

CHAPTER 1, SESSION 12: THE GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL LIFE

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Thus we begin book two of the Apprentice Series. Unlike many studies, books one and two have always existed as one continuous study. However, in *The Good and Beautiful Life* the focus turns specifically to the Sermon on the Mount and the teachings of Jesus. The implication is that as we have come to know the Good and Beautiful God, we will naturally begin to live a Good and Beautiful Life just as Jesus did.

It will be most helpful to the group if they remain aware of what they learned in *The Good and Beautiful God*, and allow that knowledge to inform their reading and discussion of *The Good and Beautiful Life*. As the leader of the group, invite the participants to name correlations they see between both books.

SUPPLIES

- ✂️ Butcher paper taped to the wall of the classroom
- ✂️ Markers for writing on the paper (make sure the markers won't bleed through the paper and ruin the wall)

WELCOME

If you have used the suggested schedule for meetings, your group is coming together for the first time in a few weeks. As folks enter, encourage a time of conversation about how everyone is doing. Allow sufficient time for everyone to become reconnected.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Throughout the remainder of the class, Colossians 3:1-17 will be recited from memory to help center participants for the silence, as well as helping to reinforce the passage in everyone's memory.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

God of all life, we give you thanks for the chance to come back together. We give you thanks for the sense of community that you have built among us as we have grown as your Apprentices. We ask for the grace to persevere together as we continue this study. We ask that you grant us patience to keep "pickling" in your good news. May we come to know the fullness of life you revealed in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Master Teacher. Amen.

GETTING BACK INTO THE GROOVE

After taking a few weeks off, it can be difficult for some people to return to the class with the same level of commitment they had during the fall session of Apprentice. Remind the group of their commitment to the class and how necessary that commitment is to the on-going power of this experience. If necessary, review the suggested weekly schedule so participants can again consider how they will organize their schedules to follow through on the class. Allow this to be a compassionate encouragement to your class.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Have anyone who is comfortable share their letter, the soul-training exercise for chapter 1. After they have shared, consider these questions:

1. What spoke to you as others in your group shared their letters?

2. What insights did you gain as you wrote your own letter?
3. What, if anything, did you learn about God or yourself through the exercise?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [30 minutes]

THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF THIS CHAPTER is that all humans desire happiness, but not all narratives lead to happiness. The narratives of Jesus are the best guide to a good and beautiful life.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all these questions.

1. In this chapter we read about Ben (pp. 18-19), a man who lived an ambitious, selfish, even sinful life, but he also found redemption and radiance before his life was over. What people have you known who, in old age, were living the fruit of their narratives (good or bad)? What wisdom can you gain from them?
2. On pages 20-21 the author gives us multiple false narratives about acquiring happiness. Review those paragraphs and discuss the narrative that you see most at work in the world, and, if you are comfortable, share the false narrative you see most at work in your own life.
3. “Sin is always ugly, and genuine virtue is always beautiful. Sin leads to ruin; virtue to greater strength. And this is why everyone, even atheists, loves Jesus. Jesus was pure virtue. He lived a good and beautiful life, which he is calling his apprentices to live” (pp. 24-25). Describe in your own words what it means that Jesus lived a virtuous life.
4. “Narratives . . . try to guide us, to orient us, to tell us which way to turn” (p. 29). Can you think of a time in your life when one of your narratives was proven wrong? How did you work through this change? How is your life different now? How do your narratives compare to Jesus’ narratives?
5. The author points out that we should not ask the question, “What will I have to give up to follow Jesus? but rather, What will I never get to experience if I choose not to follow Jesus?” (p. 31). What is your answer to the second question? Share it with the group.

BREAK [5 minutes]

ENGAGING THE WORD

The suggested Scripture in the Small Group Guide Appendix has been removed in this study. Instead, the class will read and discuss the entire Sermon on the Mount as part of the “Experiencing Transformation” aspect of the class.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [25 minutes]

This session’s experiential component is made up of two steps. The first step is identifying the “idols” we turn to for happiness, and what voices tell us those idols can make us happy. The second step is to turn our attention to the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus’ sermon will serve as the primary voice for the remainder of this study.

Read the following paragraph and questions:

In describing the “six steps to ruin” the author writes, “Someone, or something must take the place of God. We would like a god who would do a lot of good for us and ask very little in return. The solution: create an idol” (p. 22).

1. As a group, brainstorm a list of “idols” we, as a society, tend to worship. Write these idols on a large sheet of butcher paper that is taped to the wall.
2. Next to the “idols” write what we hope they will do for us.
3. Discuss what “voices” deceive us into believing these “gods” can give us what we desire.

Now, we're going to listen to a different "voice" by reading aloud the entire Sermon on the Mount, which will be the focus for the rest of this study (Matt 5-7). The author gives us this teaching about the Sermon on the Mount:

We should read the Sermon on the Mount this way. Jesus is not demanding we live his way in order to get his blessing or get into heaven when we die; he is simply telling the truth about reality. He warns against lust, not because he is a prude, but because he knows it destroys human lives when unchecked. He tells us flatly not to worry, not because it will give us ulcers, but because people who live with him in the kingdom of God need not worry; it is a waste of time. Lust and worry, judgment and anger, retaliation and pride, are never good or beautiful, and never lead to freedom. In fact, they are a flight from freedom (p. 30).

In light of these words, read aloud Matthew 5-7, allowing anyone to read who would like to, and then discuss these questions:

1. In the sermon, Jesus is giving us the truth about reality. How does this truth agree or disagree with your own understanding of reality?
2. What other questions and insights come to you from this passage, based on the first chapter of *The Good and Beautiful Life*?

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read these words from the first chapter aloud.

Each day, Jesus says to each of us, "Come, follow me." If we say yes, we can be sure that a good and beautiful day awaits us. And when we string those days together into months, years, and decades, we will have lived a good and beautiful life. And that life is destined to echo a benediction of love for all of eternity to hear (p. 32).

Go from your meeting with these words ringing in your ears! Amen.

FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 2, which explores Jesus' primary message of the kingdom of God. The soul-training practice for the week will be play!