



high school group study

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general editor



living out
Jesus'
teachings



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how to use the *uncommon* group bible studies

Each *Uncommon* group Bible study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 3 stand-alone units of 4 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, to use just one unit, or to present individual sessions. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) of each session's student handouts are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The handouts include the "message," "dig," "apply," "reflect" and "meditation" sections of each study and have been formatted for easy printing. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each session opens with a devotional meditation written for you, the youth leader. As hectic and trying as youth work is much of the time, it's important never to neglect your interior life. Use the devotions to refocus your heart and prepare yourself to share with kids the message that has already taken root in you. Each of the 12 sessions are divided into the following sections:

starter

Young people will stay in your youth group if they feel comfortable and make friends in the group. This section is designed for you and the students to get to know each other better.

message

The message section will introduce the Scripture reading for the session and get students thinking about how the passage applies to their lives.

dig

Many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students will dig into the Word of God and will begin to interact on a personal level with the concepts.

apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. This section will get students talking about the passage of Scripture and interacting on important issues.

reflect

The conclusion to the study will allow students to reflect on some of the issues presented in the study on a more personal level.

meditation

A closing Scripture for the students to read and reflect on.



unit I

priorities

It is a rare occasion when I am speechless. Cathy has told me throughout our marriage that I talk too much. She's right! However, there has been a few times when I was so struck with awe and amazement that I was reduced to absolute silence with a tear or two running down my cheek. I think of the first time I held my children, or standing in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, or my mother's passing from earth to eternity, or when our pastor announced, "You are now man and wife." For me, that same sense of amazement and awe fills my soul when I read the words of Jesus in the Bible—especially in His famous "Sermon on the Mount."

My hope is that when you finish these sessions, you and your group members will have a richer faith and a deeper understanding of the core teachings of Christ. No one can study Jesus' Sermon on the Mount without having a profound respect for the Man from Galilee who gave us these words and, more importantly,

lived His life according to them. I believe that all who study His message will have the same response as those first listeners had more than 2,000 years ago: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law” (Matthew 7:28-29).

William Barclay introduced this most important message in this way:

The Sermon on the Mount is greater than we think. Matthew in his introduction wishes us to see that it is the official teaching of Jesus; that it is the opening of Jesus’ whole mind to His disciples; that it is the summary of the teaching which Jesus habitually gave to His inner circle. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart to heart communion between the disciples and their Master.

My prayer is that your heart and your students’ hearts will burn with a desire to be silent before the Lord and hear Him speak through these powerful words of Christ.



session 1

setting the right priorities

Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:1

Are you a full-time professional youth worker? Are you a Sunday School volunteer for your church and youth ministry? Or is this your first time preparing a Bible study for teens and you're scared to death? Regardless of the amount of experience you have in ministering to young people, chances are you're a busy person. As you try to balance your life with work, friends, family, social events, your favorite sitcom, working out, attending youth ministry meetings, and, yes, preparing Bible study lessons like this one, it can be easy to lose perspective on why you're doing what you're doing.

This is why studying the beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is so important. Christ's words provide a reminder about

why you're doing what you're doing. They allow you to pull off the busy highway of life for a spiritual rest area where you can be refreshed and renewed in your faith.

In youth ministry, there is always the temptation to do more and more at the cost of spending less and less time with God—to make one more phone call, schedule one more appointment, or create one more event. Yet Jesus' teachings in the beatitudes call us to look past our “doing” and really consider who we are in Christ. They inspire us to first “be” in Christ and to rest in Him.

To truly make a difference in young people's lives, we need godly characters carved in the image of Christ. We need to be pilgrims before we are event programmers. We need to be followers before we are leaders. Teenagers respond to the changed lives of adults who sincerely and authentically love them with the love of Christ. That's something no program or event can ever do.

So, before you begin to prepare for this lesson, take a few minutes to ask God for a refreshing and new perspective of His Word. Ask Jesus to make the beatitudes a reality in your life.

Let us often remember, my dear friend, that our sole occupation in life is to please God. What meaning can anything else have?

BROTHER LAWRENCE



group study guide

setting the right priorities

starter

THE FIGHT: Ahead of time, ask an older male volunteer to read the following story. Introduce the illustration by mentioning that this is a true story that was told by an old colonel who served in the Austrian Army during World War I.

