



NAC-USA
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE

Midweek Experience Curriculum

The Woman at the Well | The Beatitudes - Parts 1 & 2 | The Holy Spirit, then and now

2015

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Facilitator Note

Question 3

One answer might be that it's hard to be vulnerable when we're fearful about exposing our weaknesses and sin because we're afraid of being judged.

Possibly follow-up with a discussion about whether church should be a place to be vulnerable.

Shouldn't our churches be a place where there is no judgement?

How can we make steps to not be judgemental as a person? As a congregation?

Mission & Vision

Our Vision is to create a church in which people feel at home and, inspired by the Holy Spirit and their love for God, align their lives to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus prepare themselves for His return and eternal life.

Our Mission is reaching out to all people in order to teach them the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to baptize them with water and the Holy Spirit. Providing soul care and cultivating a warm fellowship in which everyone shall experience the love of God and the joy of serving Him and others.

3. What is hard about being open and vulnerable in church?

4. *The woman's response (leaving her water jug to testify to the Samaritans) to Jesus underscores what it means for members to be part of the Mission and Vision of the church. In a world of individualism, it is so easy to see faith as a personal thing, and we may not feel it is our responsibility to share the Gospel.*

How does the woman's testimony exemplify part of our Mission and Vision (printed in the column)?

5. The woman came to the well to get water, but ending up leaving her jug to testify to her village. When have your priorities shifted or what have you had to leave behind because of an encounter with Christ?

We can encounter Christ in many ways; in the Bible, in prayer, in the words of a neighbor or brother or sister, in the divine service, in worship, during Holy Communion, His presence with us throughout the day, a new perspective or opportunity...

Bible References

I am...

John 6:35 I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.

John 8:12 I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

John 8:58 Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.

John 10:7 Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

John 11:25 I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

John 13:19 Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He.

John 14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

6. Think about the “I am...” statements printed in the guide. What do they mean to you? Do any of them inspire you to action, as Jesus’ “I am” statement inspired the woman?

7. Think of the disciples at this time – they wanted to get through Samaria as quickly as possible, but the longer they stayed, they saw Jesus’ love at work. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where, once you were able to shed your preconceptions, you saw God at work? What do we have to do in order to allow Jesus to transform us? What preconceptions do you need to shed?

8. Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for 2 days. How much time do we give Him to teach us? How could you incorporate Christ’s teaching into something you are already doing?

(Example: If you are taking your kids to a sporting event or school event, can you take that time to connect with other parents? Are your attitudes/actions Christian? Has God put you in that moment for a purpose? What is that purpose?)

9. The theme for this month talks about the Gospel as a model for our lives. How did the people in this story live out the Gospel? The woman at the well? The disciples?

Session 2: The Beatitudes - Part 1

Hello again. If you're looking for a practical guide to your walk of faith, look no further than the Sermon on the Mount. This great sermon and guide to discipleship was given early in Jesus' public ministry. It's recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and contains, among other guiding principles, the nine sayings known as the Beatitudes. Both Jesus' entire Sermon on the Mount and the nine Beatitudes direct the Christian's focus towards the kingdom of God. The main purpose behind this sermon was to prepare the disciples for their mission. In addition, many had gathered from the surrounding areas to hear Him that day and to be healed.

The sermon begins with a contradiction to the conventional wisdom of that time. Traditionally, one thought God's blessing was with the wealthy and privileged, while those whose lives were marked by continuous struggle, hunger, weeping and shunning by society were rejected by God. Jesus declares the opposite. When He says the poor and hungry are blessed, Jesus not only connects with the marginalized, but also paints a picture of God in an unexpected way. Where people saw God identifying with the influential, Jesus' presence among the sick, the lame, and the outcast demonstrate God's solidarity with the less privileged. Now God's strength is revealed in weakness; God's overabundant riches are made known in poverty; God's powerful presence is made known in the one who realizes his dependence on His Creator.

Can we see a similar disconnect today between the teachings of Jesus within the Beatitudes and the current pop culture or even our own beliefs? Our culture today places priority on quite the opposite of what Jesus taught. In contrast to the Beatitudes, we could summarize this thinking in the following ways:

Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.
 Blessed are those untouched by loss.
 Blessed are the powerful.
 Blessed are those who are "realistic" about righteousness, compromising at every turn.
 Blessed are those who demand justice and want an eye for an eye.
 Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.
 Blessed are those bold enough to make war.
 Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.
 Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

Is this the way we view blessings today? Do we look for the fulfillment of our prayers based on our own material gain? God's blessing isn't something that we can earn or deserve, and the Sermon on the Mount isn't a list of things to accomplish. Rather, it outlines a completely different lifestyle. God's blessing comes by changing the way you live your life, by changing your very nature and becoming more like Christ. You need to live for God and for others, instead of for yourself.

