

# On the Right Road

On this All Saints Day when we are reminded of the saints who have gone before, we encounter texts that blur the line between past, present, and future by encouraging us to travel the long trodden road toward God's love, justice, and liberation.

## Focus scripture: Matthew 5:1–12

Those who follow Jesus up the mountain, both disciples and the crowd, can hardly be faulted for being reminded of Moses who helped shape a motley crew of wandering ex-slaves into a community of liberation. Biblical scholars point out the many ways the gospel of Matthew helps make the connection between Jesus and Moses. It is on this mountain that Jesus offers an inaugural sermon akin to Jesus' inaugural message at Nazareth, which is recorded in the gospel of Luke. In both Nazareth and on the mountain, Jesus sets forth the identity, purpose, and direction of his ministry.

The crowd, hanging further back, are keenly aware of the poverty and injustices they face at the hands of imperial Rome. Can this Jesus make any difference in their lives and world? The disciples have already thrown their lot in with Jesus, but their understanding of what Jesus is calling them to be and do is still in the formative stage. As a prophet and leader of the divinely inspired liberation movement to which Moses earlier gave leadership, Jesus knows what is at stake.

By his very life, Jesus represents for the people the character of God who calls them into a liberated and justice-oriented way of living that is in direct opposition to the controlling, oppressive way of living established by Rome. Jesus invites and encourages them to be citizens of this new way of being, which he calls the kingdom of God.

The blessings that follow only make sense for a people who recognize the threat of domination systems because they live it. Each blessing is designed to support, encourage, and nurture a way of life that is counter to the exploitation and oppression they are familiar with. In his commentary in *Feasting on the Word*, Patrick Gray tells us that the word blessing translated from the Hebrew *ashar* is best translated "you are on the right road." In other words, Jesus says, "You are on the right road when you are in poor in spirit...when you mourn...when you are meek...when you

hunger and thirst for righteousness."

Being on the right road and blessing are synonymous. There is no contradiction between mourning and blessing if you are on the road toward God's realm of liberation and justice. Each of the blessings takes on new and vital meaning because they are no longer about an unrealizable aspiration. On the contrary, they are about the energy, spirit, and power given to everyone in the present who is on this road. For those who are on the right road, there also exists a new experience of time, one in which those who have died or gone before share in the present, offering support and encouragement. Something we might expect from all the saints.

**Revelation 7:9–1** confronts imperial Rome and systems of domination with vivid and dramatic eschatological language, picturing a future in which the blessings have come into fullness. Differences of language, culture, or any other means of human separation create no barriers for inclusion in this place of justice, compassion, and healing. Revelation calls upon the churches to become witnesses to this ultimate promise.

The writer of **Psalm 34:1–10, 22** refuses to let troubles of any sort keep one from living in the blessing and presence of God. In all situations, one can magnify the glory of God because it is never about momentary loss, but rather living in relationship with this God of liberation, justice, and mercy.

**1 John 3:1–3** returns to the theme of identity and purpose. Core to that identity is the basic premise of knowing you are loved. It is this love that purifies us for living as citizens of God's realm.

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In this week's readings, there is no disconnect between hard times and God's love. Just the opposite, love can lead us into the struggle of a new way of living, a new world. The blessing comes in knowing this road, this path, however challenging, is one that leads to life?



## Focus scripture

**Matthew 5:1–12**

## Additional scriptures

**Revelation 7:9–1**

**Psalm 34:1–10**

**1 John 3:1–3**



*Seasons of the Spirit* is based on semi-continuous readings of the Revised Common Lectionary.

**Blessed One, you never cease to surprise us. We grow accustomed to a way of accounting for our lives that often puts us in the losing column. Help us claim the identity and direction you offer to us so that we may stay on the road to your freedom, justice, mercy, and compassion. Amen.**

## Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on the link.

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## The Focus for Ages 15-18

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Teenagers have lots of role models and mentors in parents, older siblings, teachers, church leaders, community leaders, and others. Sometimes these role models do what they say. Other times teens encounter people in authority who say one thing and do another. Older adolescents are good at detecting “bafflegab” and can be as frustrated by this kind of hypocrisy as they are inspired by good mentors. They are learning that those in authority can exercise their power in both positive and negative ways.

