

# Being Blessed

While we all like to receive gifts, we sometimes respond uncomfortably to the idea of being blessed. To be blessed is to be given a gift unexpectedly and without strings. With such freedom granted, it's easy to see how some people might mistake being blessed for being entitled, enabling the receiver to assume a higher status. Conversely, we can see blessings as burdens, requiring something of the receiver. The passages for today show us the unique status that being blessed is for human beings. A blessing can change the core of who we are.

## Focus scripture: Luke 6:17–26

Luke 6:17–26 repeatedly intones “Blessed are you who.” What does it mean to be blessed? Is it necessarily a good thing?

Many of us may feel ambivalent, or worse, about the laundry list of blessings in Luke's beatitudes. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated and excluded, says Jesus in Luke. These are not things we usually consider “blessings.” We often create a distance between us and people we deem as blessed or gifted, putting them in separate social circles or school classes. This creates a barrier for sharing gifts with each other. It creates disconnection whether we mean to or not.

Other translations are offered for the Greek term *makarios*, which Luke uses. The Greek prefix *mak* means “to become long, larger.” Perhaps God extends God's benefits by extending us – by making our hearts and circles of care larger than they once were. Being connected to others or reconciled to one another, extends us beyond who we are. Imagine the wise proclamation as “Reconciled are we” or “Connected are we.” Could this be what it means to be blessed and to live into the future?

The crowd gather around Jesus and reach out to him. To touch him was to be healed. The crowd was healed together. This is what it means to be blessed and connected. Jesus then names all those who are blessed. Blessings do not set them above, or apart, or at odds with the rest. The blessing is to be reconciled, to enter a divine reign, to be filled, to laugh and to express joy not as individuals but as a collective.

**Psalm 1** depicts two types of people in this life: the happy and the wicked. The happy have strong roots near an endless source of

refreshment, but the wicked are unmoored and at the mercy of the wind.

Similarly, **Jeremiah 17:5–10** talks about those who are cursed or blessed. To be cursed is to be cut off from God, from creation, from others, from time. It is to get caught up in the transience frenetic activity of this world. To be blessed is to look for the long view, to feel oneself planted in an eternal stream of past, present, future, and infinity, and to trust that no mortal alone is in charge of our outcome. Verses 9–10 locate the heart as the receiver of our blessings or curses. Our hearts are influenced by what we do. Therefore, how blessed or cursed we feel can be a result not of what we receive in life but what we give from it.

Paul explains the radical blessing of Christ's self-giving love in his death and resurrection to the church in Corinth. **1 Corinthians 15:12–20** reminds us that the blessing of Christ's resurrection is that it is not just for Christ but for all of us. Christ transforms our present reality by taking away the power of death so that we may not live in fear of death any longer, and so that we may eschew the harm we do to ourselves and to others in attempts to avoid what we fear the most.

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Being blessed goes beyond the gift. Accepting Christ's blessing is as much about giving as receiving. It changes the core of who we are. Christ is alive in us. Christ's love and teachings are written in our hearts. The good news of the Sermon on the Plain is that our faith is not merely a call to ethics; it is a call to relationship with our communities, with our culture, and with the God who is ever-faithful to us as God's beloved children.



## Focus scripture

**Luke 6:17–26**

## Additional scriptures

**Jeremiah 17:5–10**

**Psalm 1**

**1 Corinthians 15:12–20**

**Triune God, you are our giver, our gift, and our power to give. Be with us now as we unwrap the wonder of your word, and seek to be a blessing to the world. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.



## The Focus for Adults

**G**ifts are greatest when they are multiplied. The musical prodigy that works hard on his own but can share his song to uplift the spirits of others. The scientist who commits herself to a cure to heal others' disease. Sometimes, we misunderstand what it means to be gifted or blessed. We isolate ourselves or others for what we do not have in common rather than what various gifts we can share when we are ready.

At the same time, the opinions of participants about the definitions of these words, blessings and woes, may differ.