Being a disciple of Jesus is a lifelong journey. When you gradually become like Him and share His Gospel with the world, you become "the light of the world", as Jesus tells His disciples, letting your light shine before others, so they can see your good deeds that glorify God. Jesus insists that his followers have a penetrating, preserving, and transforming effect on society.

So what comprises a Beatitude? First, it's a pronouncement of blessing. Second, a new way to live our lives that brings us into the nearness of the Kingdom of God. And lastly, a reason why the recipient should be considered blessed. Today we'll look at two of the nine Beatitudes to learn what Jesus was teaching His original audience and what they mean for us today as His disciples. We'll continue with the rest of the Beatitudes next time.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The poor in spirit humble themselves before God, surrender themselves to Him and allow Him to guide their lives. Their understanding of their own nothingness and sinfulness leaves them spiritually poor, and in this poverty of the spirit, they seek and find the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The word "mourn" in Greek is the most intensive kind of mourning. It was used when Jacob thought that his son Joseph was dead. It can have three distinct meanings: first, a deep sorrow for the loss of a loved one or an affliction. Second, sorrow over the condition of the world and the feeling of helplessness to do anything about it. And third, grief over our own sinful state. Being poor in spirit means we mourn over our own shortcomings and sin. It is necessary for us to suffer for our sin. This suffering means we recognize that we have disappointed the Lord because He wants us to be like Him. In our mourning we are led to repentance, humbleness, and dependence on the mercy of God. This grief drives me to change because I've failed Him again. And again I need His grace and forgiveness. Then when we hear the absolution, the Lord's peace moves over us and we are comforted.

Facilitator Note

Question 1

The Facilitator could just pick a few of these to concentrate on, depending on the time available. Promote participation in looking these up in the Bible.

Bible References

All Bible verses in the guide are taken from the New International Version

Matthew 5:1-12

Luke 6:17-26

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

The idea of God blessing the humble and restoring the proud can also be found in Proverbs 3:34 and James 4:6.

Going Deeper

Jesus' teachings and the Old Testament

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus affirmed the authority of the principles of the Old Testament. Jesus' statement in 5:17 indicates that he brings the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament to their desired end. His teaching does not abolish the Old Testament, as some of his opponents charged. Rather, his teaching transcends the Old Testament and brings it to its intended completion. Jesus illustrated in 5:21-48 how to apply the Old Testament to the new situations his coming has introduced by making new applications of the Old Testament.

We'll continue our study of the Beatitudes next week. Now, please turn to your guides to discuss the questions.

Discussion Questions:

1. "Blessed are" was a form of speech that Jesus' listeners were familiar with. The Bible is full of people identified as blessed.

In the following passages, identify who is blessed and describe the nature of the blessing:

Deuteronomy 33:29

Psalm 1

Psalm 32:1-2

Psalm 41:1-3

Psalm 84:4-7

Psalm 94:12-13

Psalm 112:1-9

Psalm 119:1-2

Proverbs 3:13-14

Isaiah 30:18

How do the Beatitudes of the New Testament compare to these "blessed are" statements from the Old?

Going Deeper

The Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes

The setting on a mountain in Galilee evokes primarily the imagery of Mount Sinai, where God's will for Israel was revealed through Moses. "Sitting down" (v.1) and "opening his mouth" (a literal rendering of v.2) seem to be incidental features, but actually suggest Jesus' divine authority. Jesus addresses his teaching primarily to his disciples, but its power is demonstrated in its impact on the crowds, who are astounded at his teaching and follow him (Matthew 7:28).

The first part of the Sermon, 5:3-12, is known as the Beatitudes because of the repeated word "blessed", which indicates God's favor toward certain types of people. There are eight beatitudes; the last two (v. 10 and 11), which concern persecution, are counted as one. Each characteristic or action of those blessed is followed by a promise that carries an eschatological ring. The first and eighth beatitudes anticipate the same reward, the "kingdom of heaven," while "righteousness" is mentioned in the fourth and eighth beatitudes.

2. Keep in mind that each of the Beatitudes is comprised of three elements: a pronouncement of blessing, a quality of life, and a reason why the recipient should be considered blessed. The first element is found in the word "blessed", which introduces each beatitude. The second element does not describe different groups of people, but a composite picture of the kind of person who will inherit Christ's kingdom. The third element looks ahead to some aspect of the coming kingdom.

