

Interactive lesson



picture from

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/little-girl-asking-for-approval-3985063/>;

credit: Gustavo Fring

What are the magic words when you want something?
<Let them respond; “please” and “thank you”>

Do you always say thank you when you get what you want? <Let them respond>

What about when you get something you do not want?
<Let them respond>

What if it turns out that you actually needed what you did not want? <Let them respond>

What gifts have you received that you appreciated more years later? <Let them respond>

God blesses us in many ways. Some of those blessings we are thankful for immediately, and some we detest until our perspective changes.

What have you received from God that you did not appreciate as a blessing until much later?
<Let them respond>

How have you shared that blessing with others?
<Let them respond>

What we may consider foolish, God uses to lift up the lowly. It is important for us to trust God’s wisdom! God gives us more blessings than we realize, that we may grow more fully into what we can be – our true selves, God’s children in the kingdom of God – and

share our blessings with others, that they too may grow into their full selves.

Gospel lesson

Today's Gospel reading is one of my favorite scriptures. It comes as Jesus's ministry had just gotten into full swing.



picture from
<https://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/Lumo-salt-light/>

Matthew 5:1-12

NRSV

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Blest Are They"

TFWS #2155>

Message: Blessed Are



background picture and overlay from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/glimpses-of-the-kin-dom/fourth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-after-the-epiphany-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Amazing God who has blessed us far beyond what we can comprehend,

as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we learn to appreciate Your blessings more fully and share our gifts more readily, that all may be more fulfilled in Your grace. Amen.

We continue the "Glimpses of the Kin-dom" series today with "Blessed Are":

"For the next three weeks, we dip into the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the most famous extended teaching from Jesus from the gospels. This week, we look at what are called the Beatitudes, the first part of the Sermon."



picture from <https://www.ebay.com/itm/384968181967>

When I was a young teen, my parents gave me a clock radio for my birthday. *Meh*, I thought, *I guess I might as well put it in my room*. I was kind of disappointed, because it was not the kind of gift that would cause me to cheer with delight. I was not about to brag about it or show it off at school.

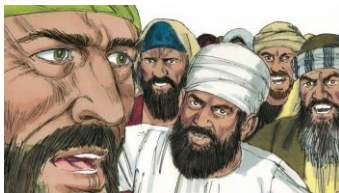
I dutifully thanked my parents and put it on the dresser by my bed. With all my siblings in it, our

house did not lack for noise, so I rarely turned on the radio just to listen to it. The alarm was useful getting me up in the morning, though.

When I went to college, having an alarm clock in the morning was important, or I would have missed a lot of classes. I grew to appreciate my clock radio much more, especially since I could wake up to music instead of just a blaring beep. My roommate also appreciated the music instead of blaring alarm beeps.

After I got married, both my husband and I relied on it. I was sad when it finally stopped working and we had to replace it. What started out as a disappointment turned out to be a cherished blessing, even more appreciated when shared with others.

I am very blessed, and you are blessed too, although sometimes it may not feel much like it. The same can be said of God's people all through the ages.



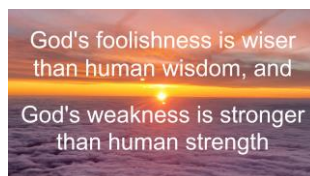
picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jehoshaphat-ahab/>

The Israelites struggled with following the covenant; the psalmist celebrates the one who does what is right. The prophet Micah voices God's complaint against the people: after all that God had done for them, they got sidetracked from living in true relationship with God. They used covenant rituals as a device to earn

forgiveness, but God would not accept that.

Our worship of God is not to be transactional, but a way of living. “[W]hat does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Anything in this created world that distracts us from that needs to be put aside. If we do not do it ourselves, God may bless us by removing those distractions for us. Paul told the Corinthians in his letter how God did that through Christ: the crucified Messiah rather than a military leader, to restore the kingdom for God’s people – all who believe, even if they are not from the line of Abraham.



picture from MMMS collection

It makes no sense to worldly wisdom. What folly that someone born among the common folk should be proclaimed LORD when all He did was serve others! What folly that the established ways should be overthrown through sacrifice instead of force! Yet that is the wisdom of God, greater than anything humans come up with.

