

Kingdom Character

**With Jesus' coming to earth, God's kingdom came to earth too.
In describing the character of Kingdom people,
Jesus calls all people to become children of God.**

BIBLICAL REFERENCE

Matthew 5:1-10

Matthew tells us that Jesus went to the side of a mountain to deliver this important sermon to His disciples. Many have noticed that this setting is similar to Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. Jesus was delivering a new message of the way God wanted His people to live. This message begins with what we know as the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes describe the characteristics of members of God's kingdom. These people are "blessed," not with an external happiness based on things but with an internal one based on Christ. "Happy" might be a better translation than "Blessed." Rather than happiness in its mundane sense, it refers to the deep inner joy of those who have long awaited the salvation promised by God and who, even now, begin to experience its fulfillment.

Only those who recognize their own spiritual poverty apart from God (the "poor in spirit") can enter His kingdom. Those who "mourn" are people who have no other option but to put their hope in God, who will comfort them (see also Isaiah 61:1-3).

Congratulating (or blessing) "meek" people shocked Jesus' listeners, for most Jews associated blessedness with prosperity, power, and prestige. The meek receive blessing, not because they throw their weight around, but because they rely on the Lord to provide for them. Kingdom blessings work in reverse order of the world's expectations. "Righteousness" goes beyond the moral quality of justice in the Old Testament. It means discipleship—loyalty to Jesus and God's kingdom. Showing "mercy" means loving one's enemies, giving to the needy, and forgiving as God forgives. God will be merciful to those who show mercy.

"Pure in heart" refers to integrity and holiness (in Hebrew thought, the heart represents a person's character). "Peacemakers" bring reconciliation during conflict, which doesn't necessarily mean pleasing everyone or compromising God's principles. It is often costly and involves personal risk. A disciple may actually face rejection, hatred, "persecution," and even death.

LIFE NEED

It's not hard to see that the message of the Beatitudes is the exact opposite of the message senior high teens may be hearing. The world is trying to teach them to put self first. They see ads urging them to grab all the gusto this life has to offer and not worry about eternal things. They are taught to consider their own needs first ("Watch out for No. 1!"), and others only as an afterthought. They are subtly taught through their music and other forms of popular media that it doesn't really matter what you do; all religions and gods are the same—we are only following different paths. Therefore, if you choose not to follow the principles of the Beatitudes, there is another religion that will still get you to heaven.

Junior and senior highers may have a hard lesson to learn when it comes to living out Kingdom values—namely, that to do so will give them an entirely new worldview that will, in many ways, go against the grain of the world. For a group obsessed with fitting in, this may be perceived as bad news.

Use this lesson to help your students embrace God's kingdom perspective, which requires a "self-last" lifestyle.

RESOURCES

- Paper, pencil, envelopes, current newspapers and magazines, glue sticks, markers
- Chalkboard, overhead, or butcher paper
- *Beatitudes Decoder* handout
- Copies of sidebar—"The Kingdom Message"
- Newsprint or poster board

PREPARING THE TEACHER

Think back to your senior high years:

- ☞ Did you exhibit the Kingdom principles that the Beatitudes advocate?
- ☞ Did you understand these principles? If not, why not?
- ☞ Was there someone that you looked up to who demonstrated these principles? How did these principles make that person someone you liked being around?

How about today?

- ☞ How hard is it for you to practice these principles?
- ☞ Which of these principles is hardest for you to follow? Why?
- ☞ How does the world treat those who live by these principles?

Think about your students:

- ☞ How many of them are currently abiding by these principles?
- ☞ Do your students desire to be members of the Kingdom?
- ☞ What are the voices competing for their interest that would keep them from living in the Kingdom?

How we live is directly connected to what we believe. If you were to ask a coworker, a spouse, or a family member to describe what he or she thought were your beliefs, based on your actions, what would be said? If he or she were honest, how many of us might be shocked, even hurt, by the observations? How does what you say you believe line up with your actions?

Christianity is not an adjective you tack on at the end of a list of adjectives you use to describe yourself. Your faith is *not* faith unless

Christianity is the spirit of Jesus at work in the world.

—Anonymous

and until it controls your entire life—decisions, thoughts, actions, and perspectives.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus makes a radical demand of all who want to be in (or consider themselves a part of) God's kingdom. Look over the list of character traits Jesus said were essential to Kingdom living (see sidebar). You can't help but see the disparity between these traits and the ones by which the world judges success. Values such as compassion, servanthood, meekness, and mercy are looked down on as weak and useless. Prized instead are power, self-promotion (even at the expense of others), and a general "I'm out for No. 1" perspective.

Every person who desires to be a Christian must consciously decide between these two worldviews: to be a Christian in name only (hearing or reading the Beatitudes but not living them) or to be a Christian choosing Christ and His perspective on life, regardless of how different that perspective may be from society's view on life.

This decision can be immediate, but living out that choice

isn't so simple. If the Beatitudes are so decidedly different than what the world teaches, how *do* we live out the Beatitudes while remaining in the world? It is a matter of learning to see as God sees, of learning to touch as Jesus touched. It probably won't happen quickly. It's a process—a vital one if we are to be Kingdom people.

Think about who watches you each week in your class. Create more than a picture for them of your Christianity. Really be who you say you are in Christ. They'll notice.

The purpose of Christianity is not to avoid difficulty, but to produce a character adequate enough to meet it when it comes. It does not make life easy; rather it tries to make us great enough for life.

—James L. Christensen

TEACHING THE LESSON

LIFE

Student Goal: Examine what the world currently holds as important (its worldview).

