



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth  
(*Consumerism*, pp. 65-70)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:  
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### Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics  
Baylor University  
PO Box 97361  
Waco, TX 76798-7361  
Phone 1-866-298-2325  
[www.ChristianEthics.ws](http://www.ChristianEthics.ws)

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# Who Are the Meek?

Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." What a fundamental paradox: Mammon is ours, the earth is ours, life is ours—if we return them to God! The poor, the lowly, and the despised are honored and welcome in the kingdom. The affluent are no less welcome, but they have to leave their baggage behind.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

### Responsive Reading†

Trust in the LORD, and do good;  
so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.

**Take delight in the LORD,  
and he will give you the desires of your heart.**

Commit your way to the LORD;  
trust in him, and he will act.

**For the meek shall inherit the land,  
and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.**

### Reflection

Americans receive mixed messages about money. One message is, "Do good, be honest, and obey the law." But the other says, "Take what you can for yourself." Some people may even enjoy the thrill of "leading a double life—outwardly a conservative, respectable businessman but inwardly working all the angles to get rich," Simon notes. "Perhaps most of us want to make it, to enjoy the symbols of success, but hope to do it honestly." How far our thinking is from Jesus' proclamation: the meek receive the earth as their inheritance!

Who are the meek? In Psalm 37 the meek "trust in the Lord" and "commit [their] way to the Lord;" they find their happiness in God-given salvation (37:3, 5). That's not the wisdom the world. The world tells us that aggressive, ambitious men and women seize the earth. Though haughty ambition and infatuation with success may be virtues in the world, the faithful are called to be meek, trusting, and committed to God.

Meek persons are patient, gentle, and mild, but they are not spineless. "Far from suggesting excessive submission to others," writes Simon, "meekness means submission to God, which gives strength for obedience." They do not strive after their inheritance, but embrace their God-given deliverance with a trusting spirit.

"The examples of Jesus and Moses teach us that to be meek is not to be shorn of ambition, but to have one's ambition transformed from self-serving purposes to that of serving God." Meekness puts generosity over gain. So, Simon asks "What would happen if we really became meek? What if we showed extravagant generosity with God's gifts to us? How much more empowered our lives and the mission of the church would be. And how much less suffering the world would have." Simon commends two ways to advance in Christian meekness:



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**Brett R. Dewey**, Graduate Assistant in The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, is the author of this study guide.

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▶ *Receiving the mind of Christ* involves following him and conforming to his virtues. That he “carried his obedience to the cross for our sake defined the meekness of Jesus as extraordinary courage,” and only the bravest dare to embrace the virtues Jesus lived. The trust in God that is essential to meekness may come more easily to the poor, dependent, and oppressed. Such trust is especially difficult for the well-connected and self-sufficient. Yet we discover—as the mind of Christ replaces a worldly way of thinking—that leaving our baggage of possessions behind leads paradoxically to gaining the kingdom.

▶ *Honoring God and properly valuing creation* challenges the persistent temptation in our consumerist culture to value stuff over the Creator. “To obtain the earth, we must give earthly treasures away and place our hearts elsewhere.” Letting go of the earth acknowledges that the earth belongs to the Lord. God bestows the gifts of creation on us to treasure, care for, and enjoy. But when we are captivated by mammon, we lose sight of the fact that we are stewards, not owners.

The things of the earth are not ends in themselves; worshipping or hoarding them is a lost cause. Mammon is a servant to be used in a way that honors the God to whom all things belong. “And God, in turn, honors us not simply with the earth, but with the kingdom as our inheritance. A house, a bed, a family meal, friendships, work, prayer, pleasure, income, citizenship—these and all other things are changed, their value dramatically enhanced because they are accepted as treasures to enjoy and employ for the highest purposes.”

### Study Questions

1. Meekness requires “one’s ambition [be] transformed from self-serving purposes to that of serving God” (p. 68). How does *receiving the mind of Christ* play a role in this transformation? What role does *honoring God through proper valuation of creation* play?
2. What other traits of Christian character are closely related to the meekness that Christians need today?
3. “Much has been made recently of an obscure prayer of a man named Jabez who asked the Lord to ‘bless me and enlarge my territory’ (1 Chronicles 4:10), a prayer that is being held up as a model for Christians,” Simon notes (p. 68). How would a meek person interpret the prayer? How can we expect it to be interpreted in our mammon-driven culture?
4. How is the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) a model of meekness?
5. Can a wealthy person today be meek? What would it mean in our culture to “leave their baggage [of possessions] behind”?

### Departing Hymn: “O God, You Own a Thousand Hills”

†Adapted from Psalm 37:3-5, 11 (NRSV).

