

Sermon-Based Small Group Bible Study

World Upside Down: Subjects of God's Reign (Matthew 5:1–12)

Open

Select one of these “ice breakers” to get the conversation going toward the study.

- At an amusement park do you prefer rides that go upside down or rides that go in circles?
- What characteristics do you admire most in people? Talent? Intelligence? Wit? Kindness? Creativity?
- When you were 18 years old, what was your idea of the ideal life?

Dig

After reading Matthew 5:1–12 together, discuss these questions.

1. What parts of this passage appear to be “upside down” by ordinary standards? Which do you find most challenging?
2. Verses 3–6 are different expressions of weakness or need. Which ones do you connect with most readily? Which ones are harder for you to connect with?
3. Verses 7–9 focus on godly characteristics. How is God pure, merciful, and a peacemaker in your experience? How does it fit the concept of God's kingdom or reign that his people should also have these characteristics?
4. Verse 7 focuses purity in the heart, where God alone sees. How does that challenge the way we might otherwise view purity? How does it fit the idea of the kingdom or reign of God?
5. Verses 10–12 assert blessing in persecution, not that persecution is an inevitable experience or an indication of special faithfulness, but that the faithful, including especially Jesus, have always suffered and often been persecuted. How might this change the way we look at experiences of hardship, suffering, and rejection?

Summary: The world at large exalts power and popularity. As he proclaims the coming of God's kingdom, Jesus calls on the subjects of God's reign to acknowledge their weakness and need, like the poor, bereft, enslaved, and hungry. He calls them to reflect their king's character in their deeds and thoughts. And he warns them to expect persecution, not popularity. God is a good and gracious king who supplies everything his people need in their weakness, who confirms them in their identity as his godly subjects, and who gives them victory in suffering. His reign turns everything upside down and inside out.

Reflect

Use any of these prompts to encourage group members to apply the text to their own experiences.

- In what ways do you find it easy to acknowledge your weakness? In what ways is it hard?
- Is there someone in your experience who has exemplified mercy, purity, or peacemaking? Describe that person for us.

- Are there ways in which you are suffering presently, whether by hostility to your faith or otherwise? What do you believe God is calling you to do in those circumstances?
- In this text Jesus takes the role of the authoritative king and lawgiver. How do you respond to that assertion of authority? What would it mean for you to submit to Jesus' authority more fully?

Pray

Invite the group to pray together using any of these suggestions.

- Let's be sure to pray for God to show us our weaknesses and to supply what we need because we are weak. Name specific areas of need if you feel comfortable doing so.
- Whether it's mercy, purity, or peacemaking, ask God to empower and enlighten you to reflect his character more faithfully.
- Let's lift up the persecuted and suffering whom we know or of whom we are aware.