

## Discussion questions for small groups

### Showing mercy

#### Starter (15 mins)

- What are your favourite films?
- How many of them have a revenge motif?
- Why are they so appealing?

#### Main course (60 mins)

- Share your experience of coming to Christ and receiving mercy from God – how has it changed you?
- How are God's justice and God's mercy held together in the Bible? Can you give examples?
- How do you react when someone wrongs you or hurts you? Is it inappropriate to want some kind of justice, or should we always forgive?
- Do you feel merciful to any particular vulnerable people groups: those caught up in poverty, or sex-trafficking, or migrants, or prisoners, or the homeless?
- Have you been inspired by someone's ministry of mercy? If so, who and why?
- Why is this beatitude so countercultural?

#### Dessert (15 mins)

- Begin by praising God for the mercy he has shown to us in Christ, and thank him for the cross by which our forgiveness is possible.
- Pray for a merciful spirit towards others, particularly those who have wronged us or hurt us.
- Ask the Lord to give you opportunities to show mercy towards the weak and vulnerable in our society: the migrants, the homeless, the prisoners, those with mental health issues, those with learning disabilities, and more.

## 6

# LIVING WITH HOLY INTEGRITY

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

MATTHEW 5:8

### Double standards

Does personal integrity matter any more? Do our private lives need to match up to our public and professional responsibilities? Is strength of moral character still viewed as an asset in a job application? Do parents need to apply the same standards of behaviour to themselves that they expect from their children? Can a teacher be disciplined for viewing pornography, if discovered? Should there be a public outcry over politicians who fiddle their tax forms and expenses claims? Should priests be allowed to continue in public ministry if they have committed a sexual offence? Should a celebrity be blacklisted for dressing up in a Nazi uniform for a fancy-dress party? Should somebody with a gambling addiction be employed by a bank?

The answers to these questions are not as obvious as they might have been 70 years ago. Life is, arguably, more complex now and definitions of acceptable personal behaviour have changed, along with a public/private split that allows people to have a large measure of moral freedom in private (apart from criminal activity) as long as it doesn't affect their public and professional performance. After all, the argument runs, none of us is perfect so we need to



make allowances for private misdemeanours and character flaws. Didn't Jesus say: 'Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone' (John 8:7), so the real hypocrites are those who pass judgement on others? Isn't that exactly what Jesus taught in the saying: 'First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's' (Matthew 7:5)? We should have expectations of high moral standards in our public and professional lives, but what we do in private is our own business. A priest said recently in a group discussion that I was in: 'Why would God be interested in what goes on in the bedroom?' People nodded in warm agreement.

This popular position has a point. It is true that we are all fallen and there is no perfection this side of heaven, even for archbishops and popes. It is true that we come into our public life and professional roles with character traits and personality weaknesses. It is true that Jesus strongly condemned a judgemental spirit that could see the faults in others but missed the huge shortcomings in our own lives. But if this position stops there and consequently promotes 'keeping up appearances' in public while allowing for a large measure of personal moral laxity in private, then we may have redefined integrity to mean exactly the opposite of what the word actually means!

All the dictionary definitions I have seen go beyond defining integrity as a personal quality of someone who has strong moral principles; they include the idea of being whole, complete or undivided. When this is applied to a person, it suggests an integration of values so that there is no separation between belief and practice, between public and private. Integrity is therefore the opposite of hypocrisy, which can be defined as either the inconsistency of saying or believing one thing and doing another, or doing something noble for the wrong motive (e.g. to impress others).

The word 'integrity' evolved from the Latin adjective, *integer*, meaning whole or complete. In this context, integrity is the

inner sense of 'wholeness' deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character. As such, one may judge that others 'have integrity' to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold.<sup>65</sup>

Amy Rees Anderson, the managing partner of REES Capital and the founder of the IPOP Foundation, a charity focused on educating entrepreneurs, writes on the Forbes website and reflects on the urgent need for integrity in the entrepreneurial world of business and enterprise:

We live in a world where integrity isn't talked about nearly enough... 'The end justifies the means' has become an acceptable school of thought for far too many. Sales people overpromise and underdeliver, all in the name of making their quota for the month. Applicants exaggerate in job interviews because they desperately need a job. CEOs overstate their projected earnings because they don't want the board of directors to replace them. Entrepreneurs overstate their pro formas because they want the highest valuation possible from an investor. Investors understate a company's value in order to negotiate a lower valuation in a deal. Customer service representatives cover up a mistake they made because they are afraid the client will leave them. Employees call in 'sick' because they don't have any more paid time off... In each case the person committing the act of dishonesty told themselves they had a perfectly valid reason why the end result justified their lack of integrity.

She sums up:

If I could teach only one value to live by, it would be this: success will come and go, but integrity is forever. Integrity means doing the right thing at all times and in all circumstances, whether or not anyone is watching. It takes having the courage to do the right thing, no matter what the consequences will be.<sup>66</sup>



It appears that integrity matters after all, and Jesus would wholeheartedly agree.

