



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 Jesus Is for Losers  
(Sermon on the Mount,  
pp. 68-76)

### Suggested Articles:

📖 You Are Blessed  
(Sermon on the Mount,  
pp. 51-55)

📖 Blessedness  
(Sermon on the Mount,  
pp. 56-59)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Jesus Is for Losers

We may be drawn together by isolating ourselves from evildoers or by joining with broken sinners who cry out to God. Both of these are magnetic and contagious. Jesus warns, "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged." Folks are hungry for a Christianity that mirrors Jesus, not the judgmentalism that has done more to repel than to woo people towards God's grace.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:1-5

### Meditation<sup>†</sup>

[Jesus] used the method of "show and tell" to make clear the extent to which the kingdom is "on hand" to us.... He could point out in the crowd now this individual, who was "blessed" because the Kingdom Among Us had just reached out and touch them with Jesus' hear and voice and hands. Perhaps this is why in the Gospels we only find him giving Beatitudes from the midst of a crowd of people he had touched.

And so he said, "Blessed are the spiritual zeros – the spiritually bankrupt, deprived and deficient, the spiritual beggars, those without a wisp of 'religion' – when the kingdom of the heavens comes upon them."

*Dallas Willard*

### Reflection

"We live in an age that when people hear 'Christian,' they are much more likely to think of people who hate gays than people who love outcasts," Shane Claiborne laments. "Bumper stickers and buttons read 'Jesus, save me from your followers.'"

As Christians we rarely restrict our self-righteousness to condemning "outsiders"; we eagerly direct it toward our sisters and brothers in Christ as well. "Conservatives stand up and thank God they are not like the homosexuals, the Muslims, and the liberals. Liberals stand up and thank God they are not like the war-makers, the yuppies, and the conservatives."

Yet Claiborne is hopeful that "a new kind of Christianity emerging – a Christianity that is closer to the poor and broken people forsaken in the abandoned shadows of the empire." As we are guided by Jesus' teaching and empowered by God's Spirit, we may lay aside the idea that "it is our duty to rid the world of evildoers." There is a better way: "The more passionately we love those who do violence, the more evil will diminish. This was true of the Christian martyrs, whose self-sacrificial love for their enemies converted many to the Church."

In his instruction on judging others, Jesus calls us to see people differently – seeing *into* their lives as dwelling places of the holy God, rather than looking *at* them as objects. "Most of the time we look *at* people – good-looking women or men, beggars, pop stars, white folks, black folks, people with suits or dreadlocks," Claiborne admits. "But over time, we can develop new eyes and look *into* people. Rather than looking at people like sex objects or work tools, they become sacred. We can enter the Holiest of Holies through their eyes. They can become a 'Thou.'"



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At the very beginning of the Sermon, Jesus models this way of seeing others. The crowd that followed him up the mountain was “suffering not only from every sort of disease, but also from the deep suspicion that God does not like them and is making that apparent in their twisted bodies and disordered thoughts,” Burt Burleson observes. Yet to them Jesus says, “You have God’s blessing – what you need most, what is essential to live.” This is always where Jesus begins. “It has to begin here with God’s grace coming down from this mountain. If we cannot get this, then we cannot get Jesus. This teaching is amazing and exasperating. We can spend a lifetime hearing it.”

Claiborne concludes, “So many people are longing to be brought to life. They know all too well that they have done evil. They long to hear not only of a God who embraces evildoers but also of a Church that does the same.”

### Study Questions

1. What is the difference between making wise choices about good and bad ways of living (or faithfulness to Christ and unfaithfulness) and being judgmental toward others?
2. Why, according to Shane Claiborne, are we so drawn toward being judgmental? Do you agree?
3. Jesus teaches that if you want to *see* other people clearly, you must “first take the log out of you own eye” (Matthew 7:5). What does he mean by this?
4. “We need more prophets who laugh and dance,” Claiborne says. “Whenever people talk about injustice, there is usually a looming cloud of guilt. Joy and celebration usually do not mark progressive social justice circles, or conservative Christian circles for that matter. That is one thing many conservatives and liberals have in common: they lack joy. But the Jesus movement is a revolution that dances.” Do you agree?
5. “The Beatitudes that Jesus shared are his self portrait,” Burt Burleson notes. “They depict one blessed of God who lives a life of blessing in the world.” Discuss the implications of this.
6. In Fanny Crosby’s hymn, “More like Jesus Would I Be,” what attitudes and traits enable us to become “gentle as a dove” rather than judgmental when other people fail?

### Departing Hymn: “More like Jesus Would I Be” (verse 1)

More like Jesus would I be,  
let my Savior dwell with me;  
fill my soul with peace and love,  
make me gentle as a dove.  
More like Jesus, while I go,  
pilgrim in this world below;  
poor in spirit would I be;  
let my Savior dwell in me.

Fanny Crosby (1868)

Tune: MORE LIKE JESUS

† Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1998), 100.