I was commanded to march against a little town on the Tyrol and lay siege to it. We had been meeting stubborn resistance in that part of the country, but we felt sure that we should win because all of the advantages were on our side. My confidence, however, was arrested by a remark

Note: You can download this group study guide in 8¹/₂" x 11" format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/living_out_Jesus_teachings.zip.

from a prisoner we had taken. "You will never take that town," he said, "for they have an invincible leader."

"What does the fellow mean?" I inquired of one of my staff. "And who is this leader of whom he speaks?"

Nobody seemed able to answer my question. So, just in case there should be some truth in the report, I doubled preparations.

As we descended through the pass in the Alps, I saw with surprise that the cattle were still grazing in the valley and that women and children—yes, and even men—were working in the fields. I thought to myself, *Either they are not expecting us, or this is a trap to catch us.* As we drew nearer the town, we passed people on the road. They smiled and greeted us with a friendly word, and then went on their way.

Finally, we reached the town and clattered up the cobble-paved streets—colors flying, horns sounding a challenge, arms in readiness. Women came to the windows or doorways with little babies in their arms. Some of them looked startled and held their babies close, and then went quietly on with their household tasks without panic or confusion.

It was impossible to keep strict discipline, and I began to feel rather foolish. My soldiers answered the questions of children, and I saw one old warrior throw a kiss to the little golden-haired tot on the doorstep. "Just the size of Lisa," he muttered. There was still no sign of an ambush. We rode straight to the open square that faced the town hall. Here, if anywhere, resistance surely was to be expected.

Just as I reached the hill and my guard was drawn up at attention, an old white-haired man, who by his insignia I surmised to be the mayor, stepped forth, followed by 10

men in simple peasant costume. They were all dignified and unabashed by the armed force before them—the most terrible soldiers of the great and mighty army of Austria.

The old man walked down the steps straight to my horse's side, and with hand extended, cried, "Welcome, brother!" One of my aides made a gesture as if to strike him down with his sword, but I saw by the face of the old mayor that this was no trick on his part.

"Where are your soldiers?" I demanded.

"Soldiers?" he replied in wonderment. "Why, don't you know we have none?" It was as though I had asked where were his giants or where were his dwarfs.

"But we have come to take this town," I said.

"Well," he replied, "no one will stop you."

"Are there none here to fight?"

At this question, the old man's face lit up with a rare smile that I will always remember. Many times later, when I was engaged in bloody warfare, I would suddenly see that man's smile—and, somehow, I came to hate my business.

His words were simply, "No, there is no one here to fight. We have chosen Christ for our leader, and He taught men another way."

After the reading has concluded, take a few minutes to discuss the following questions:

- How did the town respond to the arrival of the Austrian Army in their midst?
- How did the town's response affect the army?
- How do you think the mayor's response to the challenge to fight affected the outcome of the day?

Conclude by stating that as this story shows, when we adopt Jesus' teachings and apply them to our lives, we can never see things the same way.

message

The people Jesus encountered were hungry to hear what He had to say. Crowds followed Him as He traveled from town to town, hanging on His words and watching the way He lived. At one point, Jesus went up to a mountainside and began teaching the people what has become known as the "Sermon on the Mount." He began by explaining the types of individuals whom God considers "blessed."

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same

way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:1-12).

1. Those who are “poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3) put their trust in Christ. They do not seek the things of this world but the things of God. What do these people receive? To whom do people who live in the kingdom of heaven belong?

2. Those who “mourn” (verse 4) are truly sorry for their sins and for the suffering in the world. They lead lives that, from the world’s point of view, are difficult. What does this verse say the reward is for these people?

3. In verse 5, Jesus commends those who are “meek.” These individuals are similar to the poor in spirit, in that humility is an earmark of their lives. The meek do not seek to get their way or achieve status for themselves but allow God to care for their needs. What will the meek receive?

4. The next group of people whom Jesus describes are “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (verse 6). These people actively seek to obey God so they can have a close relationship with Him. What will these people receive?

5. What is “mercy”? What is the result of showing mercy?

6. In verse 8, Jesus refers to the “pure in heart,” which describes people who love God with all of their heart. God is welcome in every corner of their lives and nothing stands in the way of their loving Him. What will the pure in heart receive?

