

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 and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

The word ‘saint’ may be new to many of the children and puzzling to most of them. But it needn’t be that way. The playful conversation with Priscilla will help the children to hear the word in a new way. We want to do anything we can to make the idea of a saint accessible and real for the children – not out of reach and irrelevant. The Beatitudes, when understood, can provide adults and children with guidance in understanding what saintliness looks like. The version of the Beatitudes that is offered in the story for this

session will enable the children to understand what Jesus had in mind when he thought of his followers as “partners in service” (the title for this session). The use of the feather and spoken response will set a reflective pace as the children listen to these words which can be at the heart of their relationship with Jesus. The Respond activities offer practical and meaningful ways for the children to begin to act on the message in the Beatitudes. Pray that the children will continue to grow in their awareness of God’s blessing on them in all they do.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s focus scripture, Matthew 5:1–12, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 51).
- ❑ Set a worship space with white cloth, candle, offering basket, and Bible with bookmark in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring “Gathering song” (on resource sheet [“Additional Songs and Poems,”](#) p. 76) or “A Little Peace Song” (p. 5 in *SGF Songbook*; #1 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring blanket, resource sheet [“Blessed By God,”](#) and a soft feather.
- ❑ Bring song “The Blessing Song” (on resource sheet [“Additional Songs and Poems,”](#) p. 76).

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Mural:** roll of mural paper
- ❑ **Thank you card:** plain paper, and a variety of decorative materials (such as pieces of ribbon or lace, glitter, self-adhesive stickers, feathers). Fold the paper in half to make greeting cards. On the outside of each card print, “Thank you” and on the inside print, “You are a blessing to our church.”
- ❑ **Blessing moments:** copies of today’s resource sheet [“Blessing Moments”](#)

Bless

- ❑ Bring “Blessing Song” (on resource sheet [“Additional Songs and Poems,”](#) p. 76) or song, “What If You Came to My Church” (p. 29 in *SGF Songbook*; #20 on *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca.
user name: spirit
password: child



On the Right Road

Scripture

Matthew 5:1–12

FOCUS To know that God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings

Gather

Welcome each child, saying “Hello, *(child’s name)*, we’re happy you’re here.”

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space. Mention that this is a very special day called All Saints Day. It is a day to remember all the people who love God and who help us follow Jesus. Say,

The colour white reminds us that this is a special day. *(point to the white cloth).*

The Bible is a book of stories about God and of people who loved God *(point to Bible).*

The light of the candle reminds us of God’s love *(light the candle).*

Sing “[Gathering song](#)” (p. 76) or “Family Thank You” (p. 8 in *SGF Songbook*; #4 on *SGF Music CD*).

Pray Loving God,
thank you for this place.
Thank you for stories
that tell us about your love. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Good morning, Saint *(name each person by saying “saint” before his or her name)*. I heard that this is All Saints’ Day and I thought it would be fun to call each of you a saint.

Leader: And good morning to you, Saint Priscilla.

Priscilla: Why do we have an All Saints’ Day?

Leader: This is a special day to celebrate and remember all the people who loved God and followed Jesus. And anyone who knows and loves God is called a saint. Saints are all ages and live all around the world.

Priscilla: Hmm. I listen to stories of Jesus. I show Jesus’ love. And I love God and try to do what God wants me to do. Then I *really* am a saint too? And all of you *really* are saints?

Leader: Yes, Priscilla! And today we are going to hear a story about how God blesses us by loving us all the time. *(Say goodbye to Priscilla.)*

- Game** Invite children to sit in a circle to play a game. Say, “Who shows Jesus’ love?” and roll the ball to one child. That child says, “Hi, Saint *(child’s name)*.” That child repeats the question and rolls the ball to another child. Continue until every child has had a chance to roll and catch the ball. Then encourage children to name other people they know who show Jesus’ love.

Engage

Before the story

Spread the blanket on the floor, gather in a circle, and invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and open it to the gospel of Matthew. Explain that this part of the Bible has stories about Jesus and stories that Jesus told. In this week's story, Jesus talks about how God blesses us and loves us all the time. Jesus wanted us to know that God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings. We can be blessings to, when we love and care for others.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet "[Blessed by God](#)," based on **Matthew 5:1–12** to tell the story.

After the story

Song "Blessing Song" (on the resource sheet "[Additional Songs and Poems](#)," p. 76).

Encourage children to think of how we can be a blessing to others. Each time a way is suggested, clap and say "B L E S S!"

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ❑ **Mural** Invite children to see themselves as a blessing by creating a group mural. Spread a long sheet of paper on the floor. Invite children to lie down beside each other so their heads, shoulders and the upper part of their arms are on the paper. (They might hold hands.) Trace the outlines of the children in this position with a bold marker. Have children sit up and fill in outlines of their clothing. Encourage children to add their own facial features and decorate their shapes as they choose. Provide a title such as "We are all a blessing" and hang in a prominent place in the church as a reminder.
- ❑ **Thank-you card** There are often many people in the church community (such as the people who fold bulletins, lock up the building, tidy the sanctuary...) who are rarely thanked.
- ❑ **Sharing blessings** When we do loving things for others, we spread God's blessing. Hand out copies of resource sheet "[Blessing Moments](#)." Talk about how each picture shows someone sharing God's blessings. Invite children to draw happy faces beside pictures of things they would like to do to be blessings to others. Sing "The Blessing Song" again.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and light the candle.

