

# Vision Beautiful

Today we begin a five-week exploration of a collection of Jesus' sayings known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' radical vision of what God's reign on earth might look like is a vision of wholeness for all people. Paul reminds us that God's wisdom is different from worldly wisdom. Micah and the psalmist describe ways to live this vision beautiful.

## Focus Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

After Jesus' baptism, he calls a group of disciples. They travel throughout Galilee teaching and healing, sharing the good news that God's realm is breaking into the world. It is a message that the gospel writer's own community desperately needs to hear. Matthew is written to a group of new Christians after disaster has happened. The temple has been destroyed, the people scattered. Jesus is no longer present in the flesh. What laws will govern the community now? What will the new community look like? What is the good news for those trying to be faithful in a hostile world?

Of the four gospels, Matthew most wants to show that Jesus fulfills Israel's experience. In this gospel, Jesus is shown as the new Moses, teaching from the mountain as Moses did when he gave Israel the law. The gospel writer arranges Jesus' words in five blocks of teaching, reminding readers of the "five books of Moses." Chapters 5 to 7 – the Sermon on the Mount – form the first block.

The Beatitudes begin the Sermon on the Mount. They are a series of sentences beginning with the word *blessed*, or *happy* in some translations. Blessing is God's free gift to humankind, a sign of covenant relationship with God. Such blessing may look very different from the world's idea of happiness. In these sayings, Jesus turns human notions of happiness upside down. What kind of living brings God's blessing? Jesus teaches that the blessed ones are those who are humble of heart ("poor in spirit"), who are gentle, who show mercy, who hunger and thirst for God's ways. Those who mourn will be comforted; those who make peace will be called God's children. Those who are persecuted in the cause of justice will find themselves part of God's transforming reality.

There is urgency in Jesus' teaching. He uses the present tense – this is happening right now. In Jesus' coming, God's love is revealed and made manifest. This teaching is directed to the disciples, the Twelve and the larger group of men and women who accompany Jesus. The Beatitudes describe the way of life for those who commit themselves to follow. For Matthew's community, this vision beautiful is what life should be like.

Living in right relationship with God and neighbour brings blessing – calling out the best in us and others. The other readings spell out this vision of wholeness. **Micah 6:1–8** describes a dramatic confrontation, a lawsuit between God and Israel. What must Israel do to be in a right relationship with God? Verse 8 summarizes: do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. **Psalm 15** gives a similar response. The psalmist asks who may come before God in the temple. It is those who do what is right, speak the truth, and do no evil to their neighbours.

In **1 Corinthians 1:18–31**, Paul echoes Matthew's theme of worldly values turned upside down. God's wisdom seems like foolishness to the present age. God overturns the established order. God chooses us to play our part in God's plan. In Christ we are strengthened to bring about God's reign of justice and peace.

• • • • •

Our experience today is, in many ways, similar to that of Matthew's community. We may not be persecuted for our faith, but the ways of faith often seem foolish compared with the values of society. In what ways do the gospel values challenge contemporary views – turn them upside down? What challenges do you find in trying to live according to the standards expressed in today's readings?

January 30, 2011



**Focus Scripture**  
**Matthew 5:1–12**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**Micah 6:1–8**  
**Psalm 15**  
**1 Corinthians 1:18–31**

**O God, you turn things upside down, calling the wise to embrace your folly. Help us to grow in acknowledging our need for you. Open us to the vision of your reign on earth, and strengthen us to do our part. Amen.**

---

## The Focus for Ages 15–18

---

**M**any young people are keenly aware of the kind of society in which they want to live. Their affirmation of values such as world peace, cooperation, and social justice give content to their ideals and the way they imagine society could be. Young people are often accused of being selfish, an observation that arises out of their individualistic way of thinking. Yet many teenagers place a high value on cooperation and helping one another, and are often committed to volunteering. As young people become more aware of the impact that the society can have on individuals, and on their wellbeing, they become more aware of the importance of social justice.