# Jesus Is for Losers

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To distinguish between making wise choices about good and bad ways of living (or faithfulness to Christ and unfaithfulness) and being judgmental toward others.
2. To diagnose the spiritual temptation for Christians communities to be judgmental toward outsiders and toward one another.
3. To discuss how we can follow Jesus more faithfully in being gentle rather than judgmental.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Sermon on the Mount (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “More Like Jesus Would I Be” locate the familiar tune MORE LIKE JESUS in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at [www.cyberhymnal.org](http://www.cyberhymnal.org).

## Begin with a Story

“I can remember talking with a homeless guy in an alley downtown and he started sharing with me about God,” Shane Claiborne writes. “He was familiar with the Bible, but kept talking about ‘those Christians’ in the third person and at a distance. A little confused, I finally asked him for clarity, ‘Are you not a Christian?’ ‘Oh no,’ he said, ‘I am far too messed up.’ I asked him what he thought a Christian was, and he said, ‘Someone who’s got their [you know what] together, and has things figured out.’ I confessed that I must not be a Christian either (and that I was not sure I had ever met one), and we laughed. We read together where Jesus tells the Pharisees (the ones who had things together): ‘It’s not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance’ (Luke 5:32, NIV<sup>†</sup>). My homeless friend nodded with a smile: ‘I like that verse’” (*Sermon on the Mount*, 68-69).

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members to be discerning, but without being judgmental.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 7:1-5 from a modern translation.

## Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

## Reflection

Shane Claiborne does not advocate politically correct “tolerance” — a relativism that fails to practice discernment, that is, making wise judgments between the wise and faithful forms of life and the ways that lead to spiritual and social destruction. Yet he thinks Christians have failed to heed Jesus’ warning to not

be judgmental. We have a serious image problem – not because others think badly of us (we often deserve and can profit from their criticism), but because we misrepresent our Lord and obstruct the gospel. We may live on the “compost of Christendom,” but the good news is that forms of Christian community are emerging that share Jesus’ concern for “the poor and broken people forsaken in the abandoned shadows of the empire.”

### *Study Questions*

1. Shane Claiborne’s opening story suggests some important differences between judgmentalism and wise discernment. Judgmental persons are quick to evaluate and condemn others, relish the feeling of superiority (as though they have fully earned the higher status), and prefer to rebuke publicly rather than be friendly and welcoming to people of whom they disapprove. Their judgments are skewed toward the standards of their group. Wisdom, on the other hand, is modest and gentle in its evaluations, refuses to build self-esteem on the harsh criticism of others, and remains gracious and welcoming toward the sinner. The goal is to encourage healing and reconciliation with the other person, not isolation and prideful neglect of them.
2. Claiborne’s insight is that “isolating ourselves from evildoers” is both magnetic and contagious. How is it “magnetic”? We feel good about ourselves, and our communities, by being judgmental of others. Perhaps ‘playing the judge’ appeals to our vanity and envy. And what makes it so “contagious”? When our friends are judgmental, we may be drawn into their behavior for the fellowship or to avoid becoming their next targets.
3. “Taking the log out” cannot mean “healing ourselves,” for this would lead to more self-righteousness rather than less. Jesus calls us to realize our own brokenness and to acknowledge and embrace God’s gracious healing. This reading is suggested by the first four beatitudes that commend being poor in spirit, mournful, meek, and hungry for righteousness.
4. Do members agree that Christians, liberal and conservative, lack joy? If so, why are we so joyless? Claiborne suggests that many of us live under “a looming cloud of guilt” and have not fully embraced God’s gracious blessing. We may fear that we are responsible for fixing the world or may strive to keep up appearances of goodness. These are other ways of not fully trusting God’s grace. Recall the stories Claiborne tells of playful prophetic actions – of Don Miller and his friends dressing like monks and setting up ‘reverse’ confessional booths where they confessed their sins to anyone who was willing to listen and forgive, or of friends at the Camden House who dressed in sackcloth branded with the fruits of the Spirit and walked among both “the warmongers and Bush-bashers” at a war protest.
5. When we are confident of God’s gracious blessing and realize that we need not earn it, we are drawn to care for others like Jesus did. Discipleship follows grace, not the other way around. “The Beatitudes bounce around and challenge us to live like Jesus in our world, in our relationships,” Burleson says. “And having heard – core deep and deeper – that you are blessed of God, you will find yourself caring about everything else that Jesus said that day on the mountainside. What is more, you will seek it – meekness, peace, humility, mercy. Knowing that you have God’s blessing, you will live a life of blessing.”
6. Crosby says the indwelling of Jesus (or God’s Spirit – through an allusion to the “dove”) fills us with peace and love. Poverty of spirit – a deep awareness that we are unable to heal our own wounds of sin – is necessary to receive humbly this merciful indwelling. Encourage members to discuss how peace with ourselves and God, love, and poverty of spirit can make us less judgmental of one another.

### *Departing Hymn*

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

† Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.