## Pure in heart

The sixth beatitude is not a call to perfection, but to integrity at the deepest level. The commentators unanimously agree that the root meaning of 'pure in heart' is a total consistency between belief and practice, between 'life' and 'lips', between heart and mind. There is no 'double-mindedness' or 'double standards'. The pure in heart are consistent, integrated, whole people, with the added dimension of living solely for the glory of God. This is spelled out very clearly, for example, by Davies and Allison in their commentary on this beatitude:

Purity of heart must involve integrity, a correspondence between outward action and inward thought, a lack of duplicity, singleness of intention and the desire to please God above all else... to will one thing, God's will, with all of one's being.<sup>67</sup>

So our love for God should not just be expressed only in public acts of worship but is to be woven into the very fabric of daily life. Jesus will go on to make this point very forcibly in the rest of the sermon, emphasising purity of the eye in the way we look at the opposite sex (Matthew 5:27-28), purity of motive in acts of generosity (6:2-4), praying (6:5-8) and fasting (6:16-18) and purity of heart in our willingness to forgive (5:38-47). Jesus was the only person who has shown total consistency in every area of his life, but we are called to be like him as people who claim to follow him.

The key Old Testament passage that Jesus is thinking of in this beatitude is likely to be Psalm 24:3-6. In answer to the question 'Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?', referring to the spiritual requirement for pilgrims arriving at Jerusalem to worship, the answer comes:

The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol,  
or swear by a false god.

They will receive blessing from the Lord...

Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek your face, God of Jacob.

PSALM 24:4-6

There is an emphasis on inward purity here, whereby truthfulness, a clean conscience and a genuine seeking after God are the requirements for God's blessing in gatherings for corporate worship. This has a particular relevance to the Judaism of Jesus' day, which laid a great stress on ritual purity: to be 'pure in heart' implies a contrast with the meticulous observance of outward, ceremonial purity. True religion is a purity of the heart.

Added to this is the setting of Isaiah 61:1, where the broken-hearted now receive their healing, purity of heart and wholeness, in the day of the Messiah, the divine physician who will 'arise with healing in his wings' (Malachi 4:2, KJV).

Psalm 24:6 ('those who seek [God's] face') is now fulfilled with a vision of God: 'They shall see God' (Matthew 5:8). There are wonderful moments of epiphany in both Old and New Testaments (Exodus 24:9-10; Isaiah 6:1; Matthew 17:1-8; John 2:11; Revelation 1:12-17),<sup>68</sup> and Jesus may well have been encouraging his disciples with promises of more to come. Yet commentators are clear that the primary focus of Jesus' promise is eschatological: a privilege of those who are called to the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:4; 1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2).

Here on earth the people of God may find strength 'as if seeing the one who is invisible' (Hebrews 11:27), but such 'seeing' remains only a foretaste of the true vision of God in heaven.<sup>69</sup>



## Guard your heart!

When the word 'heart' is used in a conversation, it could mean one of 43 definitions, according to one dictionary: the vital organ that pumps blood round the body, the symbol of romantic love, the epicentre of a city or a community, a passionate feeling about a cause, the quality associated with courage, and so on. It is a rich and variable word, and one must listen very carefully to the context in order to understand how it is being used at any given time.

However, none of these definitions do justice to the biblical concept of the heart: the main meaning of the word in the Bible is altogether richer and fuller than any of these individual ones. In Hebrew thought, human beings were a totality: not 'a body plus a soul'; but a living unit of vital power – of which the heart was the epicentre. Our personality, character, feelings and intellect altogether are nearer to the biblical concept of the heart. The heart expresses the real 'me'. It is the location of my spiritual, emotional, moral and mental DNA. One Bible dictionary defines it:

The centre or focus of our inner personal life. The heart is the source, or spring, of motives, the seat of the passions, the centre of the thought processes; the spring of conscience. Heart (in the Bible) is associated with what is now meant by the cognitive, affective and volitional elements of personal life.<sup>70</sup>

Understood like this, it seems obvious that the heart is the most important part of us. Proverbs 4:23 makes this point very powerfully: 'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.' That is very countercultural in today's world: billions of pounds are spent each year on an advertising industry that says: 'If we want to be good, cool people, we need the latest smartphone, or to wear the latest outfit, or to drive the new convertible car. This is what really matters, and this is what will make you a person that others will respect and want to know.'

But the Bible says: 'This isn't true!' These are not bad things in themselves, but not what really matters, and it is certainly not wise to spend our lives pursuing them. 'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.' What really matters is not the outward, but the inward; not the appearance, but the substance; not the trappings of life, but the heart. Who we are (at the very centre of our being) matters a lot more than how we express ourselves. And when we pay attention to that, almost without trying, we win people's respect and they want to hang around us.