You cannot build people up when you are busy tearing others down. How are you to see God when you are looking greedily at created things? How can you live more fully if you turn away from the source of all

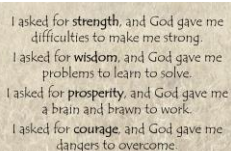
life? We need God, and to follow God's wisdom!

We live only by the grace of God, who intervenes to call us back, who reaches us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus pointed out that those who turn to God and follow God's ways, whom society deems poor, are rich in blessings from God, even moreso than those whom society deems rich. He invites us to lean into the possibilities our Creator put before us.

- † Be humble, that you may receive.
- † Share feelings, that you can know you are not alone.
- † Be meek, that you may avoid destructive fights.
- † Hunger and thirst for righteousness, that all may have justice.
- † Show mercy as an example for others.
- † Look for good, that you may see God in action.
- † Work for peace, that all can live in harmony.
- † Stay faithful, even when ridiculed or hurt by others, for God will remain true to you.

That does not mean we will be blessed with easy comforts and having all our wants fulfilled.

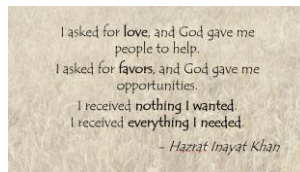
Hazrat Inayat Khan wrote this poem which points out the difference between what we want and [what we need in order to have] what we want:



I asked for **strength**, and God gave me
difficulties to make me strong.
I asked for **wisdom**, and God gave me
problems to learn to solve.
I asked for **prosperity**, and God gave me
a brain and brawn to work.
I asked for **courage**, and God gave me
dangers to overcome.

picture from MMMS collection

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picture from MMMS collection

I asked for **love**, and God gave me
people to help.
I asked for **favors**, and God gave me
opportunities.
I received **nothing I wanted**.
I received **everything I needed**.

As Rev. Dr. Derek Weber put it, "We are not blessed to feel better in ourselves. We are blessed to be a blessing." As God's children, we are to work on building God's kingdom here on earth - starting with trust in God's direction and the tools God gives us to work with. Blessed are those who love the Lord with all their heart, all their mind, all their soul, and all their strength, for they shall have life, and have it abundantly.

And we only multiply our blessings when we share them with others. Blessed are those who love their

neighbors as themselves, for they shall live in Christian community, filled with love.

What more do we really need?

Let us now respond with **A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada** UMH #883

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the church:

to celebrate God's presence,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of all blessings, your beloved son teaches all we

need to know to claim the life you've hoped for us. In spite of that, we live like the rest of the world that is eager to accumulate and reluctant to give, showering adoration on the rich and powerful and pushing the poor and powerless.

As we bring to you our gifts,
which are the result of your blessings,
help us to remember who Jesus called truly blessed!
(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
 - **Matt Sheldon** - infections + other health issues
 - **Family of Carole Nelson** - passed away Wed 1/25
 - **Diane MacGregor** - cancer
 - **Jason Wentworth** - fell, not doing well in hospital
 - -
 - -
 - -
 - -
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 - -
- Thanks for
 - -
 - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off
 - Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle,

especially those to whom we remain oblivious.

- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
 - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
 - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we lift up in Your holy name,
praying as you taught us to pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

<Hymn "Give Thanks" TFWS #2036>

<Benediction>



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Give thanks with a grateful heart
for we are **blessed**
in ways the world does not understand.
Welcome the Holy Spirit, serve Jesus,
and help others to life in Christ with us,
that all may join the Kingdom of God
and give thanks for all the blessings
God has provided in wisdom and love. Amen.