trapped in human traditions. They called for people to get back in touch with nature. They rejected social, racial, and religious divisions. They ridiculed people who spent their lives trying to obey society’s rules in order to win society’s rewards and rejected the idea of having possessions or working for a living. They depended on handouts for food. They questioned authority figures.

Jesus said not to worry about food, drink, or clothes (vv. 25-32). He said simply to trust that God would provide all these things (v. 33). Ask the class to discuss in what ways Jesus was like the Cynics.

## C A Way to End

**We now face the task of applying Jesus' teachings to our lives.** *Living out any part of the sermon is difficult, but trying to obey Jesus' words in this section is especially hard. To do what he says, we must change many things about the way we live. We might even have to reconsider the basic orientation of our life. We might feel compelled to make some fundamental changes.*

*But change is what the gospel is about. It is good news that comes into the midst of what is wrong with our lives and offers a way to become transformed. That transformation process continues throughout our lives. Each time we hear Jesus' good news, we find opportunity to transform more of our lives. We should not despair because the pursuit of holiness proves challenging. We should rejoice that Jesus has brought us light to see by on the journey.*

### ○ Practice Simplicity

Part of the difficulty in applying Jesus' teachings is that we are already so enmeshed in pursuing the objectives he warns against that we cannot conceive of ways to change. Richard Foster offers some specific suggestions for simplifying our lives. Find a copy *Celebration of Discipline*, and read the chapter on simplicity. Use his list of suggestions (also provided on page 25) to lead a discussion about ways we can try to live out Jesus' words.

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than for their status.
2. Reject anything that is producing an addiction in you.
3. Develop a habit of giving things away.
4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
6. Develop a deeper appreciation for creation.
7. Look with a healthy skepticism at all "buy now, pay later" schemes.
8. Obey Jesus' instructions about plain, honest speech.
9. Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
10. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

### ○ Seeking the Kingdom

Jesus said that we should seek God's kingdom and righteousness first of all (v. 34). But how do we do that? Invite the class to conclude today's session by thinking of ways we should seek God's kingdom. After they have suggested several ways, tell them about Soren Kierkegaard's struggle with this question and his conclusion. After telling his story, lead the class in silent prayer.

Soren Kierkegaard struggled with the question of how a Christian should seek the kingdom of God. He wondered if a person should find the right kind of work that would allow him to influence people to become more virtuous. He thought that perhaps one should give away all his or her money to help feed the poor. He questioned if perhaps the best thing to do would be to preach Jesus' message about seeking the kingdom to all the world. As he considered all the options that he could conceive, he always came back to the conclusion that none of them was correct. Instead, he decided that what one should do first and foremost was to seek God's kingdom. He concluded: "Then in a certain sense it is nothing I shall do. Yes, certainly, in a certain sense it is nothing, become nothing before God, learn to keep silent; in this silence is the beginning, which is, first to seek God's kingdom." (Foster, 86–87)

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# A LITANY OF AFFIRMATION

I am blessed.

I may not know all  
that I need to know about God,  
but I am blessed.

I may not do all  
that I should do for God,  
but I am blessed.

