

Monday, November 25. Read Matthew 5:1-12. At the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus announces, “the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). When we read “kingdom of heaven,” we may think of harps, clouds, and angel choirs, but Jesus is clear that the kingdom of heaven refers to God’s rule on earth. This kingdom is not fully realized on earth as we know it, but will reach completion when we see “the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). Meanwhile, we are called to live so that the new way of the kingdom of heaven is made visible. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5), Jesus tells his followers about the values, ethics, and practices of this new kingdom. His sermon opens with the beatitudes—eight statements beginning with the word *blessed*. Each beatitude declares that a group of people usually regarded as afflicted is actually blessed. Those who belong to each blessed group experience God’s grace because the kingdom of heaven has come near. Those who are blessed do not have to do anything to attain this blessing. The beatitudes are declarations of God’s *grace*. They are not conditions of salvation or roadmaps to earn entry into God’s kingdom. Most scholars also regard the beatitudes as painting a picture of the characteristics of the kingdom of heaven. As we step into God’s kingdom, we hope to become more like those named as blessed—more meek, more merciful, more hungry for righteousness, more apt to make peace.

Tuesday, November 26. Read Matthew 5:3. The “poor in spirit” are those who cast themselves on God’s grace. It is the tax collector in the temple, beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:9-14). It is an honest confession that we are sinful and in desperate need of God. Jesus is declaring that it is a blessing to recognize our need for God’s grace. Blessed are those who realize they are spiritually bankrupt, for this realization turns them to God, without whom they cannot fulfill what they are created to do and be. What might this blessing look like in the workplace? If we are poor in spirit, we are able to bring an honest appraisal of ourselves to our work. We don’t inflate our résumé or boast about our position. We know how difficult it is to work with people who cannot learn, grow, or accept correction because they are trying to maintain an inflated image of themselves. So we commit ourselves to honesty about ourselves. We remember that even Jesus, when he started working with wood, must have needed guidance and instruction. At the same time, we acknowledge that only with God at work within us can we put Jesus’ teachings into practice on the job. In the fallen world, poverty of spirit may seem to be a hindrance to success and advancement. Often this is an illusion. Who is likely to be more successful in the long run? A leader who says, “Fear not, I can handle anything, just do as I say,” or a leader who says, “Together, we can do it, but everyone will have to perform better than ever before.” According to *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...And Others Don't*, Jim Collins’ research shows that a humble leader is the first characteristic mark of companies that achieve sustained greatness. Of course, many workplaces remain stuck in the old kingdom of self-promotion and inflated self-appraisal. In these situations, the poor in spirit are all the more a blessing to those around them.

Wednesday, November 27. Read Matthew 5:4. When we face evil, it saddens us. The evil may come from ourselves, others, or sources unknown. In any case, when we honestly mourn evil words, evil deeds, or even evil policies on the job, God sees our sorrow and comforts us with the knowledge that it will not always be this way. What might this blessing look like in the workplace? Those blessed with mourning about their own failings can receive comfort by admitting their errors. If we make a mistake with a colleague, student, customer, employee, or other person, we admit it and ask their pardon. This takes courage! Without the emotional blessing of sadness over our actions, we would probably never muster the guts to admit our mistakes. But if we do, we may be surprised how often people are ready to forgive us. Some businesses have found expressing sorrow to be an effective way to operate. Toro, the manufacturer of tractors and lawn equipment, adopted a practice of showing concern to people injured while using their products. As soon as the company learns of an injury, it contacts the injured person to express sorrow and offer help. It also asks for suggestions to improve the product. Surprising as it may sound, this approach has reduced the number of customer lawsuits over a period of many years.

Thursday, November 28. Read Matthew 5:6. Understanding the fourth beatitude relies on understanding what Jesus meant by righteousness. In ancient Judaism, righteousness meant “to acquit, vindicate, restore to a right relationship.”^[1] The righteous are those who maintain right relationships—with God and with the people around them. We are genuinely hungry for right relationships if we desire to bless others for their sakes and not as a means to meet our own needs. We can only form right relationships with others when we cease making all our actions revolve around ourselves – something that goes against our natural tendencies. Truthfully, we can’t take on battles against unrighteousness with our own strength. In following the sequence of the beatitudes, we must recognize our own emptiness (poverty of spirit in Matthew 5:3), mourn our own unrighteousness (Matthew 5:4) and submit our use of power to God (Matthew 5:5). Then, we will be able to hunger and thirst for righteousness in our relationships. What might this blessing look like in the workplace? Injustice disrupts relationships between people and between people and God. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness desire to see wrongs righted, including in the workplace. The Christian faith has been the source of many of the greatest reforms in the work world, perhaps most notably the abolition of slavery in Great Britain and the United States, and the genesis of the Civil Rights movement.

Friday, November 29. Read Matthew 5:7. Mercy consists of treating people better than they deserve. Forgiveness is a type of mercy, as is aiding someone whom we have no obligation to help. Mercy, in all these senses, is the driving force of Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection. Through him, our sins are forgiven and we ourselves receive aid by the gift of God’s spirit. What might mercy look like in the workplace? At work, mercy has a highly practical effect. We are to aid others to attain their best outcomes, regardless of how we feel about them. When you assist a co-worker, whom you may not like and who may even have wronged you in the past, you are showing mercy. Mercy may cost you an advantage you could otherwise have taken. Yet it benefits the work outcome, as well as the other person. Assisting someone you don’t like helps your work unit achieve its goals, even if it doesn’t benefit *you* personally. An environment of forgiveness in an organization offers another surprising result. It improves the organization’s performance. If someone makes a mistake in an organization where mercy is not shown, they are likely not to say anything about it, hoping it will not be noticed and they will not be blamed. This diminishes performance in two ways. The first is that an error covered up may be much more difficult to deal with later. Imagine a construction job where a worker makes a mistake with a foundation fitting. It is easy to fix if it is brought to light and repaired right away. But it will be very expensive to fix after the structure is built and the foundation buried. The second is that the best learning experiences come out of learning from errors. Organizations don’t have the opportunity to learn if mistakes are not brought forward.

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