

***Psalm 34: A Responsive Reading***

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

**My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.**

O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.

**I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.**

Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

**This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.**

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

**O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.**

O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want.

**The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.**

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

**Which of you desires life, and covets many days to enjoy good?**

Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit.

**Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.**

## *Confessing the Beatitudes*

Suggestions for Leaders

The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.

**The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.**

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles.

**The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.**

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all.

**He keeps all their bones; not one of them will be broken.**

Evil brings death to the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

**The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.**

### **Closing Prayer**

Living God, you came to us an impoverished child, and taught us to honor those who are destitute. Loosen our grip on the things we crave, and teach us to share your good creation with all of your children. In the name of the one born in a manger, we pray. Amen.

## **Group Activity**

Read your assigned passage: either *Matthew 5:1–12* or *Luke 6:17–26*.

Based upon your reading of the assigned passage, answer the following and be prepared to share your responses:

- Where is Jesus when he delivers these words?
- Who hears his words?
- How many beatitudes are there?
- How many woes are there?
- How does the passage compare with the words that were recalled from memory?

## ***Confessing the Beatitudes***

Suggestions for Leaders

You might also want to consider the following: Many scholars conclude that *Matthew* was written primarily for a Jewish audience. Attempting to show that Jesus is the Messiah, *Matthew* presents Jesus as the “new Moses.” *Luke*, on the other hand, is thought to have been written for a Gentile or more general audience. Presenting Jesus as the savior of all people, *Luke* shows great concern for marginalized members of society.

What clues do you see in your reading that support the conclusions about the author’s purpose and audience, as described above? For example, consider how the presentation of Jesus as the “new Moses” in *Matthew* might have impacted the author’s placement of Jesus on a mountain. Would the Jewish audience of *Matthew* have connected Jesus to the lawgiver of Mount Sinai as easily if he were standing on a plain, as in *Luke*? As you hear the responses of the other group, consider how the different emphases in each Gospel, as described above, may have impacted the ways in which Jesus’ teachings now known as the Beatitudes were retold.

**Comparison of *Matthew 5:1–12* and *Luke 6:17–26***

<i>Matthew 5:1–12</i>	<i>Luke 6:17–26</i>
Jesus is on a mountain (Sermon on the Mount)	Jesus is on a “level place” (Sermon on the Plain)
Jesus talks to the disciples only.	Jesus talks to “a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people” who came to hear him and be healed.
There are nine beatitudes.	There are four beatitudes.
There are no “woes.”	There are four “woes.”
Jesus speaks in the third person for all but one beatitude (“Blessed are those . . .”).	Jesus speaks consistently in the second person (“Blessed are you . . .”).
Language describes internal/spiritual dispositions (“poor in spirit”, “hunger and thirst for righteousness”).	Language describes external/material circumstances (“poor”, “hungry”).
5:3 the poor in spirit	6:20 you who are poor
5:4 those who mourn	6:21 you who weep now
5:5 the meek	
5:6 those who hunger and thirst for righteousness	6:21 you who are hungry now
5:7 the merciful	
5:8 the pure in heart	
5:9 the peacemakers	
5:10 those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake	
5:11 you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account	6:22 you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man*
	6:24 woe to you who are rich
	6:25 woe to you who are full now
	6:25 woe to you who are laughing now
	6:26 woe to you when all speak well of you

## **Group Activity**

To discover who the “weepers” and “mourners” might be in today’s context, search the headlines of the news source(s) you have been given and respond to the following and be prepared to share your responses:

- Choose a story in which there is weeping or mourning. Write down the headline.
- Who is weeping or mourning?
- What is the cause of their grief?
- Is it a temporary circumstance of life or an ongoing condition in which they live?
- Are these situations being helped or made worse by larger economic, political, and social realities? Explain.
- Rewrite the headline, reflecting what the church can do, or what women can do, to give voice to the weeping and to reverse the situations that cause it.

**A Reading of *Luke 16:19–31*—The Rich Man and Lazarus**

**Jesus:** There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

**Rich Man:** Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.

**Abraham:** Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.

**Rich Man:** Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.

**Abraham:** They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.

**Rich Man:** No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.

**Abraham:** If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.

**Closing Prayer**

Merciful God, we raise our prayers for our sisters gathered here, giving thanks for a Savior who walks with us when our hearts are breaking. Sovereign Christ, you were not ashamed to weep in loss for your friend, Lazarus, and in grief for your beloved Jerusalem. Open our eyes to those who mourn, in loss and in protest. Strengthen us to stand with them in love and justice, even as you stand with us. Amen.

***Psalm 37:1–13, A Responsive Reading***

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

**Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

**Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.**

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret—it leads only to evil. For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

**Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.**

The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them; but the LORD laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming.

**Closing Prayer**

Almighty God, we are drawn to those in power, and we ignore those who cannot defend themselves. Like Moses at the bush, send us to defend your people who suffer oppression and cannot fight for themselves. Grant us courage to speak justice to the oppressed, even as Christ did. Amen.

***Psalm 107:1–9: A Responsive Reading***

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.

**Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.**

Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

**Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town.**

Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.

**Closing Prayer**

God of the harvest, many are hungry. Many more thirst for justice. Awaken us to how we contribute to the hunger and thirst of our neighbors. Teach us to feed your people with food and justice, even as you fed the people with manna, that all may be satisfied. Amen.

**Gathering Activity**

Write the definition beside each word.

Bug

Milk

Draft

Jar

Straight

LOL

Chicken

MBS

B4N

Pudding

Season

JK

**Gathering Activity Answer Sheet**

Write the definition beside each word.

