

Group discussion *Each number below includes questions that relate to the scripture. I offer a few answers, but your perspective may be better. The point is to discuss, not to get 100% agreement. Rule of thumb: the fewer questions you ask, the better. Save time for “the big question.”*

Read Matthew 5:1-12 aloud. As a way to hear this familiar text in a fresh way try reading it aloud from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*.

1. Jesus’ teaching in this sermon takes place following several meaningful events. What has happened to Jesus thus far in his life and ministry? *Hint: Note especially chapter 4.*

How does life experience affect how someone teaches?

How do you think these events affected what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount?

In what ways do you think this should change how we listen to the teaching of Jesus?

2. Matthew tells us that Jesus goes up the mountain from the crowds and begins to teach his disciples that follow him there. Why do you think Matthew makes the distinction between these two groups?

What would you say is the difference from being part of “the crowds” versus being a “disciple of Jesus?” *Hint: The word Matthew uses for “disciple” means “learner.”*

Name one thing a modern-day disciple would learn about what it means to follow Jesus if they read through this whole sermon.

Name one way their life would be visibly different if they followed the Sermon on the Mount as their guide for living.

3. Central to Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus is of him being a master teacher (see Bible Notes). Do you think Christians think of Jesus as someone who can teach them how to live? Why or why not?

Why do you think it is important for Christians to envision Jesus as a master teacher for their lives?

How might a person do a better job of learning how to live from the life and teachings of Jesus?

Give an example of a time when you saw the teachings of Jesus lived out in front of your very eyes. What was your response?

If someone asked you why the way of Jesus was the best way to live what would you say to him or her?

4. Jesus begins his teaching by announcing blessing. What do you think it means to be blessed? *Hint: See Bible Notes.*

Why do you think it is significant that Jesus begins his teaching with an announcement of blessing instead of demands?

What does this say about following Jesus?

How then should followers of Jesus treat others who are interested in becoming disciples of Jesus?

5. Who does Jesus say is blessed according this passage?

Which of these descriptions stick out to you the most? Why?

Are these types of people (states of being) typically who we say are blessed in our world? Why or why not? (See Kid’s activity for more ideas about the answer to this question).

What should a Christian’s response be in light of this challenging notion of who is really blessed?

† **The million-dollar question** *If you ask only one question, let this be it. Allow at least 20 minutes. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to answer. It’s okay if they pass, but at least they get a chance to respond.*

Who is one person that you can share the blessing of God with this week? How do you specifically plan on doing that?

Resources

Bible notes

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five major teaching discourses Jesus gives in Matthew's Gospel (5:1-7:27; 10:5-42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35; 24:25-46). One of Matthew's primary views of Jesus is that he is an authoritative teacher with important teaching for the people of God.

A key word in this opening teaching of Jesus is "beatitude." Beatitude is a state of blessing; it is to have the favor of God. It is Jesus' definition of who really is well off, who really has the good life. So when Jesus says "blessed are" he is not giving a "to do list" for his hearers to attain. Rather he is showing them divine favor where they find themselves. Jesus does not begin with demands and to-dos, but with grace and blessing from God.

Kid-friendly activity. *An activity designed to help kids and adults grow in faith together. Do this first, then dismiss the kids so the adults can talk.*

"No More Ladders" Activity and Object Lesson

Prep: Get construction paper, scissors, and glue.

Activity: Have the kids build a ladder with the construction paper. Give them a list of people: A doctor, lawyer, garbage man, preacher, schoolteacher, and an athlete. Ask them to rank them from who they think is the most to least important based on our world's standards by writing their names on the rungs of the ladder.

Discuss: Go around to each and ask them why they ranked them that way.

Read: Matthew 5:1-12 (have them turn their ladders horizontally).

Delivery: "When Jesus comes along announcing blessing he is telling people that no matter who they are they are blessed by God. In God's world there is no ranking system. In other words, he is telling them there is no ladder—it has been turned on its side. All are invited to receive the blessing of God equally."

Activity: Have the kids write the word "blessed" horizontally on the sides of their ladder as a reminder that no matter where we might rank someone they are blessed in God's world.

Closing: Dear God, thank you for blessing us where we are. Help us to live our lives in response to the grace you show us first. Amen.



February 2011: Bonus Guide 1

LIFE Group Guide

Matthew 5:1-12 – The Good Life

By Wilson McCoy (wilson.mccoy@gmail.com)

The theme: **Following his declaration of the kingdom's nearness, calling of the first disciples, and healing of many crowds Jesus sits down to teach his disciples. What follows is more than a sermon; it is an invitation into a different kind of life. He comes inviting his disciples into a life that is radical and upside down. He comes instructing them about what it means to live the good life—a life lived in sync the kingdom of God.**

This guide is the first of many Bonus LG Guides for 2011. Our focus for this year at College Hills is "making and nurturing disciples of Jesus." Therefore, the guides this year are going to focus on what many consider to be the central teaching of Jesus for his disciples past and present. The Sermon on the Mount is the starting place for learning the ways of Jesus. His instruction here will guide us through the rest of this year.

Leadership tip: One temptation every LIFE Group leader faces is feeling like they need to have all the answers. However, central to Jesus' teaching method was leaving some questions unanswered and allowing his disciples to keep wrestling with his teaching. Such methods can serve as helpful instruction for us today. Don't feel like you have to "tidy up" every conversation. What you might find, as a result, is your group wrestling with Jesus' teaching long after your LIFE Group gathering is over.

Relate *Use a few to introduce the theme, check everyone's spiritual pulse, and "break the ice." No right or wrong answers – maybe goofy but not wrong! Look for opportunities to affirm and encourage through these questions.*

- ❖ Name one of your favorite teachers of all time. Why them?
- ❖ What is one memorable lesson or experience you had with this teacher?
- ❖ If you were a teacher what is one thing you would want all of your students to learn from you?