



Participant Handout for *Blessed to Follow: The Beatitudes as a Compass for Discipleship* By Martha E. Stortz

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, ruler of heaven and earth. Day by day you shower us with blessings. As you have raised us to new life in Christ, give us glad and generous hearts, ready to praise you and to respond to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

(Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 64)

Points to Ponder

In Matthew 5, Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's gospel, this is the beginning of Jesus' preaching ministry. Verses 3-12—our topic today—are called the "beatitudes," using the Latin word that is translated as "blessed" in this passage.

1. What does it mean to you to say someone is "blessed"?
2. In this sermon, when Jesus talked about people being blessed, this word contains a sense of deep happiness. What is it about being blessed that can make people happy and contented?

A "Blessed" Sermon

3. Read Matthew 5:1-3. Notice that when Jesus started preaching, his very first words were about people being blessed. How does this compare with most sermons you have heard?
4. Imagine you are at a worship service, and the pastor begins preaching. He or she announces that you are blessed and explains why. How do you think you would feel? How might you want to respond?
5. Why do you think Jesus started his preaching with blessings?

Nine Blessings

6. Read Matthew 5:3-12. Which of these verses (blessings) speaks most strongly to you today? Why?
7. Which of these verses (blessings) seems most mysterious? What puzzles you? What would you like to learn about this blessing?
8. Which of the blessed qualities sound appealing to you?
 - a. Poor in spirit
 - b. Mourning
 - c. Meek
 - d. Hungry and thirsty for righteousness
 - e. Merciful
 - f. Pure in heart
 - g. Peacemakers
 - h. Persecuted on Jesus' account
9. Which of the promises sound appealing to you?
 - a. The kingdom of heaven is yours.
 - b. You will be comforted.
 - c. You will inherit the earth.
 - d. You will be filled.
 - e. You will receive mercy.
 - f. You will see God.
 - g. You will be called children of God.
 - h. Your reward is great in heaven.
10. Which of these promises have you already experienced to some degree? How have those experiences shaped your relationship to God and other people?

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Martha Stortz writes, “Blessings leak, and as we receive the blessings of Jesus’ beatitudes, we become a blessing to others” (p. 8). Two biblical examples are Abraham and Mary.

11. Read Genesis 12:1-3. What promise did God make to Abram (later Abraham, ancestor of the Hebrew people)? What did Abram have to do to receive that promise?
12. How did Abraham become a blessing—that is, what blessings resulted from his faithfulness?
13. Read Luke 1:26-38. What promise did God make to Mary? What did Mary have to do to receive that promise?
14. Read Luke 1:39-45. Were Mary’s blessings difficult for her to receive? How did she bless others?
15. How has Jesus been a blessing to others? To you?

Counting Our Blessings

16. Do you feel blessed today? Look again at the qualities in question 8. Notice that the first four describe “victims of the world’s ways” (Stortz, p. 107). Surprisingly, Jesus calls such people blessed. Even if you’re going through difficult times, can you see any areas of your life where God is blessing you?
17. When you start and end each day, do you usually think about your problems, your chores, or your blessings? What can you do to shift your focus more to your blessings?
18. Look again at the qualities in question 8. Notice that the second four describe people coming to the aid of the world’s victims. How might developing our appreciation for God’s blessings increase our desire to be a blessing to others?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your many blessings.

Today we thank you for some of the ways you have blessed each of us. *[Each person says thank you for a blessing.]*

Inspire us to recall these blessings every day and to be a blessing to others.

In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

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