

Play a Different Game Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. Do you get excited about the Christmas season? Explain.
2. If you could change one thing about your circumstances right now, what would it be?

Read the following passage: Matthew 5:1-16.

Jesus' famous "beatitudes" (i.e. declarations of blessing) take on particular significance in the context of his first-century Jewish world. Jesus' contemporaries were eagerly anticipating the arrival of the kingdom of God (which Jesus references in vs. 3 and 10). To hasten the arrival of God's kingdom, devout Jews (many believed) needed to be zealous for the Law and even ready to participate in an armed revolution. Zeal for the Law would distinguish God's true children from compromising neighbors and pagan foreigners. And when the Messiah led a revolution, the Gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) peoples would finally be subjected to the rule of God's people. The blessed person, many believed, was the person who was zealous to uphold and defend the Law. Jesus turned this perspective upside down. The blessed person was not the one who hated the enemies of God and jockeyed for the position of power. Just the opposite, in fact. Jesus' blessed followers were the poor, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemaker. These peacemakers were called not to subdue to the nations, but to be salt and light to the nations. Rome played the game of power. Jesus' followers were to play the game of love.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. When you lose sight of God's purpose for your life, what pursuits are you most prone to substitute for God's will? Explain. What effects do such false pursuits tend to produce in your life?
2. Jesus pronounces "blessed" the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (or justice). How should we think about these attributes? Should we try to be gloomy, unsuccessful, and passive people? If not, what is Jesus getting at? How were these characteristics manifested in Jesus' life?
3. Read Psalm 1:1-2. Why would we ever walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners? Have you ever slipped into this error? Explain.
4. What type of people are you most prone to envy? What's the difference between following the example of a good or godly person (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 11:1) and being envious of somebody?
5. Psalm 1:2 says that the blessed person is the one whose "delight" is in the Law of the Lord. This is a statement about the orientation of a person's heart. Explain the difference between living life "outside in" (my circumstances determine my well-being)

and living life “inside out” (the condition of my heart determines my well-being). (See also Proverbs 4:23.) What does it look like practically to live life “inside out”? How well are you doing this?

6. Read Matthew 5:20. The Pharisees felt they were among the most committed to the Law of Moses. What was wrong with the way they were zealous for the Law? Read Matthew 22:37-40. How did Jesus read the Law? Explain how someone might approach the Christian faith today in a way that is similar to the way the Pharisees in the first century approached the Law.
7. Read Matthew 1:20-21 and Luke 7:44-47. How can receiving forgiveness from God make a major impact on how we live? Have you received God’s forgiveness for your sins? Explain.
8. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. What are some ways you can practically love people in this season of your life?

Pray