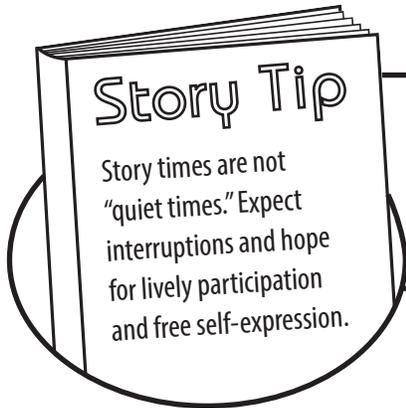
Pray Dear God,
you bless us with your love.
You show us how special we are.
Help us to do the same for others.
Amen.

Blessing Lead the group in the "[Blessing song](#)" (p. 76) or the song "What If You Came to My Church" (p. 29 in *SGF Songbook*, #20 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words, "(Child's name), learn with Jesus as you follow in God's way."

Reflect

In what ways did the children see themselves as receiving blessings or bringing blessings to others?



Blessed by God

(based on Matthew 5:1-12)

(Whenever the feather symbol is shown in the story, hold the feather high in the air and let it go. Encourage everyone to say, "God blesses you." When the feather lands on the floor, everyone says in an emphatic voice, "Yes!")

(Point to stand-up figure of Jesus.) "Come, sit down, my friends. I have something important to say to you. I want you to be my disciples." Jesus looked around. Many of his friends were with him. This would be a good time to sit on the hillside and talk together. This would be a good time to tell his friends what it means to be a disciple.

"Friends, when you see someone hungry, know that God blesses them. God doesn't want anyone to be hungry. Share your food with others."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone sad, know that God blesses them. God wants to help their sadness go away. Please help others who are feeling sad."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who wants to know more about God, know that God blesses them. God wants to help everyone know more about God's way. Be kind and loving, share your food and toys, and people will know what God is like."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who is kind to others, know that God blesses them. God wants kindness to come to them, too. Care about other people. God cares about you very much."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who is gentle and who doesn't hurt others, know that God blesses them. They will always be part of God's family. Tell others that God loves them."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, when you see someone who tells the truth and is honest with God, know that God blesses them. God loves them and will always be with them. Tell others that we can always trust God."



God blesses you...
Yes!

"Friends, you are all God's children. Listen to God. Listen to each other."



God blesses you...
Yes!

Jesus looked around at all his friends again. "You are my disciples," Jesus said. "I love you and I want you to be happy. You are a blessing to others when you live God's way."



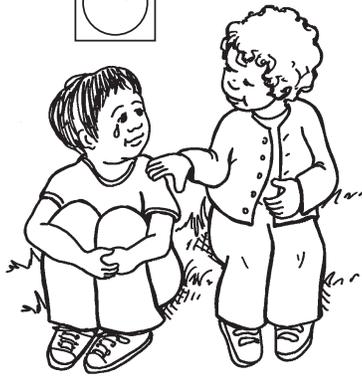
God blesses you...
Yes!



Blessing Moments

God gives us gifts of love that we call blessings.

There are many ways that we can be a blessing to others. Draw your happy face in the boxes beside the pictures of things you would like to do to be a blessing to others.



Additional Songs and Poems

Welcome song

(tune: "London Bridges")

Welcome, welcome, we are here!
Clap your hands! Shout a cheer!
We'll sing and pray and learn today,
to live and grow in God's good way.

Parting poem

Where do we see God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)
God's love is there, shining through,
in me (*point to self*) and in you (*point to others*).

Where do we find God? (*Shrug shoulders.*)
Let's look all around. (*Shade eyes with hand.*)
God's love can be found,
the whole wide world around (*spread arms wide*).

God Is with Us

(tune: "B-I-N-G-O")

God's with me and (*point to self*).
God's with you and (*point to another*).
God is with us always (*make a circle with arms*).
Yes, yes, when we love (*clap for each word*),
Yes, yes, when we care (*clap for each word*),
Yes, yes, when we help (*clap for each word*),
God's with us every day (*place hands over heart*).

Gathering song

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Thank you for this lovely day (*arms held wide*).
Thank you for the ways to pray (*hand together*).
Thank you for the friends we see (*wave to each other*).
Thank you for your love for me (*hug self*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
Yes, God, we thank you (*hands out, palms up*).
We thank you every day (*hands over heart*).

Blessing song

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

Now let's go out to share God's love,
share God's love, share God's love.
Every day, in every way,
let's share God's love with all.
(Repeat if desired, substituting the last line with phrases, such as "Let's be a friend to all" or "Let's show our care for all" or "Let's try and help someone.")

Shout It Out

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Share, share, share God's love,
share God's love today.
Shout it out and tell your friends,
God's love is here to stay!

Ten Young Bridesmaids

(Start by holding up 10 fingers. Put one finger down as each bridesmaid runs out of oil.)

- 10 young bridesmaids with lamps burning fine.
One ran out of oil and then there were 9.
- 9 young bridesmaids said, "The bridegroom is late."
One ran out of oil and then there were 8.
- 8 young bridesmaids said, "Now it's past eleven."
One ran out of oil and then there were 7.
- 7 young bridesmaids, with brightly burning wicks.
One ran out of oil and then there were 6.
- 6 young women asked, "When will he arrive?"
One ran out of oil and then there were 5.
- 5 young bridesmaids, standing in the room.
"Finally he's coming! Here comes the groom."
- 5 young bridesmaids with lamps burning bright,
went to the wedding and shared their light.

Just like the bridesmaids, we make choices, too.
We can let our lights shine depending on what we do.

