

FAITH UNITED MILTON 2019 SUMMER SERIES BASED ON BEATITUDES

www.faithunitedmilton.org

INTRODUCTION:

The summer 2019 emailed worship series focuses on the BEATITUDES, found in Matthew 5:1–12 which introduce Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The dictionary definition of beatitude is: “supreme blessedness; exalted happiness.” The Beatitudes are brief illustrations on the spirit of the law, and advice about the personal and private nature of our relationship with God. In each statement, Jesus names a group of people normally thought to be unfortunate and pronounces them blessed. This worship series seeks to explore those blessings.

“‘Bless you’ is a phrase that people use often. But what does it really mean to be blessed ... to be a blessing to others?” According to Jesus, being blessed “doesn’t mean having lots of material wealth, avoiding problems and having a comfortable life. Instead, blessing (or happiness) can be found in some of the hardest times of our lives – and maybe even because of them.”

[quotation from: request.org.uk/jesus/teaching/the-sermon-on-the-mount-the-beatitudes]

MATTHEW 5:1-12 – New International Version (NIV)

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Notes on the sources:

This worship series was compiled by Lorna Turner, and is made available by the Worship Team at Faith United Milton [faithunitedmilton.org].

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Music links take you to YouTube.com videos.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT (SUNDAY, JUNE 30)

There is a great deal of discussion on what “poor in spirit” actually means, but many agree that it means humility. “Jesus puts this beatitude first because humility is the foundation of all other graces, a basic element in becoming a Christian,” according to The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Descriptions of one who is poor in spirit include: reserved in conduct – neither aggressive nor demanding; loves to give up their advantages to benefit others; does not seek to gain influence with others; happy wherever God puts them; and does not discriminate and is a servant to all

Opening Prayer:

From the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes,
with spirits reaching out and hearts open wide,
we bring our whole selves to you today,
gracious God,
ready to receive your blessing
for each of us and for our faith community.
You are more than we can imagine;
you work within us and among us
in amazing ways.
From the tops of our heads to the tips of our toes,
with spirits reaching out and hearts open wide,
we bring our gratitude and our love, gracious God. Amen.
Susan Lukey, High River U.C., High River, Alta.
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.

Scripture Readings:

Exodus 4:10-16 New International Version (NIV)

Moses said to the Lord, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

The Lord said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.

Luke 18:13-14 New International Version (NIV)

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Reflection: “Humility” By Arie Leder

[\[https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/humility-2\]](https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/humility-2)

Our world is hostile to humility; it sees the humble person as a doormat—someone who stands by quietly while others step all over them. The world would rather have us think more of ourselves.

But we are naturally so selfish that increasing our love of self will leave little room for God, not to mention our neighbor. A life built on self-esteem is lonely. What’s more, because humility is often confused with weakness, the lover of self tends not to forgive others.

True humility places all the power of “self” in the service of God and neighbor. Thus God takes hold of Moses’ weak tongue and strengthens him to speak boldly and plainly to Pharaoh. And the humble tax collector throws himself on God’s grace when he says, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Most important, the eternal Son of God takes on the form of a humble servant and dies in our place.

Directed by God’s love, people who are humble in spirit invest themselves in what the world thinks is weakness. Christ’s power strengthens us to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves. Sharing the good news of God’s love and helping others in need, we have “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:15-16).

The world scorns humility. But Jesus Christ’s humility has overcome the world, to the glory of God the Father.

Listen / Sing:

Open The Eyes Of My Heart, sung by William W. Smith (5:22) –

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqb7Vn4AEE \]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqb7Vn4AEE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your mind live in us daily so that your love and power will guide us in all we do and say. Amen.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN (SUNDAY, JULY 7)

“All of us experience losses, but our hearts don’t want to accept them. We’re left feeling hurt and powerless. [But] if we believe that God’s grace and sovereignty are greater than any loss or disappointment, we too can experience joy in the midst of sorrow. We may not understand why God allows tragedy to strike, but we can rest in his infinite wisdom and tender mercies. One look at Jesus’ suffering on the cross, and we know he understands our pain. ‘If you cry, it will get better’ is the meaning of this second Beatitude, says Brittany, age 6.”

(Quoting Carey Kinsolving <https://www.creators.com/read/kids-talk-about-god/09/08/why-does-god-comfort-those-who-mourn>)

Opening Prayer:

This is a day of new beginnings, a day for starting out again—the first day of the week and the day we set aside to worship you, Holy God. We open not only our hearts to you today, O Lord; to you, we give our lives. Help us with that intention. Bind us to you, so that we do not stray. This we ask in Christ’s name. Amen.