As young people experience the results of their own words and actions, they may realize that actions often do speak louder than words. They notice that when people lead by practicing what they preach/teach,

then all learn together more effectively. As young people explore the value of being congruent in word and deed they will come across times when it feels easier to say, or promise to do something, than to actually do it, especially when tensions and ambiguity emerge between people. At these times they will discover how shame, pride, guilt, vanity, and fear are all obstacles that can get in the way of their best intentions to “walk the talk.”

Some young people in the group may see themselves as leaders, and want to model good leadership and discipleship. Pray that young people will discover the importance of being congruent in words and actions as they live in ways that Christ calls them to be.

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## Prepare

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### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures Matthew 5:1–12, Psalm 34:1–3, 9 and [biblical background](#) material (p. 51).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white cloth, white pillar candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.
- ❑ To access connections between current events and the focus passage, visit [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca) and click on [Lecture Connection](#). Bring information that might inform this week’s session.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 9), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 9), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available for purchase at [www.seasonsonline.ca](http://www.seasonsonline.ca).

### Gather

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song “Hold Us in Your Grace” (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

### Engage

- ❑ Bring copies of resource sheet “[You’re Blessed](#).”

### Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Reflection:** copies of this week’s resource sheet “[Reflecting on Jesus’ Teaching](#)”
- ❑ **Blessing bracelets:** beads in four colours, leather or plastic lacing
- ❑ **Poster:** poster board

### Bless

- ❑ Bring, if possible, the refrain for the song “Be God’s” (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).



# On the Right Road

## Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

**FOCUS** To discover that we are saints as we work for peace and justice

## Gather

**Welcome** young people and invite them to share experiences from the past week.

**Gather** in the worship space and invite a volunteer to light the candle.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the song “Hold Us in Your Grace” (p. 16 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #11 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

**Pray** Invite youth to form two groups to read alternate verses of **Psalm 34:1–3, 9** as a gathering prayer.

## Making connections

Invite youth to think of two people who are, or have been, role models. Discuss together the following questions:

- **What characteristics do these people have that you really admire?**
- **How have these people inspired you?**
- **What makes someone a positive role model?**

## Engage

### Setting the scene

In the chapter before today’s reading, the gospel writer describes Jesus’ travels through Galilee, where he taught in the synagogues and cured many people. Read **Matthew 4:25**. Explain that the *decapolis* was a group of ten gentile (non-Jewish) cities east of Galilee. The writer of the gospel of Matthew grouped a collection of Jesus’ teachings into chapters 5–7 and today’s reading is the beginning of the first of five major speeches. In these Jesus teaches about practical things such as prayer, marriage and divorce, money, and dealing with worries, and offers a picture of what life looks like in God’s realm. Read **Matthew 5:1**. The teaching that we will read today is part of what is called the “Sermon on the Mount,” a name given to all the teachings in chapters 5–7. In the Bible mountains are associated with being in God’s presence.

### Scripture reading

Distribute sheets of paper, and invite youth to make two columns on their papers, with the first having a title of “Who” and the second with a title of “What.” As you read **Matthew 5:2–12** have youth write, for each verse, who Jesus names (for example, “the poor in spirit”) and what is God’s blessing for each group. After the reading compare information together.

- **Who are those that Jesus identifies as ones needing blessing?**
- **What might be the significance of naming these particular groups of people?**
- **In what ways do the blessings that they will receive connect with what they experience?**

Distribute copies of the resource sheet “[You’re Blessed](#)” and invite youth to read this paraphrase of today’s focus scripture.

- **What new understanding do you have about the blessings of God?**

Jesus’ teaching closes with an encouragement to those who will experience persecution.

- **What do you think it means to be persecuted “because of Jesus” or for Jesus’ sake?**
- **What encouragement does Jesus offer?**

Jesus offers a vision of what life is like in God’s kingdom, or God’s realm.

- **What do you think Jesus is saying about God in this teaching?**
- **What do you think Jesus is saying about how we are to live in God’s realm?**

### Digging deeper

The reading we have today is sometimes called the “Beatitudes,” which means “a statement

about those who are blessed.” The Beatitudes can be divided into two sections: verses 3–6 speak of the believers’ relationship with each other and with God, and verses 7–10 speak of their relation with the world. Invite youth to look again at each of these sections and reflect on the following questions:

- **Who are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted in today’s world?**
- **What words of promise might Jesus offer today?**

### Connecting scripture with life

Recall the conversation about role models in the gathering activity and ask youth to now think of

two people who have been role models of faith, one person a peer and the other an adult. Invite youth to look at the poster *Dance* and think about how these people have encouraged, supported, and celebrated with them as they follow in Jesus’ way.