Jesus' teaching may turn upside down the understanding of blessing and woe in your culture. Specifically, in considering God's blessings, some may find it difficult to believe they are blessed if they are facing unfortunate economic or relationship situations. The Beatitudes show us how, in Jesus's mind, we are blessed both for what we are and are not, for what we have and will receive.

Pray for the group, yourself included, as you prepare to lead this session, that you may grow in your understanding of life in God's reign.

## Prepare

### Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's scriptures, Jeremiah 17:5–10; Psalm 1; Luke 6:17–26; 1 Corinthians 15:12–20, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 73).
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on *Spirit Sightings*. Bring information that might inform this week's session.
- ❑ Set a worship space with green fabric, an open Bible, and a candle.
- ❑ Bring Bibles, matches, and [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 8) and *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 8), CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "God Is Our Shelter" (p. 18 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #12 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet "[Luke 6:17–26](#)" resource sheet.
- ❑ Write these references on small cards or slips of paper: Luke 9:60–62; Luke 12:32–34; Luke 13:18–21; Luke 17:20–21; Luke 18:15–17; Luke 18:24–30.

### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Political speech:** nothing extra required
- ❑ **Blessings and woes:** copies of resource sheet "[Blessings and woes](#)"
- ❑ **Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** nothing extra required

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "I Am Sent by God/*Enviado Soy de Dios*" (p. 20 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #5 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).
- ❑ Bring copies of [biblical background](#) material for February 24 (p. 79).



# Being Surprised

## Scripture

Luke 6:17–26

**FOCUS** To explore what it means to be blessed and to be a blessing

## Gather

**Welcome** participants and introduce any newcomers or visitors.

### Opening ritual

**Gather** in the worship space and light the candle.

**Pray** Form two groups to read **Psalm 1** as an opening prayer, alternating verses.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song “God Is Our Shelter” (p. 18 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #12 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

### Moving into the theme

Consider a time when someone blessed you.

- **Was it an intimate act – from a family member to you alone or was it a communal rite – a benediction in a meaningful service or rite? When was the last time, you were surprised? What would it take to surprise you?**
- **How did you feel after being blessed? Set apart? Commissioned? Loved?**

## Engage

### Setting the context

Jesus goes up a mountain to pray and stays all night. The next morning he calls the disciples together and chooses twelve of them to be apostles (Luke 6:12–16). As they come down the mountain, there is an enormous crowd of people waiting for them, seeking healing.

### Exploring the texts

Hand out copies of the resource sheet “[Luke 6:17–26](#)” and invite group members to read it.

Jesus heals and teaches about blessing in the midst of everyone. Imagine yourself in that crowd as one being healed and blessed with thousands of others.

- **How does the location of Jesus as one of them change how you understand who can give and receive blessings?**

“All the crowds were trying to touch Jesus, for power came out from him and healed all of them (v. 19). Gifts are given with good intentions – to heal, to feed, to bring joy. The giver is not merely depleted by giving, but receives a gift from the motivation. As in the prayer attributed to St. Francis, “it is in giving that we receive.” Consider how a blessing is multi-directional as well.

- **What blessings have you received that you wanted to share immediately?**

- **Which ones made you feel as if you had a great responsibility?**
- **Which ones gave you freedom and joy? In what ways did you feel shame for being blessed?**
- **Which blessings helped connect you with others?**

One way to define “blessings” are those things that open us up; “woes” are those things that close us down. Consult a variety of Bible versions to find other ways to understand these concepts.

- **How would you summarize what Jesus means by “blessed are you” and “woe to you”?**
- **What do these blessings tell you about the life of discipleship?**
- **Are there things that tie these woes together? If so, what are they?**
- **What do these woes tell you about the life of discipleship?**

Like many of Jesus’ teachings, Luke 6:20–26 concerns the reign of God.