Bug            *n.* insect; *v.* to annoy

Milk           *n.* beverage that comes from a cow; *v.* to exploit; *v.* to draw liquid from a cow

Draft          *n.* breeze; *v.* to select persons from a group; *n.* preliminary writing; *v.* to draw

Jar            *n.* a container; *v.* to shake; *v.* to make an unpleasant sound

Straight       *adj.* without angle or curve; *adj.* honest; *adj.* traditional; *adj.* heterosexual; *adv.* continuously;

LOL           Laugh out loud

Chicken       *n.* domestic fowl; *adj.* cowardly; *n.* dangerous game played with cars

MBS           Mom behind shoulder

B4N           Bye for now

Pudding       *n.* creamy dessert made with milk; *n.* any sweet treat (United Kingdom)

Season        *n.* period of year; *n.* series of games in a sport; *v.* to enhance flavor; *n.* to mature

JK            Just kidding

***Psalm 51:1–12: A Responsive Reading***

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

**Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.**

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

**Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.**

Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

**You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

**Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.**

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.**

Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

**Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.**

**Closing Prayer**

We confess, oh God, that you are sovereign and just, faithful to those in need. Purify our hearts and strengthen our resolve to live out our confession in truth. Fix our eyes on you, that our lips and our lives may reflect, with integrity, our discipleship to our Savior. Amen.

## **Martin Luther King Jr.'s Principles of Nonviolence<sup>1</sup>**

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for a courageous people.
2. Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.
3. Nonviolence seeks to defeat injustice, not people.
4. Nonviolence holds that voluntary suffering can educate and transform.
5. Nonviolence chooses love instead of hate.
6. Nonviolence believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

## **Martin Luther King Jr.'s Steps of Nonviolence<sup>2</sup>**

1. Gather information.
2. Educate others.
3. Remain committed.
4. Peacefully negotiate
5. Take action peacefully.
6. Reconcile.

## **Group Activity**

Identify a situation in need of peace, and respond to the following in light of Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence and steps of nonviolence, as found in this handout.

- What is the situation that is in need of a peaceful resolution?

1. Fundamental tenets of Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence are described in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
2. Ibid.

- What are the implications if peace does not come to this situation?
  
- If you define “peace” in negative terms, what would a peaceful outcome look like? How could this be achieved?
  
- If you define “peace” in positive terms, what would a peaceful outcome look like? How could this be achieved?

1. Fundamental tenets of Martin Luther King Jr.’s principles of nonviolence are described in his first book, *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

2. Ibid.

**A Psalm of Peacemaking**

We live in a time of kairos

when humanity stands on the border of a promised time,  
when God's people are summoned to obedience and faithfulness  
to preserve God's creation,  
to stand with the poor and oppressed everywhere, and  
to stand together as the people of the earth;

when with confession and with humility we repent of

our blindness to the division and war in our own hearts and in our own land,  
our obsession with money and our pursuit of power,  
our irrational belief in security through weaponry, and  
our worship of secular gods.

We are called

to be obedient to Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace,  
who loves the whole world and  
who invites us to be stewards of the earth and servants of his people,  
to be co-workers in the new Creation.

Let us be peacemakers.

Let us be called the children of God,

speaking boldly with moral conviction to the nation and to the world,  
building, with God's grace, a new moral order in the world community; and  
acting now for world peace, an enterprise of justice, an outcome of love.\*

\* United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA), "Peacemaking: The Believers' Calling" (New York: 192nd General Assembly, UPCUSA, 1980), 7.

***Psalm 119:81–90: A Responsive Reading***

My soul languishes for your salvation; I hope in your word.

**My eyes fail with watching for your promise; I ask, “When will you comfort me?”**

For I have become like a wineskin in the smoke, yet I have not forgotten your statutes.

**How long must your servant endure? When will you judge those who persecute me?**

The arrogant have dug pitfalls for me; they flout your law.

**All your commandments are enduring; I am persecuted without cause; help me!**

They have almost made an end of me on earth; but I have not forsaken your precepts.

**In your steadfast love spare my life, so that I may keep the decrees of your mouth.**

The LORD exists forever; your word is firmly fixed in heaven.

**Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast.**

**Closing Prayer**

For the ancestors who faced persecution that we may know justice, known and unknown, we give you thanks, liberating God. Teach us to honor those who stood faithfully against injustice, even as Christ did. Fill us with your emboldening Spirit that we may follow your call faithfully, even as they did. Amen.

**Group Activity**

Read one of the passages below as assigned:

*Daniel 6:1–16*

*Matthew 14:1–12*

*Matthew 27:1–38*

*Acts 6:8–15; 7:55–60*

*Acts 22:3–5*

In your group, respond to the following and be prepared to summarize your findings with everyone:

- Who is being persecuted by whom?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the reason for the persecution?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is the response to the persecution?

***Psalm 71:18–24: A Responsive Reading***

So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens. You who have done great things, O God, who is like you?

**You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again.**

**You will increase my honor, and comfort me once again.**

I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel.

My lips will shout for joy when I sing praises to you; my soul also, which you have rescued.

**All day long my tongue will talk of your righteous help, for those who tried to do me harm have been put to shame, and disgraced.**

**Closing Prayer**

Christ of the mountaintop, you have called us to discipleship. Yet, we fear the persecution that discipleship brings. Steady us to trust that you walk with us, empowering us with your Spirit. Remind us that the end of the journey is nothing but overwhelming joy. We praise you. Amen.