In this session we begin a five-week study of the Sermon on the Mount, a collection of Jesus' teachings about how to live in the world as disciples. Matthew's

author collected and arranged the sayings in such a way that they spoke to the particular situation of first century Christians. Group discussion during these weeks will provide an opportunity to explore what it means to follow Jesus in our own time. Teens respond to the message that faith offers an alternative to the world. But this realization requires a community that can help them embody this difference. As you prepare for the session, reflect on the dynamics of the community of your congregation. In what ways does this community embody the way of God's realm? How might the church offer young people a space to explore their own visions and commitments? Pray by name for each member of the group, as they grow in understanding about what it means to live responsibly and faithfully as a follower of Jesus today.

---

## Prepare

---

### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Matthew 5:1–12, Micah 6:1–8, 1 Corinthians 1:18–31, and biblical background material (p. 59). Read article "Vision Beautiful" (in *Ages 15-18 Supplements* folder).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca), and click on Spirit Sightings. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- ❑ Set a worship space with *green fabric, white pillar candle, Bible, and poster "Christ in Cookham."*
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (p. 2), *Bibles, matches, and if possible, Seasons Music CD, vol. 9 and CD player.* *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring *song "The Anointing"* (pp. 8–9 in *Music Section*, also #5 on *Seasons Music CD*).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of this week's resource sheets "Choral Reading" and "You're Blessed."*

### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring materials.

- ❑ **Writing beatitudes:** *coloured writing paper*
- ❑ **Art panels:** *sheets of poster board (cut in half), art and craft materials*
- ❑ **Serving project:** *information about needs and volunteer opportunities of local organisations*

### Bless

- ❑ Bring *poster "Word of Light" and starburst shapes cut from yellow paper.*
- ❑ Bring *song "Be God's"* (pp. 10–11 in *Music Section*, also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring *copies of the lyrics for "Be God's"* (in *Ages 15-18 Supplements* folder); save lyrics for following weeks.

### Materials needed



# Vision Beautiful

**Scripture** Matthew 5:1–12

**FOCUS** To imagine a world where relationships reflect Jesus' teaching about life in God's realm.

## GATHER

Welcome young people and invite them to share experiences of the past week.

Gather around the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the Christ candle.

Sing or listen to "The Anointing" (pp. 8–9 in *Music Section*, also #5 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Pray by reading the words of the refrain of the song "The Anointing" as an opening prayer.

### Making connections

Invite group members to recall a time they joined a new group or team.

- What questions did you have when becoming a member of this group?
- What expectations did you have about the group and about your participation?
- In what ways were your expectations fulfilled?

## ENGAGE

### Setting the scene

In the gospel of Matthew there are five major sections of Jesus' teachings about living as disciples. Today's reading, called "The Sermon on the Mount," is the first of these sections, and will be the focus of the next five sessions. The

teachings in this section follow the account of Jesus' baptism, his temptation in the wilderness, and the calling of the fishers. The setting for today's teaching is on a mountain. Read **Matthew 5:1**. In the Jewish faith, the mountain is often considered a holy place.

### Scripture reading

Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Choral Reading" and follow the instructions for reading **Matthew 5:1–12**.

- What surprises you about this teaching from Jesus? What is challenging to believe or accept?

These sayings are called "beatitudes," from a Latin word meaning "very great happiness or blessedness." The beatitude is a literary form found in ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Hebrew literature and was used to present a brief summary of an essential teaching.

- What is the vision of God's reign that Jesus helps us to see in these sayings?

Matthew was writing to a community that was trying to live God's way in the midst of a hostile world. The way they lived and related to one another was very dif-

ferent from the way of the world around them. Invite young people to form pairs and distribute the following verses among them – **verses 3 and 5**, **verses 4 and 6**, **verses 7–9**, and **verses 10–12**. Invite each pair to review their verses and share responses to the following questions with the group:

- Who is blessed in each statement?
- How is each statement different from those the world thinks of as blessed?
- How might this quality make a difference in the life of the community?

Distribute copies of the resource sheet "You're Blessed" and read it in unison.

- What does this version add to your understanding of Jesus' Beatitudes?

Jesus' teachings often turned worldly wisdom upside down.

- Which commonly held values in society are turned upside down in this reading?
- For whom are these words good news? For whom might these words be frightening?