- **What would you say about the nature of God, based on this passage?**
- **The passage mentions the “kingdom of God.” What do you deduce about this reign of God from these verses?**

Form pairs. Give one of the cards you prepared with verse references to each pair. Ask them to look up and discuss the passage and report anything that might contribute to their understanding of God's reign.

**Other readings** Jeremiah 17:5–10 reminds us that our hearts are the greatest mystery beyond our full discernment or control. Consider a time of deep discernment.

- **What different messages were your heart sending you?**
- **When have you acted out of love only to realize at its impact the selfishness of your expression? When have your actions blessed not only yourself but others?**

**Psalm 1** uses the imagery of being rooted or blowing in the wind.

- **When did you feel you had an eternal perspective on time and events?**
- **What spiritual practices were you doing to stay grounded?**
- **When did you feel caught up in the whirlwind of despair and messiness of life?**
- **What life events knock you down most often?**

### Making life connections

We are blessings to each other in our intimate relationships but also in our corporate ones.

- **In what ways is your church a blessing to its community?**
- **What blessings has God given your church that it could share more fully with the world?**

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## Respond

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Choose one or more of the following options.

- **Political speech** Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:20–26 has the power to cause significant changes in any society. If Jesus had been addressing a political convention in our time, rather than the first disciples, how might he have rephrased these words?
- **Blessings and woes** There are blessings and woes in life, and God's people are not exempt. How do we experience the blessings and woes that Jesus describes in the passage, in our daily lives? Distribute copies of the resource sheet "[Blessings and Woes](#)." After reading the sheet individually, discuss the questions as a group.



- **Spiritual practice: Holy Reading** *Lectio divina* or "holy reading," is an ancient practice of meditating on scripture. Invite participants to engage in a reflection on the following passage. Read **Luke 6:20–26**. Listen to these words in the context of the day ahead of you, or behind you. Write down your thoughts on those connections. Offer prayer that attends to the movement you hear in this passage and in your life. If time is limited, encourage participants to use this discipline to guide their devotion time at home.

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## Bless

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**Gather** around the lit candle again. Invite participants to consider silently a word or thought from this session that has been difficult for them to hear. What might God be speaking to them through this word or thought?

**Sing, or listen to**, if possible, the song "I Am Sent by God/*Enviado Soy de Dios*" (p. 20 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 8; #5 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 8).

**Pray** the prayer on the [biblical background](#) page (p. 73).

**Distribute** the [biblical background](#) materials for February 24 (p. 79).

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## Reflect

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How honest do you think group members are when speaking about issues of blessings, woe, righteousness, and discipleship? What can you do to continue to create an environment where participants feel comfortable being honest with one another?



# Luke 6:17-26

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.

They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases;  
and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out of him and healed them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor; for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you,  
revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;  
for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolations.

“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”



# Blessings and Woes

Jesus' teaching in Luke 20:20–23 is often called The Beatitudes or "blessings." The Beatitudes are also found in Matthew 5:1–12. Jesus promises these blessings for those who follow God's word and God's way. In Luke, these blessings are balanced by four woes (verses 24–26).

Consider the contemporary sayings below. Which are familiar in your community? Who speaks them? Who they say about one's worldview?

"Love is all you need."  
"The one who dies with the most toys wins."  
"United we stand."  
"She'll be right mate."  
"No one is an island."  
"Injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere."  
"In God we trust."  
"Think globally, act locally."  
"It's the survival of the fittest."  
"There's no such thing as a free lunch."

"When the going gets tough, the tough get going."  
"My country right or wrong."  
"Jesus loves you and so do I."  
"Time is money."  
"It's a dog eat dog world."  
"God said it, I believe it, that settles it."  
"It's better to burn out than rust out."  
"What goes around comes around."  
"Live, love, laugh."  
"Just do it!"  
"Life is short, eat dessert first."

Next, consider these sayings in light of Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:17–26.

- **Based on Jesus' teaching, which statements do you think are filled with blessing? Which are filled with woe?**
- **Does categorizing these sayings in this way change your feelings about them?**