Values Comparison ⌚10

To prepare for this activity, you'll need five pieces of newsprint or poster board, gluesticks, stacks of current newspapers, celebrity and fashion magazines, and markers. Divide your class into small groups (no more than four groups). If you have a small class, remember that one person can be a group.

Assign each group a different celebrity from current society, such as the president or other politician, a popular movie star, a musician, or a sports figure. Try to pick people popular with kids in your group. Provide newspapers and current magazines that contain articles about the personalities you've selected. This will give students more information as they work.

Say: **From what you know of your particular celebrity, list this person's top three values. These are the three things this person believes are most important. For example, an athlete may value health, or a politician may value freedom of speech. Cut out pictures that symbolize each value.**

Have each group list their celebrity's values on a sheet of newsprint or poster board. Next to where they have written each value, have them glue the picture that symbolizes that value.

After each group has finished their list, have them all get together and tell them they are going to do the same thing for their youth group. Together, have them choose the top 3-5 values of their youth group. then have them search for pictures or headlines that could represent those values.

Then ask these questions:

- **Was it easy or hard to find pictures to represent the values of this group? What about the values of each celebrity? Was it easy to find pictures that represent their values? Why?**
- **What did this activity tell you about values?**
- **Which of the values you saw listed for the celebrity are values that you hold? Why do you consider them important?**
- **What values do you think a Christian should have? Why those?**

NOTES

The Kingdom Message

Jesus' Words on How We Should Live

You're *blessed* when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

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.

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.

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.

You're *blessed* when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're *blessed* when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

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.

You're *blessed* when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

(Matthew 5:1-10, TM)

TRUTH

Student Goals: Understand the meaning of "blessed"; see how God's values differ from the world's values.

Beatitudes Decoder ⌚15

Distribute copies of the *Beatitudes Decoder* handout. On this handout are the character traits Jesus shared with His listeners in the Sermon on the Mount. Before class, be sure to read the Biblical Reference section in the lesson introduction for a fuller perspective on Jesus' message in these verses. Allow your students five minutes to complete the handout, alone or in pairs.

Together, look at Matthew 5:1-10. Read aloud verses 1-2, and then ask students to take turns reading verses 3-10. If students don't all have the same version of the Bible, consider providing them with copies of "The Kingdom Message" sidebar. It will give them a clear picture of what Jesus meant in each beatitude. With the sidebar, simply have them take turns reading the Beatitudes, then ask the following discussion questions:

- **The Beatitudes show us Jesus' worldview. In what ways are the Beatitudes different from the worldview of our society?**
- **Why do you think Jesus would ask His followers to be so radically different from the world?**
- **If you had to come up with a description of a Christian based solely on these verses, how would you describe one?**

Say, We can all probably agree that knowing how to live and actually living that way can be two different things. Others will be able to see what we really value. Let's take a look at our own lives and determine what values we want others to see in us.

VISION

Student Goals: Learn to differentiate between Kingdom principles and worldly principles; commit to change to fall in line with Kingdom character traits.

What Are My Values? ⌚15

Have students take turns sharing one value named in Matthew 5:1-10 that they'd like others to see in their own lives. Give each student a piece of paper (or simply have them turn over their handouts), and urge each to write a letter to God, asking for His help in living out the Kingdom worldview. When they have finished the letters, have them put them in envelopes, seal them, and address the envelopes to themselves. Plan on mailing the envelopes about two weeks after you've completed this unit, as a reminder to the teens of this lesson and an encouragement to them to continue to adopt a Christian worldview. Close the session in prayer, thanking God for His worldview and asking Him to help students develop His kingdom values in their lives.

NOTES

CREATIVE OPTIONS

Music

Preview the songs listed below, and play any that are appropriate for your class:

“Beautiful, Scandalous Night” by The Choir on the album *Let It Fly*, or *Flap Your Wings*

“Collide” by Jars of Clay on the album *If I Left the Zoo*

“Some Kind of Zombie” by Audio Adrenaline on the album *Some Kind of Zombie*

Group Singing

“Seek Ye First,” “The Kingdom of Our God Has Come,” “Let My Life Be the Praise,” and “I Will Stand” all from the *All the Best Songs for Youth* chorus book (MB-748, Lillenas Publishing Company, available at www.barefootministries.com).

Videotaping

During the week prior to the lesson, use a VCR to record various clips from television shows or commercials that show various character traits. Try to come up with at least 10 different character traits. Utilize a mixture of good and bad. When students arrive in class, tell them you are going to show them various video clips that illustrate different character traits. Tell them to be observant and try to identify as many different character traits as possible. You may want to give them pencils and paper so that they can write down their responses.

After you have shown the clips, ask the class to call out their responses. Record these on a chalkboard, overhead, or butcher paper. After all the students have responded, check to see if there are any you think they missed, and add them to the list. Then ask the following questions: **Which of these character traits are highly valued by the world? Which are considered of little worth?** Explain that a worldview is one’s perspective on life. That perspective colors the way we view life. Ask: **How would you describe the worldview of our society? Is it good or bad?** Say something like this: **What the world often says is good or important is quite different from what the Bible says. When we look at the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, we find what kind of worldview God expects His people to have.**

Drama

Use the following sketch as an opener for this lesson or as a follow-up for your class to present the message of this lesson to the rest of your youth group or to a group outside your church you’re trying to reach: “The Beatitudes” by Hicks and Cohagan in their book *He’s Got My Number* (Lillenas Publishing Company, available in the drama section at www.lillenas.com, MP-626).