*Kate Gregory, Belwood-Metz P.C., Belwood, Ont
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.*

Scripture Reading —

1 Corinthians 15:50-58 New International Version (NIV)

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Reflection: “Death Is Hard To Deal With” by John Rozeboom

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/death-is-hard-to-deal-with-2010-04-10>]

<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/death-is-hard-to-deal-with-2010-04-10>

The reach of Christ’s cross and empty tomb is very great indeed. It spans the whole creation and covers all human history. And because of the resurrection of Christ, death is a “has been.”

Today is my mother’s birthday. She died more than ten years ago. Like that of my younger brother, my wife’s younger sister, our grandparents, and many other loved ones in our lives, her life and her death are still very real in memory. So are the feelings of loss. The earliest Christians, who lived with eagerness and joy in the power of Christ’s cross and his rising from

death, were probably brought up short by the deaths of believers—friends and family members who passed away.

Death is hard to deal with, especially after Easter. I see a good friend from time to time whose wife, Ellen, died several years ago. John speaks frankly about everything, and when I asked him how life was going without Ellen, he said, “John, death stinks!” His words brought tears to my eyes then, and they still do today.

Our hope and confidence is that death cannot write the final chapter for all who have died (or will die) in Christ. As surely as Christ arose, they will rise to life again with new, non-perishing bodies. “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus”!

Listen / Sing:

The Lord Is My Shepherd – (4:03) [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pN4tPkX0MG0>]

Closing Prayer

Father in heaven, thank you that Jesus’ death happened once for all, but that resurrection will be repeated. Our hope is in you, Lord Jesus, and in your resurrection. Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK (SUNDAY, JULY 14)

Meek isn’t a word that we use much anymore, so let’s look at the meaning of that word first. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as: “Quiet, gentle, and easily imposed on; submissive.”

But *Christianity Today* has a richer description: “THE MEEK are those who are gentle, humble, and unassuming, simple in faith and patient in the face of every affront. Imbued with the precepts of the gospel, they imitate the meekness of the Lord, who says, ‘Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart.’” (1)

Finally, there is strong scientific evidence that those who are meek exhibit greater awareness of their surroundings and adapt more readily and quickly to changing conditions, and therefore have a much higher likelihood of surviving adverse conditions. The meek will inherit the earth.

(1) (*Chromatius*, Tractate on Matthew.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/august/10.48.html>)

Opening Prayer:

In this place, we profess that you are God who “has created and is creating.” And so, we come to worship this day to lift our prayers to you, trusting that you are active in the world and in our lives. We come with all our doubts, for we have many. We come with all our questions, though they are heavy. We come just as we are, perfectly imperfect. We come to worship you, powerful God, for we know that you are not done with this world and that you are certainly not done with us. Your Spirit is creating still. Amen.

Nora Vedress, Calvary U.C., Prince Albert, Sask.

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Scripture Readings:

Ephesians 4:2-3 New International Version (NIV)

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

1 Corinthians 13:4 New International Version (NIV)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Reflection: “Patience” by Kevin Adams

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/patience-2013-02-07>]

A thousand things try our patience. You buy something that requires assembly, and the instructions are in French. A huge project is due, but your coworker is chatting in the break room. You spend days potty-training your four-year-old with no results. And then your neighbor informs you that her child mastered the task at age 2!

Specifically, love is patient with people. It’s one thing to be patient with computers or fishing rods or an old Buick; it’s another thing to be patient with your bigmouthed nephew or your crabby neighbor. Sometimes we become impatient with patience. We think of patience as the virtue of the elderly, the infirm, or those too weak to have other options.

But Christian love is patient because it is realistic. The Bible affirms what we already know; there’s something wrong with all of us. Sometimes people call that depravity. As darling as your three-year-old daughter can be, you don’t need a theologian to tell you she’s got an “evil twin” inside her as well. We all suffer from a curvature of the soul. All of us live with people who are imperfect. The world is filled with failures, and we soon discover that people will fail us. All of us fall short of being what we want to be.

We need God’s grace to be patient with others. And we can be patient, because God is patient with us.

Listen / Sing

This Is The Way – Walk In It (3:34) written and sung by Dave and Jess Ray Doorpost Songs, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8T7TC12HFTI>

Closing Prayer

Patient Father, thank you for sticking with us, even when we fail you. Give us your strength to love in your patient way. Amen.

**BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS
(SUNDAY, JULY 21)**

Hunger and thirst are easy enough for us to understand, but what is righteousness?

According to theologyofwork.org: “Understanding the fourth beatitude turns on understanding what Jesus meant by righteousness. In ancient Judaism, righteousness meant ‘to acquit, vindicate, restore to a right relationship.’ The righteous are those who maintain right relationships with God and with the people around them.”

[<https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/matthew/the-kingdom-of-heaven-at-work-in-us-matthew-5-7/the-beatitudes-matthew-51-12/blessed-are-those-who-hunger-and-thirst-for-righteousness-matthew-56>]

Opening Prayer:

It is astonishing, God, to think that,
in the vastness of the universe,
you not only notice us but love us
and long for us to be whole and happy.

It is even more astonishing to hear that
you love and care for those
who are different from us,
for those we don't like,
even for those we call "enemies."

Most astonishing of all,
you seem to see us as essential
to your great work of healing
and reconciliation.

Send your Spirit among us;
teach us your will and your ways.

We pray in the name of the rabbi Jesus. Amen.

John Moses, Aylesford U.C., Aylesford, N.S.

Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47 New International Version (NIV)

The Fellowship of the Believers

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Reflection: Doing Life Together by Lloyd Wicker

<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/doing-life-together>

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. — Acts 2:42

We learn a lot about what community looked like in the early church. It included things like sharing meals, caring for one another, worshiping together, and praying together. The early church took community seriously. It wasn't just an occasional event or gathering. It was regular and ongoing. They valued spending quality time together, and they did it often.

We see in the early church a focus on what matters—the Word of God, fellowship, worship, and prayer. We see who matters—the body of Christ doing life together. And we see that it isn't just a once-a-week event. It also isn't about being a church in one place or even in a building. The Bible says the Lord added to their number every day. There was room for others—more and more.

In our culture of focusing so much on individual desires, biblical community can seem a bit strange to us. But it's all about relationships, and that is something we can grasp even in this "me first" world. Relationships always involve sharing—time, experiences, material goods, and more—and sharing requires an ongoing personal investment. It endures through joys and struggles over the long haul. Doing life together is one of the strengths of biblical community. The gift we share always has room for others, even when it is messy.

In what ways can you invest more in your relationships with God and others today?

Listen / Sing:

By Our Love, written and sung by Christy Nockels (3:32) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifQpZgtGHlk>

Closing Prayer

Father, with you, we want to live fully together as your people, wherever you have placed us. Thank you for this gift. Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL (SUNDAY, JULY 28)

[<https://www.cgg.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Library.sr/CT/PERSONAL/k/170/The-Beatitudes-Part-5-Blessed-Are-Merciful.htm>]

According to a discussion of this fifth element in the Beatitudes, John Ritenbaugh writing for cgg.org says: “English language dictionaries are of limited help in understanding the biblical meaning of mercy. In English ‘mercy’ is normally used to mean showing compassion, forbearance, pity, sympathy, forgiveness ... These synonyms ... all express how a merciful person might act. However, none of them specifically pictures what biblical mercy is, because the scriptural concept is virtually untranslatable into a single English word.

... in all likelihood Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and the idea behind His statement about mercy came from Old Testament—that is, Hebrew—usage and teaching. The word He would have used is the Hebrew and Aramaic *chesedh*... [which] means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings. Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity ... This is sympathy in the literal sense of the word. Sympathy is derived from two Greek words, *syn* which means together with, and *paschein* which means to experience or to suffer. Sympathy means experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through.”

Opening Prayer:

God of Grace, we come with all we have, bodies, souls, minds, all here to worship you. We have come for a glimpse of your kingdom of kindness—a world where love rules over all, a world where enemies embrace and distinctions between enemies and friends evaporate in the light of your love. We dedicate this hour of worship to you and to your kingdom come. Amen.

*Anita Rowland, Monticello U.C., Grand Valley, Ont.
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.*

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 25:31-40 New International Version (NIV)

The Sheep and the Goats

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

Reflection: Room for Others by Lloyd Wicker

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/room-for-others>]

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. — Matthew 25:40

The life of following Christ is not just about “me, me, me.” The gospels challenge us repeatedly to devote our lives to living for others. Jesus equates serving others with serving God.

All too often, though, our lives become consumed by our own plans. Our schedules may be filled with important, honorable things to do. Yet we often risk focusing only on our own plans and missing out on the opportunities God gives us to make room for others in life.