### Digging deeper

Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Matthew speaks of God's reign or realm as both a present reality, revealed through Jesus, and a future hope. The prophet Micah also teaches about living as God's people. Read **Micah 6:1–8**.

- What similarities do you find between Micah's instruction and Jesus' Beatitudes?
- What does Micah say about what God requires of the people?
- Who has been an example to you of doing these things?

### Connecting scripture to life

Jesus' teaching speaks of God's reign breaking into human society, turning typical human understanding upside down. Invite young people to reflect in silence on the following question:

- What do you think God is calling you to turn upside down in your life in order to follow more closely Jesus' model of life in God's realm?

Jesus offers a vision for harmony and happiness. Like the people in Matthew's community we too are called to live into the "vision beautiful."

- Where do you see examples of Jesus' Beatitudes being played out today?
- What actions might we take as individuals and communities to bring this vision to reality?

# 3

RESPOND

Choose one or more of the following options.

- Writing beatitudes** Jesus' teaching invites us to imagine how life might be different in God's realm.



Discuss the following questions: Who would we describe as "blessed" or "fortunate" today? What behaviours and actions demonstrate the values of God's reign? Invite young people to form pairs to write one or two beatitudes for today. Share these in the whole group. Consider printing them in the church newsletter or posting them in the "Prayer and Poem" gallery in the Action Zone at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

- Art panels** Jesus' teaching offers a vision of God's reign. Divide the verses from **Matthew 5:3-10**

among the group and invite each person or small group to design an art panel illustrating the vision in each of the "beatitudes," using poster board and art and craft supplies. Have them print their verse(s) along the bottom of their panels and put the scenes together to create an illustrated "text" of the focus scripture.

- Serving project** Jesus' teaching offers a number of insights into "right action." Share information gathered from community organisations. Choose one idea and plan how the group might put Jesus' teaching about God's realm into practice by participating in the project, perhaps involving other groups in the church.

# 4

BLESS

**Gather** in the worship area around the lit candle. Invite group members to look at the poster *Word of Light* as you read a quote from Bible scholar David Tiede: "The Sermon on the Mount is flashes of light from God's coming kingdom [reign]." Invite young people to

think of the "flashes of light about God's realm" that they have glimpsed in today's session, and write a

word or phrase on a yellow starburst shape, placing these around the poster.

**Sing or listen to** "Be God's" (pp. 10-11 in *Music Section*, also #3 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Close your session by** distributing the lyrics for the song "Be God's" to read as a commissioning. Form two groups, with the first group reading the first half of each verse ("Where the world is...") and the second group responding with the last phrase, "be God's..."

# REFLECT

What in today's discussion has helped you and group members to understand "blessedness" in a new way? How might you continue to affirm the vision and imagination of the young people in your group?



# Choral Reading

Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud from the text on the left. Pause at each **bolded** word for another person to read the synonyms for the word from the column on the right.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<b>Blessed</b> _____ are the <b>poor in spirit</b> , _____ for theirs is the <b>kingdom of heaven.</b> _____	Happy, fortunate, golden those who are at the end of their rope perfection, shalom, humble of heart
<b>Blessed</b> _____ are those who <b>mourn</b> , _____ for they will <b>be comforted.</b> _____	Happy, fortunate, golden those who have lost what is most dear soothed, consoled
<b>Blessed</b> _____ are <b>the meek</b> , _____ for they will <b>inherit the earth.</b> _____	Happy, fortunate, golden gentle, lowly, vulnerable, humble have all they need
<b>Blessed</b> _____ are those who hunger and thirst for <b>righteousness</b> , _____ for they will be filled.	Happy, fortunate, golden right stuff, love of God and neighbour
<b>Blessed</b> _____ are the <b>merciful</b> , _____ for they will receive <b>mercy.</b> _____	Happy, fortunate, golden compassionate, tender-hearted, full of care compassion, tenderness, care



# You're Blessed

## Matthew 5:1–12 (*The Message*)

- (1-2) When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:
- (3) “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.
- (4) “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.
- (5) “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are – no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.
- (6) “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.
- (7) “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.
- (8) “You’re blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.
- (9) “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.
- (10) “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.
- (11-12) “Not only that – count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – give a cheer, even! – for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

*The Message by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.*