# Who Are the Meek?

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 5	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To understand the biblical virtue of meekness.
2. To consider how we advance in meekness by receiving the mind of Christ, honoring God, and properly valuing the creation.
3. To reflect on how meekness requires us to retreat from the baggage of affluence.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Consumerism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude with a prayer that members will be led to a more trusting and committed relationship with God.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 5:1-12 from a modern translation.

## Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

## Reflection

The Greek word translated “blessed” in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-11) is *makarios*. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the early church, this word is used for the happiness experienced in God-given salvation, but not for the self-striving successes or driven attainments of individuals. Thus, the phrase “blessed are the meek,” means “God’s salvation graciously comes to those who are meek.”

Many are puzzled by the blessing of the meek in Matthew 5:5. “Who are the meek?” we wonder (for we don’t think meekness is a particularly admirable trait), and “What could mean for *them* to ‘inherit the earth?’”

To answer our first question, Simon appeals to the picture of meekness in Psalm 37 (where it is parallel to “trust in the Lord” and “commit your way to the Lord”) and in the lives of Moses and Jesus (where it is certainly not spinelessness). In answer to our second question, he says we are graciously given the kingdom of God. “To inherit the earth we must let go of the earth. To obtain the earth, we must give earthly treasures away and place our heart elsewhere,” he writes. “Why should we ever wish for something so insignificant and transient as wealth or fame when God offers us the kingdom as an inheritance? And to celebrate the kingdom, why would we not gladly die to our privileges so that others may live?” (pp. 68-69).

To put on Christian meekness is to “have one’s ambitions transformed from self-serving purposes to that of serving God.” Simon highlights two ways of doing this: (1) receiving the mind of Christ and (2) honoring God by properly valuing creation. To receive the mind of Christ, or to adopt his patterns of thinking and acting in the world, requires great courage. He elevated the powerless, “those more often oppressed than successful,” those who usually wind up under the foot of the mighty. Most of us are the socially respectable, and might “find it hard to seize [such a] a disturbing truth when a comfortable life depends on toning it down” (p. 67). To honor God through properly valuing the created good would prove itself in great care for the creation and generous sharing of our possessions. The value of created goods becomes “dramatically enhanced because they are accepted as treasures to enjoy and employ for the highest purposes” (p. 69). Christian meekness leads us to receive our possessions as stewards rather than owners.

### **Study Questions**

1. *Receiving the mind of Christ* grounds meekness in the life and obedience of Jesus Christ, who is our model of trusting faithfulness, rather than in individual ambition or self-striving gain. We look to Jesus’ teachings about trusting God and to his actions in following God’s will, even to his death on the cross. *Honoring God by properly valuing created goods* brings us to a proper sense of self-worth and self-respect. It enables us to realize that we are not self-made, and that our greatest goods (including family, friends, health, and opportunities, as well as possessions) are gifts from God to be treasured and employed to the highest purposes.
2. Members might list traits in Psalm 37, such as trusting God, delighting in God’s faithfulness through worship, committing to the way of God, refraining from anger, and waiting on God. Or, they might brainstorm other traits (such as love for God over self, commitment to strong Christian communities, and sharing) that help us resist the temptations to materialism, distorted ambition, greed, and regarding others as mere instruments to our self-fulfillment or status.
3. In meekness, we might ask God to give us new opportunities for love and service. In our mammon-driven culture, the prayer might be read to ask for increased possessions and control of resources.
4. The Lord’s Prayer is the guideline for prayer that Jesus gave to his disciples. It encourages trust in God and conformity of our desires to the kingdom’s goals. By addressing God as “Abba” or “Father,” the prayer indicates we are dependent on God. It honors God above all the creation (“hallowed be your name”), and asks that God’s kingdom, rather than our vision, be realized in the world. Even when we pray for our needs (“our daily bread”), we are to realize that God is the source of all good things and we are not to ask for everything we greedily desire.
5. Simon suggests that meekness requires a change in perspective, away from “failing to see the earth as God’s gift” and investing in ourselves, and toward investing our money, time, ability, and influence in heaven—“that is to say, those given to help others, those put in service for the needy, those shared with the poor, those furthering the mission of the church, those protecting the earth for future generations. These, offered to God, have transcendent value.” The meek look at all of their resources as gifts from God to be graciously received and shared with others. “We inherit the earth by seeing it with the eyes of faith,” Simon writes. “Because we are part of God’s new creation in Christ, we can perceive the world as it really is, and as it one day will be when, in the resurrection, the reign of God is fully revealed” (p. 69).

Surely a wealthy person can be meek, but this would require great effort to live for others and avoid the trap of seeing the world as “my oyster.” They will be tempted to save and expend resources as other people do, rather than in ways consistent with Jesus’ meekness.

### **Departing Hymn**

“O God, You Own a Thousand Hills” is on pp. 52-53 of *Consumerism*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.