7. “Peacemakers” (verse 9) are not interested in self-ambition. What do peacemakers receive? Who do people see when they look at a peacemaker’s life?

- 8. “Those who are persecuted because of righteousness” (verse 10) refers to people who won’t compromise their relationship with God. Why does Jesus say these individuals can rejoice (see verses 11-12)?

dig

This passage in Matthew 5:1-12 is commonly called the “beatitudes.” One way to look at this section of Scripture is to think of Jesus’ teachings as “be attitudes,” or character qualities that define a person who reflects Christ in his or her life. Each of the beatitudes begins with the word “blessed,” which in the Greek means “fortunate.” It implies that the person described is to be congratulated and that his or her life is to be admired. It does not refer to the person’s psychological state of mind or his or her feelings. It simply means that he or she is a model to be held up and followed.

- 1. What qualities do the individuals whom Jesus describes in Matthew 5:1-12 have in common?

2. How do the qualities that Jesus lifts up as commendable differ from the qualities that the world admires?

3. What do you observe about the order in which Jesus mentions each character quality in the beatitudes?

4. From the world's point of view, why is it surprising that the meek will inherit the earth?

5. How do the words "hunger" and "thirst" describe a genuine desire to know God?

6. How does our merciful treatment of others affect our lives?

7. What does it mean to “see God”?

8. What do you think the people might have felt when they heard Jesus say these words in Matthew 5:10-12?

apply

As you read these descriptions of people whom Jesus calls blessed, take a moment to think about the areas in which you would like to grow more into a “beatitude” believer.

1. In the following list, next to each trait rate your level of commitment from 1 to 10, with 1 being a long way to go and 10 being approaching Christlikeness.

___ Poor in spirit: *I realize I am helpless without Christ; therefore, I place my complete trust in Him.*

- ___ Mourn: *I am truly sorry for my sin and for the suffering in the world.*
- ___ Hunger and thirst for righteousness: *I desire a relationship with God more than money, people, success or anything else.*
- ___ Mercy: *I hurt for others, feel what they feel, think their thoughts, and experience their pain.*
- ___ Pure in heart: *I have pure motives and reasons for all my actions. I don't dwell on impure thoughts.*
- ___ Peacemaker: *My goal is for all my relationships with others to be completely peaceful.*
- ___ Persecuted for righteousness: *I obey Christ regardless of criticism, loneliness, rejection or fear.*

2. Now consider what it would take for you to reflect Jesus in every area of your life. What would you need to do to become more of a disciple of Christ? (Check all that apply.)

- Obey Him more.
- Meditate on His Word.
- Start a new life with Him by asking Him to make me His child.
- Trust Him more completely.
- Choose one beatitude and make a commitment to ask God to help me improve in that area.
- Find Christlike friends.
- Weigh the costs and pay the price.

3. When you belong to God, you live a life that is free from this world's standards and one that serves as an example

of Christ to others. How would you describe your relationship with God?

4. Which of the beatitudes is the most difficult for you personally to follow? Why?

5. What beatitude is the most apparent in your life? Why?

6. What does a person's life look like when he or she completely trusts in Jesus?

7. How does dealing with sin in your life affect your relationship with God?

8. Why is it impossible to live up to the beatitudes without God's help?

reflect

We are all works in progress, and there is always room for us to grow. Often we strive to grow through our own efforts, but we can only make temporary progress this way. The beatitudes show us that when we put aside our agendas, our pride, our self-pity and our inadequate feelings and choose to trust that God is powerful enough to comfort us, protect us and grow us in Him, we will be truly blessed.

1. What things stand in the way of you having a more open and vulnerable relationship with God?

2. What risks are required for you to trust God?

3. In what area of your life do you need to be more obedient to what Christ is calling you to do?

4. Who in your life can help you take the next step in living for Jesus?

5. What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of person do you think God wants you to be?

6. What does it mean to want God more than anything else in this world?

7. How could an influx of mercy in your school or community make a tremendous impact for Christ?

8. Why is it difficult to find “pure” motives and actions today? How could having this characteristic affect your relationships with others?

9. What would it look like to be a peacemaker in your school?

10. How could persecution—when people insult you and say bad things about you because you are a follower of Christ—serve as an opportunity for you to reflect God’s love to others and show them His nature?

meditation



Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—they do no wrong but follow his ways.

PSALM 119:1-3