Matthew repeatedly stresses that if we love God, we will inevitably love others. In fact, if we don’t love others, our love for God is in question. Love in action is not just for the people closest to us but also for people who are marginalized, suffering, and in need. When we care for such people, we are actually showing our love for Jesus.

For many of us, the thought of showing hospitality tends toward shared time with friends and family. But do we consider hospitality as an active expression of our faith? The Bible calls us to “welcome the stranger” and “practice hospitality.” More than making room, hospitality calls for Christians to be ready even for the unexpected. While our deeds of compassion and mercy are not the means by which we enter God’s kingdom, they show that we are part of God’s family.

Listen / Sing:

Let Your Mercy Rain, sung by Chris Tomlin (4:38) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zd0PXuXZKDw>

Closing Prayer

Lord, help us to see the opportunities you give us to care for others. Make us generous in compassion and care as we live each moment today. Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART (SUNDAY, AUGUST 4)

Opening Prayer:

God of wonder, God of light,
open our hearts and minds to your incarnation,
expand our understanding of what's possible through vulnerability,
deepen our listening for your Spirit's nudging,
root our living through your self-giving.

God of light, God of discovery,
open our souls to your gracious touch,
expand our incarnation of humility,
deepen our empathy for the stranger,
root our lives in your grace.

God of discovery, God of wonder,
walk with us this day, we pray. Amen.

Gord Dunbar, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine, Ont.

Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.

Scripture Reading:

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13 New International Version (NIV)

Timothy's Encouraging Report

But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

Reflection: "Strong Hearts" by Greidanus

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/strong-hearts-2012-12-06>]

May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blame-less and holy ... when our Lord Jesus comes. (1 Thessalonians 3:13)

What does it mean when you hear that someone's "heart is in the right place"? Usually it means you can count on that person to do what's right, in line with living God's way.

When Paul writes about our hearts, he's talking about the core of our being, our real character, our true self. And he longs for believers to have a heart that is "blameless and holy" before God. That is a tall order!

How do we get a heart like that? Not with delicate surgery in a hospital. We need hearts changed by the Spirit of God. We need moral, ethical change. We need thoughts that think about God first, and others second. We need help to do what we should do, but instead we often skip over and forget.

Paul's letter offers a way to get that help. We can read the Bible, learn what God expects, and look for his Spirit to guide us. A person praying for us, as Paul did, can also help. A caring visit by someone like Timothy—to remind us of grace and forgiveness—would be encouraging also. I find it most encouraging that we can ask God each day to “strengthen [our] hearts.” God is not a cruel teacher who throws a mysterious final exam at us. He is our Father, who loves us and wants us to have full life, now and forever.

Listen / Sing:

Give Us Clean Hands, sung by Chris Tomlin (4:21) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onGbkeWkA64>

Closing Prayer

“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me;
Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”
(Psalm 51:10-12)
Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS (SUNDAY, AUGUST 11)

Opening Prayer:

When we have done all we can to make peace and seek justice for all, we can continue to pray with our hearts and our words.

When we have done all we can to feed those who are hungry and provide shelter for those who are homeless, we can continue to pray with our hearts and our actions.

We, who recognize the Spirit in all, can continue to follow Jesus.

We can surround our community and our world in prayer, O God, and when we can act no longer, we can continue to pray, for your Spirit never leaves us.

Amen.

*Suzanne Edgar, Dexter-Port Stanley P.C., Port Stanley, Ont.
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.*

Scriptures:

Matthew 5:23-26 (NIV)

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand

you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Psalm 34:14 (NIV)

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Reflection: “The Priority of Peace” by David Zandstra

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/the-priority-of-peace-2012-06-09>]

What could be more important than going to church to bring praises and offerings to God together with his people? In his message in Matthew 5, Jesus says that if we know someone has a conflict with us, we need to go and straighten things out before approaching God in worship.

We often think that if someone harbors a bad feeling toward us, it's their responsibility to approach us, especially if we think we have not caused their complaint. “My mother-in-law won't come to our home, and I don't know why,” Laura said, explaining her problems to her friend. “I guess I'll just have to wait until she is ready to tell me.” But Jesus says, “Don't wait; it's your move.”

Why should we pursue peacemaking even if we don't think it's our fault? First, separation between believers is the wrong witness to the world around us. What's more, you may have done something to frustrate that other person without knowing it. Or perhaps you may not have. But it's helpful to know either way. We may find forgiveness for a sin or clear up a misunderstanding. Both are pleasing to God.

