

Becoming

“Kingdom Belongs to the Peacemakers”

Week 4 – April 28, 2024

Scripture: Luke 6:20-26; Matthew 5:9; Philippians 4:7

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Are you someone who keeps the peace or stirs the pot? What about the other members in your family?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Jesus offers a blessing to those who endure persecution for his sake. Those who remain faithful in spite of threats and pressures to choose the contrary. The reason we don't have to be hopeless or discouraged, but rather can have hope and joy in the midst of this life and world, is because there is something beautiful waiting for us in heaven.

Luke 6:20-26 is part of a message Jesus gave that is similar to a message recorded in the gospel of Matthew known as the Sermon on the Mount, and the principles in both of these sermons are foundational to what it means to be his follower. These words of Jesus are more important than ever because when we look at our relationships, our communities, and our world, we are incredibly divided and polarized. One option is for us to do nothing and continue on our current trajectory and see what happens, or we can choose to live and move in a different way.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. What are the things people often chase to remove hostility, conflict, and emptiness from their lives?
2. The Hebrew word Jesus used in his sermon that's translated "peace," is the word "shalom" (**Matthew 5:9**). Author and theologian, Cornelius Plantinga, describes shalom like this: "The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight...Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be." Discuss this description of shalom versus peace defined as the absence of hostility and conflict.
3. We must know peace before we can make peace. **Philippians 4:7** says, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." With God's peace standing guard over our hearts and our minds, how can we experience the wholeness, fullness, completeness that life is meant to be?
4. Peacemaking is about having the courage to step in and do something.
 - a. How could discussing polarizing topics without judgement or division impact your courage to step towards peacemaking?
 - b. Who do you know has tried to step into a peacemaking effort?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that his peace guards our hearts and minds. Thank him we can live with joy and hope. We desire to be people actively working as peacemakers to bring about transformation, restoration, flourishing, and wholeness in our world. Ask him what that could look like in your life and how you can start moving towards it.

Becoming

“Kingdom Belongs to the Mourning”

Week 3 – April 21, 2024

Scripture: Luke 6:20-26; Matthew 5:3-12; Psalm 13

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Do you feel comfortable when someone cries in front of you? Why or why not?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

For the apostle Paul, as he journeyed with Jesus, he became more and more aware of his sinfulness, and he mourned. Over a 7-9 year period, he went from saying he was the worst apostle, to the worst Jesus follower, to the worst person in the world. But as he mourned, he was comforted because as he understood his brokenness in a greater way, he came to understand the grace and mercy of God in a greater way. It's the same for us. When we realize that we are spiritually destitute, it causes us to mourn but hopefully it also drives us to Jesus. When we come to him with nothing, he overwhelms us with his everything, with his grace, his mercy, and his love, and we're able to find comfort and joy.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Because of our access to technology and news on-demand, we often choose to numb out instead of leaning in and lamenting. Story after story of suffering causes us to disengage to self-protect. Grieving losses and expressing our questions is part of our relationship with God. Lament enables us to go to God honestly, and it prepares us to hear and receive from God.
 - a. Discuss what it really looks like to be honest with God about a particular situation, voice a complaint, question, or grieve something.
 - b. Can you think of a time you lamented instead of numbing? What did you experience?
2. Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Luke says that mourning points to joy: “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (**Luke 6:21b**) and “Woe to you who will laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.” (**Luke 6:25b**). Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Matthew says that those who mourn will be comforted (**Matthew 5:4**).
 - a. Joy and sorrow can exist at the same time. While society says sorrow, grief, and deep emotion are to be avoided, God created us with a depth of emotion. What are ways we can hold both joy and sorrow?
 - b. Jesus' teaching in Matthew is more personal. Another good example of a personal lament is found in **Psalm 13**. Discuss it's 3 main sections:
 1. An honest complaint. What are you grieving? What are you struggling with?
 2. An earnest petition. What do you want to ask God for?
 3. An expression of trust. How can you acknowledge God's past work in your life?
 - c. The message in Luke can be seen as a call to weep communally. Communal laments can answer the same questions, but about our community. They are often about injustice and loss and call out to God as the one who can restore, heal, and bring justice. What could God be inviting you to weep over communally?
3. How can God be show you his grace and mercy in a greater way through practicing lament?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God we can come to him with nothing, spiritually poor and mourning, and he can fill us with his mercy and his love. Thank him that in him we can find lasting joy because his kingdom is not of the powerful but found within powerlessness and suffering. Ask him to meet you in your sorrow and joy.

