

# CHAPTER 3, SESSION 14: THE GRAND INVITATION

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Our perception of the world is “upside-down” according to Jesus. To call Jesus’ teaching a paradigm shift is an understatement. So when the class reads this chapter, they will probably be encountering a new teaching on the Beatitudes as well as a new way of looking at the world. That is a lot to digest, and it will take some time.

Most people find it very liberating to hear that the Beatitudes are not “prescriptions” we must fulfill to be blessed by God. Make sure they savor this good news. However, there is possible temptation for individuals who aren’t on the list of Beatitudes; in our comfort we may assume that we don’t need God. It is this danger that leads us to Luke 6, where Jesus adds to the Beatitudes with a list of warnings for those who are rich, full, laughing and well thought of by others. As much as possible, allow your group to live in the tension between these two lists, because at certain times we all find ourselves on one or more!

## SUPPLIES

- 🎧 CD player
- 🎧 Recording of Rich Mullins singing “Surely God is With Us,” from *The Jesus Record* (recording available on iTunes or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))
- 🎧 Dry erase board or large sheets of paper for the two lists created in the “Experiencing Transformation” activity

## WELCOME

After everyone has arrived, spend a few minutes confirming the plans for the silent retreat and confirming who will be able to attend.

## RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

## 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

## PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

At the end of the silence you may offer the following prayer or a prayer of your own.

*O Lord, with your preaching and with your life you proclaimed that we should change the way we have been thinking, because through you a life of intimacy and interaction with God is now possible. May your Spirit lead us during this time so that we can live such lives. Amen.*

## SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul shaping exercise of hospitality.

1. Were you able to practice any of the suggestions for hospitality this week? If so, which ones?
2. What did you learn about God’s presence in the lives of those who are different than you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself through the exercises?
4. Discuss the soul-shaping exercises from previous chapters that you continue to practice. Do you notice any long-term effect from these practices?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE BEATITUDES ARE NOT PRESCRIPTIONS for blessedness but descriptions of the kinds of people who are invited into the kingdom of God.

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 of these questions.

1. The author opened the chapter with a beautiful story of a young man named Kevin and the testimony he shared. What was your reaction to the story of Kevin's testimony?
2. Take a few moments to review the section "Jesus' Narrative: The Beatitudes Are Invitations of Inclusion" including the author's interpretation of each of the Beatitudes (pp. 55-62). Compare and contrast the author's interpretation with what you have been taught about the Beatitudes.
3. In discussing Luke 6:20-26, the author writes, "Jesus' stern warning is born of love. He knows that we try to find solace in our wealth and fulfillment in our bellies. And we confuse fleeting pleasure with joy. When all is well in the kingdom of this world we are tempted to think we have no need of the kingdom of God" (p. 63). Can you identify times when success led you away from or difficulties drew you closer to God? If you are comfortable, discuss these with the group.
4. Near the end of the chapter, the author reflects, "When I heard Kevin speak that day I was watching a living beatitude. His condition seemed unbleasable in the kingdom of this world. According to society's values he has nothing going for him. He is marginalized, outcast, ostracized and neglected. No one would choose his situation. And yet, he is welcomed, esteemed and valued in God's kingdom, which is why he smiled" (pp. 64-65). Have you known someone who is a "living beatitude"? If so, describe this person to your small group.

## BREAK [5 minutes]

## ENGAGING THE WORD—EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [30 minutes]

Read the following:

*We may not think of people being "inside" or "outside" the kingdom of God as Jesus' audience did, but we probably think of people being blessed and cursed because of their abilities and external circumstances. To help us relate to Jesus' message, we are going to spend a few minutes brainstorming two lists: those who are "blessed" in our world's eyes, and those who are "cursed" in our world's eyes.*

Make two separate lists—"Blessed" and "Cursed"—using the dry board or paper. After you have created them, ask: *How would these two groups feel about Jesus' Beatitudes?*

As part of the discussion, have someone in your group read aloud Luke 6:20-26.

Ask: *Looking at our list of those who are "blessed" in our world's eyes, is Jesus' warning appropriate for them? Why or why not?*

Following that discussion, ask: *How can we, as followers of Jesus, live out the message of invitation with people on both lists?*

Finish the experience by listening to the song "Surely God Is with Us." Below are the lyrics.

Who's that man, says he's a prophet?  
well I wonder if he's got something up his sleeve?  
Where's he from? who is his daddy?  
There's rumors he even thinks himself a king,  
of a kingdom of paupers, simpletons and rogues, the whores all seem to love him,  
and the drunks propose a toast, and they say  
  
surely God is with us,  
surely God is with us,  
they say, surely God is with us today

who's that man, says he's a preacher?  
well he must be, he's disturbing all our peace  
where does he get off? what is he hiding?  
well, every word he says, those fools believe,  
but who could move a mountain?  
who could love their enemy?  
who could rejoice in pain, and turn the other cheek?  
and still say...

*chorus*

blessed are the poor in spirit, heaven belongs to them  
blessed are those who make peace, they are God's children  
I am the bread of life, I am the way,  
do you hear that man? believe what he says?

who's that man, they made him a prisoner?  
tortured him and nailed him to a tree  
was he so bad? who did he threaten?  
did he deserve to die between two thieves?  
see the scars and touch his wounds, his risen flesh and bone  
now the sinners have become the saints, and the lost have all come home, and they say . . .

*chorus*

Give the group a few minutes to respond to the message of the song.

### GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by reading these words aloud.

*Go from this place trusting that as you discover your identity as one "in whom Christ dwells," you will be empowered to live as a Beatitude: a walking, talking blessing to the world.*

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 4, "Learning to Live Without Anger."
- ☞ The soul-training practice for the week will be keeping a Sabbath, so you will need to read the chapter early in the week and make necessary adjustments to your calendar.