In addition, in our love for others, we don't want them to allow grudges to grow in their hearts. If we can help others to resolve their conflicts, especially with us, we should take the initiative toward healing.

Listen / Sing:

Make me a channel of your peace, sung by Daniel O'Donnell (4:21) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sE9std-lwXQ>

Prayer

Lord of my life, it can be hard to obey your command to offer my love to others. Give me courage to pursue peace with grace wherever there's a problem. Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED (SUNDAY, AUGUST 18)

Opening Prayer:

God, when it comes to praying, it might seem that we should be experts by now. Some of us have been praying for decades; your people have been praying for centuries. And yet, we are very much like Jesus' first disciples, saying, “Lord, teach us to pray.” All of us, long-timers and first-timers, are new at this.

We are as little children before the Mystery.
Come to us now, lead us, guide us.
God, we wait for you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

*John Moses, Aylesford U.C., Aylesford, N.S.
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.*

Scripture:

1 Peter 4:12-19 (NIV)

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

Matthew 5:10

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Reflection: "Suffering for your faith" by Jerry Hoytema

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/suffering-for-your-faith-2-2006-11-12>]

Many of us who read these devotions have never been imprisoned or persecuted for believing in Jesus Christ. In Canada, where I live, I am free to go to church and worship. I can go to as many Bible studies and prayer meetings as I want. Others of us in some parts of the world, however, have suffered terribly for having faith in Jesus. We must all be prepared, as Jesus has made clear: "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20).

We must remember also that Jesus is talking about being "persecuted because of righteousness." He also taught that we should "seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). When we start living as citizens of God's kingdom, we can expect opposition. When we speak out against the ills of society, people will brand us. Many of us Christians today do not sufficiently challenge the unrighteousness in the culture around us. Believers who seek God's kingdom and righteousness strive against immorality and injustice in their communities, care for poor and disadvantaged people, and share the love of God wherever they are. When you become a Christian, you learn to stand for the right. You study the Bible to learn how you should live. Though you are not of the world, you stand in the world as a follower of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we know you were persecuted for our sake. Give us the strength and courage to stand up for your sake as we seek God's kingdom in this world. Amen.

Listen / Sing:

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, by Maranatha Music (3:04) –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EsBpM9IcBts>

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, let me forth into the world, among all people, and let your love so shine upon stranger and neighbor that all may know whose I am — for I am Christ's! Amen
adapted from – George Allan, Chatham, Ont.

**WHAT DO THE BEATITUDES TEACH US ABOUT LIFE?
SUNDAY, AUGUST 25****Opening Prayer:**

O God, you have been with us in the past and you will guide us into the future. We give you thanks for the lives we have been given, with all of their blessings and challenges. We give you thanks for the life of this community of your people. We pray that we will be attentive to your call in the days and weeks and years to come, the sunny times and the stormy times. Help us to learn your ways and grow more faithful to you in all times. Amen.

*Jean Leckie, Heart Lake U.C., Brampton, Ont.
Gathering, Pentecost 1, 2019. Used with permission.*

Scripture:

Matthew 5: 1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reflection: “Ultimate Blessing and Joy” by Laurie Zuverink

[<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/ultimate-blessing-and-joy>]

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

(James 1: 2)

The Beatitudes can be described as “ultimate blessings.” These blessings refer to the glorious goodness of life with God in his kingdom and presence. And we can count on these blessings despite all the difficulties we may face in our lives, including persecution for being followers of Christ. All who claim God’s promises in Christ can live in the hope of these promises. But the beatitude blessings are more than just promises for the future.

Notice how James talks about having joy in the midst of trials. Christian joy includes a profoundly deep sense of peace and comfort that sustains believers even in the midst of persecution, trials, and suffering. The blessedness of this joy is the same as the ultimate blessedness of the beatitudes.

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God offers us a joyful, blessed spirit— not only in anticipation of the life to come but also in this life too.

A joyful spirit is not one that is happy all the time, no matter the circumstances. Rather, it has the firm foundation of peace and understanding that no matter what happens, God loves us, knows us, and will never leave us. This truly is the highest blessing.

Listen / Sing:

All The People Said Amen, written and sung by Matt Maher (3:01) –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9ifzzMD7zk>

Closing Prayer

Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we have prayed for the spiritual qualities mentioned in the Beatitudes. Listen to this great rendition of “The Lord’s Prayer”, sung by Andrea Boccelli to complete our summer 2019 worship series.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEplqV0scyo>