Using the two Beatitudes in this session, discuss the three different parts.

3. Do you see a disconnect between the teachings of Jesus within the Beatitudes and current pop culture, or even our own beliefs? Read through this rewriting of the Beatitudes:

- Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.
- Blessed are those untouched by loss.
- Blessed are the powerful.
- Blessed are those who are "realistic" about righteousness, compromising at every turn.
- Blessed are those who demand justice and want an eye for an eye.
- Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.
- Blessed are those bold enough to make war.
- Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.
- Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

How do these play out in our world today? Now read through the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. At a first glance, what are the contrasts?

In the fourth Beatitude, our Lord declares that those who feel a most intense desire for righteousness will obtain it. For Christians, the promise is clear and definite. Notice it doesn't say those who are righteous, but rather those who hunger and thirst for - or seek - righteousness. This is about a continual striving to be right with God. This isn't possible on our own. We can be righteous by the law, but that leads to self-righteousness. Only through the righteousness that God gives through Christ can we be filled and satisfied. When we strive to be right with God, it carries over into our actions and relationships with our neighbors.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy means showing compassion and goodness to others. Jesus teaches that we should love our neighbor as our self, and those who receive mercy from God should have mercy on others. The Greek word for "mercy" has its root in the Hebrew word meaning "to get inside someone else's skin." God came in the skin of man through Christ to be able to identify with us. We should also suffer together and empathize with the pains and sufferings of others.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The pure in heart are free from evil desires and purposes. They exclude all uncleanness from their lives which enables them to understand the motives and actions of God. Our hearts aren't pure in their human state, but can be cleansed through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We have to make a decision to have a pure heart, and through repentance allow it to be fully washed. The pure in heart can see God's presence in their lives now, and in the future they'll see Him face to face.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

The term 'peacemaker' includes all who make peace between men, whether as individuals or as communities. It even includes those who worthily endeavor to make peace, even when they fail. They will be called God's children because God is a God of peace. He gave His Son to be born into this world as the Prince of Peace. Here's another example of how Jesus turns traditional belief on its head. Here on earth, the instigators of war stand highest, but in God's kingdom, peacemakers outrank them.

NAC Catechism

4.6 God's blessing (excerpt)

Blessing is synonymous with God's saving and healing activity upon both mankind and the creation. The conviction that man's entire existence is dependent on God's blessing points to an image of mankind that derives from belief in God as the almighty Creator and Sustainer of all creation. By grasping the gifts of God in faith and allowing the Lord to lead them, human beings can partake in blessing.

4.6.2 God's blessing in the old covenant (excerpt)

In the old covenant, the blessing of God manifested itself primarily in the daily life directly experienced by the people, and encompassed all areas of life, for example victory in battles against enemies, longevity, wealth, numerous descendants, and fertile soil. Even in the old covenant, however, blessing already had a dimension which surpassed earthly welfare, as becomes clear in God's promise to Abraham: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."

4.6.3 God's blessing in the new covenant (excerpt)

Starting in the new covenant, divine blessing was imparted through Jesus Christ. The Lord blessed through His word, through His miracles, and through His conduct. His ultimate blessing was given when he offered up His sinless life on the cross. Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Believers know that being chosen in Jesus Christ incorporates the calling to inherit the blessing. They demonstrate their thankfulness for God's blessing through a life defined by the fear of God, obedience of faith, and selflessness.

3. Describe a time when you've found yourself in the state of one of the Beatitudes. Did you experience the reward listed, or are you still waiting for it?

4. The reasons given for every "blessed" condition are associated with a special fellowship with God (they are filled, shown mercy, see God, called children of God, theirs is the kingdom of God). Discuss how it feels to have such great promises of fellowship with God. These are promises of the future, but describe how you can feel the effects of these promises already today.

5. The Apostle said in the video that *"choosing the way of a disciple of Christ is not easy. It is a struggle with yourself. Jesus calls us to self-sacrifice and to live outside the norm of culture."*

How have you experienced this struggle? Discuss how living to the standard of the Beatitudes that Christ gave is countercultural.

6. Read the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19: 16-22. What did Jesus ask the man to do? Do you see traces of the Beatitudes in this story? Why did the man go away sorrowful?

Session 4: The Holy Spirit, then and now

Over the last two weeks we covered the Beatitudes, which are a series of “blessed are” statements that Jesus taught during his Sermon on the Mount, early on in His ministry. Let’s fast forward now to the end of Jesus’ life and ministry and talk about how the Holy Spirit brought the disciples understanding, and how He brings understanding to us today.