- **What have you learned from these people about how to live as a follower of Christ?**

On All Saints Day we recognize that as Christians we are all God’s blessed people, saints. Being a Christian is not easy in today’s world. Jesus teaches that meekness, longing for God’s righteousness, showing mercy, relying on God, and working for peace are all part of being God’s people.

- **What might we do, as God’s saints, to show mercy and work for peace and justice?**

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## Respond

Choose one or two of the following options.

- **Reflection** Today’s reading reminds us that in God’s realm there will be comfort, fulfillment, mercy, and a close relationship with God. Distribute copies of the resource sheet *“Reflecting on Jesus’ Teaching”* and invite youth to use the questions to help them reflect on the meaning of Jesus’ teaching in their own lives.
- **Blessing bracelets** Invite youth to create bracelets that will remind them of their call to live as God’s people in the presence of God’s promises. Have them choose four different colours of beads (one each to represent the words “you” “are” “blessed” “when”) and arrange them in patterns on lengths of plastic or leather lacing, tying knots in between each bead or set of beads. Encourage them to wear their bracelets,



or keep them in a pocket along with a copy of the reading on the resource sheet *“You’re Blessed,”* as reminders of their call.

- **Poster** On All Saints Day we celebrate the life and work of God’s saints in the world. Invite youth to create a poster of saints. Have them draw a person-shaped outline on a sheet of poster board. Inside the shape have them use different colours of felt markers to write words and phrases that characterize a saint. Begin by using some descriptions from today’s reading, for example: humble, merciful, pure hearts, make peace. Around the outline of the person shape have youth print the names of saints, both from long ago, and in today’s world (such as world leaders, church workers, mentors). Display the poster in the church hall if desired.

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## Bless

**Gather** around the lit candle, inviting young people to spend a few moments in silence looking at the flame.

**Sing or listen to**, if possible, the refrain for the song “Be God’s” (pp. 10–11 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 9; #3 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 9).

**Close your session by** offering the following blessing: “Let us go into the world to be a blessing to others as we have been blessed. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.”

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## Reflect

What insights did youth express about what it means to be a saint, one who shows us what it means in God’s way? How did they see themselves as “partners in service” as they follow Jesus’ teachings?



# You're Blessed

**W**hen Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions.

This is what he said:

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.  
With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.  
Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are — no more, no less.  
That's the moment you find yourself proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God.  
He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

"You're blessed when you care.  
At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

"You're blessed when you get your inside world — your mind and heart — put right.  
Then you can see God in the outside world.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight.  
That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.  
The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

"Not only that — count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

"You can be glad when that happens — give a cheer, even! — for though they don't like it, / do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."

Matthew 5:1–12

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# Reflecting on Jesus' Teaching

All Saints' Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. We have a role to play in working for peace and justice for all.

Reflect on Jesus' teaching in today's reading from **Matthew 5:1–12**. Use the questions below to guide your reflections.

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■ **When have you felt at the end of your rope?**

■ **What do you do to help get your inside world, heart and mind, put right?**

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■ **When have you felt as if you had lost something very precious?**

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■ **When have you been able to demonstrate cooperation instead of competition?**

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■ **When have you felt happy about yourself, just the way you are?**

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■ **What helps you to stay committed to God and to God's way of living?**

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■ **When have you spent time caring for others? What did you do?**

When you have thought about these questions, compose a personal prayer based on your reflections. You might like to make your prayer in the form of an acrostic, with the first letters of each line spelling a word. Choose a word from today's scripture reading, such as "BLESS" and create a prayer line for each letter of this word:

**B**lessings... help me remember, God, that there are blessings in my life that I'm not aware of.

**L**iving... help me remember, God, to be more careful in my living.

**E**ncouragement... help me remember, God, to cooperate instead of compete.

**S**peaking... help me remember, God, to be a peacemaker through my words.

**S**urrounded... O God, I know that your love surrounds me wherever I go and whatever I do.