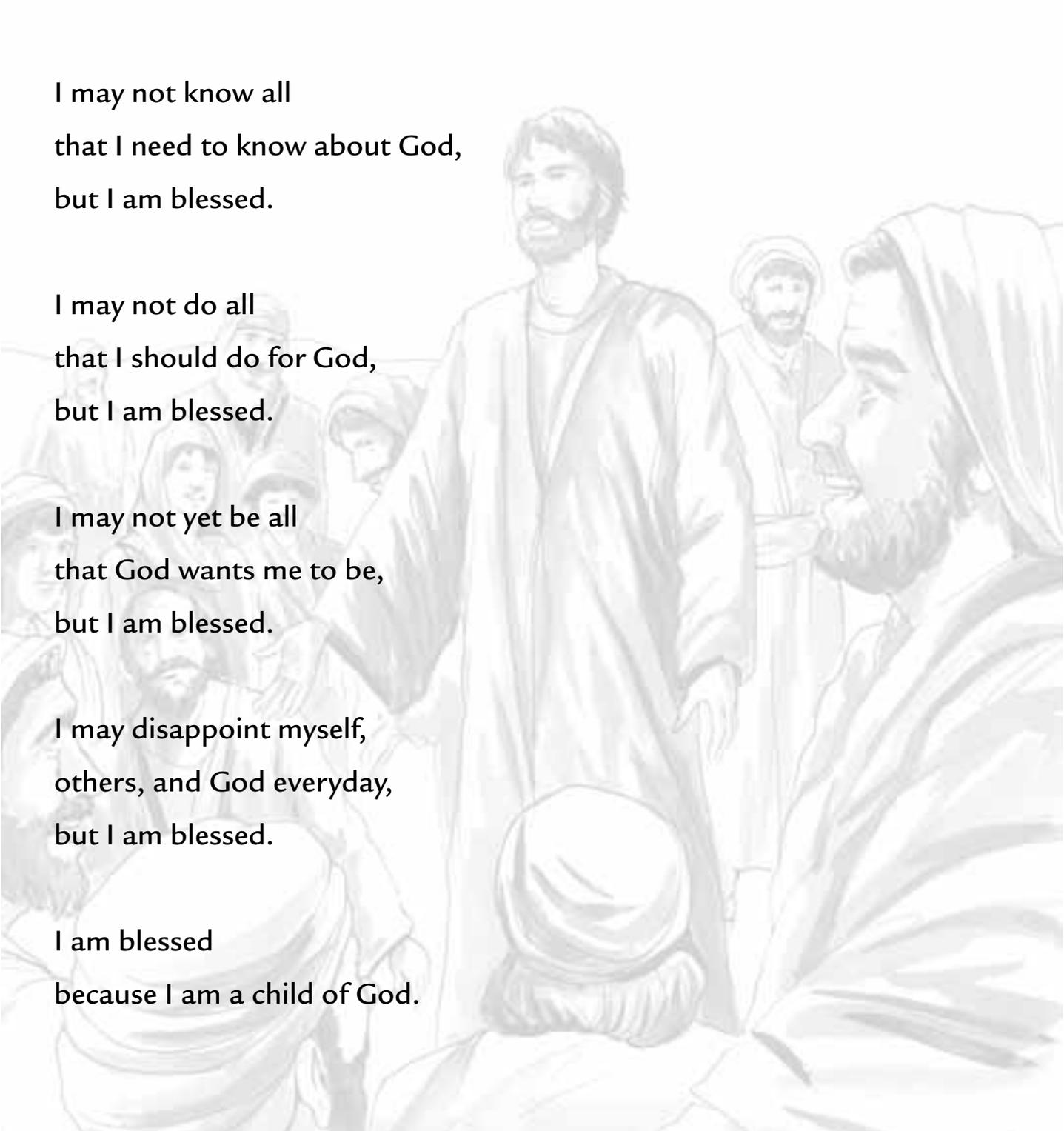
I may not yet be all  
that God wants me to be,  
but I am blessed.

I may disappoint myself,  
others, and God everyday,  
but I am blessed.

I am blessed  
because I am a child of God.

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# REASONS RELIGION MAY BECOME EVIL

1. Religion may become corrupt when it becomes all-knowing and inflexible in its claims to know the absolute truth.
2. Religion may become corrupt when it calls for blind obedience on the part of its followers.
3. Religion may become corrupt when it believes that it can and should establish its vision of the “ideal” time by forcing that vision on others.
4. Religion may become corrupt when it believes that any means justify the ends it seeks to accomplish.
5. Religion may become corrupt when it declares “holy war” on its opponents.

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# SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICING SIMPLICITY

1. Buy things for their usefulness rather than their status.
2. Reject anything that is producing addiction in you.
3. Develop a habit of giving things away.
4. Refuse to be propagandized by the custodians of modern gadgetry.
5. Learn to enjoy things without owning them.
6. Develop a deeper appreciation for creation.
7. Look with a healthy skepticism at all “buy now, pay later” schemes.
8. Obey Jesus’ instructions about plain, honest speech.
9. Reject anything that breeds the oppression of others.
10. Shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God.