Becoming

“Kingdom Belongs to Those Who Hunger for God”

Week 2 – April 14, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 5:6; Isaiah 55:1-2; Matthew 6:33

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: Think about an unusual food pairing that you enjoy and share why you like it.

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

We all hunger and thirst for something because this is how we have been created. Some believe this desire can be quenched by influence, power and money, others by achievement or relationships. Many have chased after these aforementioned things hoping it would fill them but they haven't. However, when we encounter Jesus, he is able to provide us with a satisfaction and fulfillment like nothing else in this world.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. The Bible frequently uses the metaphor for hunger and thirst for food and water to describe our relationship with God. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God gives an invitation, and a question in **Isaiah 55:1-2**: Why do we spend our lives in pursuit of things that don't satisfy? Discuss what pursuits in your own life would fall into this category and why.
2. Jesus invites us to drink living water that will satisfy the deepest needs of our soul. **Matthew 6:33** describes how: *“seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* Righteousness is about both our personal character and conduct – to seek to be like Christ by standing up for what is right and just, loving our neighbor as ourselves, standing up for the oppressed, being a voice for the voiceless, and showing compassion to those in need.
 - a. What barriers often exist to stop us from seeking ths for our lives?
 - b. How could righteousness lead to lasting satisfaction and fulfillment?
 - c. Discuss the difference between character and competency and the characteristics of a Jesus follower seeking righteousness.
3. Discuss again the things we substitute for God in the search for satisfaction in our lives. What is one way you can turn away from the pursuit of pleasure, riches, success, and fame in your own life this week?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God that he provides satisfaction and fulfillment that is lasting. Lean into his promise. When we take Jesus in, he nourishes and grows our inner person, our soul or spirit. We change, and our lives become an expression of his righteousness, and as Jesus promised, we live with deep satisfaction. This is our prayer.

Becoming

“Kingdom Belongs to the Poor”

Week 1 – April 7, 2024

Scripture: Luke 6:20-26

Grab your Bible and a few people to connect with. Read the Scripture, reflect on the questions below, and share your thoughts. It's that easy!

Share: When you see a social media post using the word “blessed” what is your reaction? Why?

Read the scripture noted above together: Take turns reading if you prefer. Enjoy the different Bible translations we each read.

Discuss the following context:

Poor is a central characteristic of what it means to be a Jesus follower. Subsequently, all of the other beatitudes are built on this one. Jesus tells us we're blessed when we're poor in spirit, spiritually destitute. The reason he calls this type of person blessed is when we come to him with nothing, he is able to give us everything. Empty handedness is where the blessed life begins because it is here we are able to receive the kingdom of heaven by experiencing the presence of God.

Share your thoughts about the following questions:

1. Jesus was teaching Jews and non-Jews, those who were his followers, some who were skeptics, and others who were seeking, wanting to know if Jesus was the real deal. He began his message declaring “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” (**Luke 6:20b**) and “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.” (**Luke 6:24**)
 - a. What does it mean to be “blessed”? Discuss if you think it means having a lot of money, great family, health, relationships, and lots of happiness, or something else.
 - b. How have others experienced “blessings” when you felt left out?
 - c. Is there a connection between “blessings” and experiencing more of God? How?
2. The Greek word that translated to “poor” in **Luke 6:20b** primarily refers to a person's spiritual state. Jesus is telling us we're blessed when we're spiritually destitute, when we have absolutely nothing. To be rich in spirit is to have the attitude that I am good enough, and don't need Jesus because I can do it on my own.
 - a. Describe a time in your life when you felt “poor in spirit” and/or “rich in spirit”.
 - b. What part does control play in your life?
 - c. What is one area of self-reliance in your life that you can identify?
3. When we come to Jesus close-fisted, we can't receive anything because there's no room for anything. But when we come to him open-handed, he gives us more and greater things than we can imagine. What things in your life are you currently holding tightly to?

Pray together: Ask each other to share what is on your heart today. Thank God he invites us to surrender; when we come to him with nothing, he gives us everything, just as The Serenity Prayer describes:

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next.

Amen.