The Holy Spirit served to enlighten the disciples as they gradually came to understand what Jesus had taught them during his life on earth. Even though they’d spent 3 ½ years with him, they still didn’t get many of Jesus’ teachings until He’d resurrected. Take, for example:

- In John 2: 19-22 when Jesus speaks about the destruction of the temple and how, in 3 days, He would build it up again. The disciples only got the real meaning after He’d risen as you can read in verse 22.
- Also, in John 20:9 the disciples see the empty tomb and finally understand Jesus’ words from before when He said He would rise from the dead.

Jesus had explained to his disciples that it would be to their advantage that He “go away”, otherwise the “Helper” would not come. This Holy Spirit would reveal new things to them, after Jesus had returned to His Father, and would disclose what had previously been hidden from them and that they couldn’t understand at that point in time.

“When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will guide you into ALL truth,” Jesus says in John 16:13. As we can see in the earlier examples with the disciples, divine truth has a temporal dimension to it. The Spirit helps us to understand each phase of salvation history. God grants, over time, much more insight and knowledge of what is important for our salvation. This process brings changes and new insights with it.

So what does that mean for us in today’s world?

Our Chief Apostle mentioned the following: *“Many of us have grown up in the New Apostolic faith and have made the experience that we have a different understanding about many things today than previous generations did. Here one might be tempted to ask, ‘Were the things we were taught in the past wrong? Did the insights we received at that time not likewise come from the Holy Spirit? Did the Apostles of bygone days not allow themselves to be led by the Spirit?’”*

Bible References

John 2:19-22

John 20:9

John 16:1-15

Mark 8:22-26

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you experience the power of the Holy Spirit in your life?

2. The Chief Apostle said to *“trust in the power of the Holy Spirit.”* Discuss what this means to you. How have you applied this to your life since you heard it on Pentecost?

3. Share some thoughts on how the power of the Holy Spirit can strengthen the fellowship in the congregation.

4. It is interesting how Jesus explained to His disciples the upcoming “work of the Holy Spirit”. Please read John 16: 1-15 and discuss.

5. Can you share some **personal** examples of “inner growth” over the past years, inspired and led by the Holy Spirit?

NAC Catechism

1.3 Present-day revelations of the Holy Spirit (excerpts)

Fundamental evidence that the Holy Spirit would, after Jesus' return to His Father, reveal new things, and thus disclose that which had been previously hidden, can be found in John 16: 12-14. With these words, Jesus Christ promised His Apostles that they would receive further explanations about God's nature and plan of salvation through the Holy Spirit.

3.5.2 The Holy Spirit as a power – the gift of the Holy Spirit (excerpt)

In the course of salvation history, the Spirit of God manifests Himself as the power which takes hold of human beings and enables them to become instruments of God. This power can influence, fill and even renew a human being [Titus 3:5] It is important to differentiate between the Holy Spirit as a gift of God and the Holy Spirit as a person of the Godhead. The gift of the Holy Spirit is imparted by God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

3.5.4.2 The Spirit of truth

Jesus Christ also described the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of truth" [John 15:26]. This Spirit makes clear what is pleasing to God and what is contrary to His will: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" [John 16:8]. The Holy Spirit clearly distinguishes between truth and falsehood [Acts 13: 9-10].

Everything the Spirit of truth reveals is closely linked to Christ's nature and work. Thus He testifies of the sovereignty of the Son of God [1 Corinthians 12:3]

6. What new insights and spiritual developments have you noticed in **the church** over the past years?

7. NAC Catechism excerpt: *"The revealed side of the church of Christ, like the Man Jesus, shares in the general history of mankind. In contrast to Him, however, the human beings at work within the church are subject to sin. Hence the errors, aberrations, and lapses inherent in mankind are also to be found in the church. However, the deficiencies of the visible church can neither damage nor destroy the invisible and perfect church, namely the church to which the true believers and elect belong. This interconnection and simultaneous distinction between the visible and invisible church can only be grasped in faith."*

After reading this, we can see how the weight of imperfection and their own humanness must weigh on our ministers and leaders as they try to lead the church of Christ. When we see glimpses of these imperfections in our leaders and in our brothers and sisters, it can lead us to judge and complain. What would happen if, instead of complaining, we prayed instead? We can pray for our leadership and congregations in a number of ways: for spiritual protection, for protection from moral failure, for preaching the Word of God, for their families, for encouragement, for physical strength, for courage, for discernment, for wisdom in leadership.

Take a moment and either as a group, or in silence individually, pray for the leadership of our church. Discuss this perspective.

8. What is required from us to allow ourselves to be led onward and to accept what the Spirit reveals to us as truth?