I'm learning this at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where I am a University Chaplain and Co-Senior Welfare Officer. I don't think God requires me to be the most dynamic chaplain they have ever had, going to every sporting event and hanging out in the college bar until 3.00 in the morning! He is asking me to be a person of integrity who pays attention to my heart, and who is therefore able to minister to others from a depth of character, and so help strengthen the life of the community.

Integrity matters in how we speak and our ability to speak the truth. One of the worrying features of our time is the concept of 'post-truth', which the 2016 Oxford Dictionaries declared as their 'international word of the year'. It is defined as an adjective that describes the use of emotion and personal interpretation as more important in persuading public opinion than objective facts. Editors said that use of the term had increased by around 2,000 per cent in 2016 from the previous year and was largely due to 'the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States'.<sup>71</sup> The Oxford Dictionaries' President, Casper Grathwohl, said:

We first saw the frequency really spike this year in June with buzz over the Brexit vote and Donald Trump securing the Republican presidential nomination. Given that usage of the term hasn't shown any signs of slowing down, I wouldn't be surprised if post-truth becomes one of the defining words of our time.<sup>72</sup>



In contrast to this cultural trend, a disciple of Jesus is called to be 'pure in heart', allowing our speech to be transparently truthful and unexaggerated, telling the truth as it is without any attempts to 'cover things up' or 'present in its best light'. Using oaths or promises should not be necessary, because our words can be trusted without any need to bolster confidence in them with 'I promise':

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfil to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

MATTHEW 5:33-37

Christian worship that has integrity and brings joy to God is also a matter of the heart. Paul writes to the church at Ephesus and says:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

EPHESIANS 5:18-20

There is a genuine debate in commentaries as to whether Paul meant 'sing and make music *with* your heart', meaning with your whole heart, letting your worship be an expression of the love and devotion and gratitude that you feel towards Christ; or whether he meant 'sing and make music *in* your heart', describing the location of our worship, so it is not just going on with the outward movement of mouths singing, hands rising, knees bending, heads bowing, and so on, but it is really happening in our hearts, at the centre of our

being and at the core of who we are. Remember how Jesus criticised the Pharisees and said: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me' (Matthew 15:8)?

As both readings of that phrase are possible, and both are actually true, it would be wise to embrace both meanings. Christian worship is to be passionate and heartfelt, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with hearts full of deep love and gratitude to the Lord who has saved us; *and* it is to be done from the core of our being, from the centre of our personality, with integrity, commitment, surrender and obedience.

The worship leader Matt Redman wrote a famous song while he was on the staff of St Andrews, Chorleywood, entitled 'The heart of worship'. In it, he acknowledges that worship is much more than just music and songs sung to God. He talks of the way the Lord looks within us and searches our hearts to see if we are worshipping with sincerity and heartfelt devotion.<sup>73</sup> This shouldn't cause us to be over-spiritual or desperately pious as we come to worship – God knows us through and through and he's not the slightest bit impressed by sudden bouts of piety! Genuine confession and heartfelt repentance are core ingredients in our times of worship too. But it is important to remember that, as we worship together, God is looking into our hearts and asking us: do you really love me? Is this coming from the core of your being? And will your life through the week match up with your lips?

This leads us to another very similar passage to the Ephesians passage quoted above, where Paul seems to be repeating himself, only this time to the Colossians. But there is an important difference that is worth noting:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed,



do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

COLOSSIANS 3:16–17

To the Ephesians he emphasised 'Be filled with the Spirit' as the key to heartfelt worship on Sunday and through the week. Here in Colossians, it is 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'. Again, we don't have to make a choice, but embrace both resources in helping us to be 'pure in heart'. God's word and God's Spirit are the secrets to living and worshipping with integrity. We desperately need both: to be filled with the Spirit enables us to be transformed into the likeness of Christ and empowered to live and worship with integrity; letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly teaches and trains us in godly living (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Psalm 119:9–11).

We have seen that the 'pure in heart' are those who display a consistency of behaviour and a singleness of purpose *in public and in private*. Both of these spheres matter hugely for the credibility of the gospel and the honour of God's name. It can safely be said that when public or private integrity has been lacking among God's people, the cause of Christ has struggled. But where people can see that Christ's followers have a consistency of character in personal holiness and public morality, in worship and at work, the kingdom advances and the truth of the gospel is self-evident. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, the 19th-century Scottish Presbyterian pastor, was right when he said: 'The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.'<sup>74</sup> Jesus would agree, adding, I suspect, that the greatest need of *the world* is for my people to be 'pure in heart', living consistently in public and in private.

## Personal reflection

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God**

- Am I pure of heart? Are my intentions pure? Do I say 'yes' and 'no' as Jesus did?
- There is a purity of heart, of lips, of eyes, of body: do I seek to cultivate all these kinds of purity that are so necessary?
- The clearest opposite of purity of heart is hypocrisy. Whom do I seek to please by my actions: God or other people?

## Prayerful response

The 'Collect for Purity' is 'the name traditionally given to the collect prayed near the beginning of the Eucharist in most Anglican rites. It appears in Latin in the 11th-century Leofric missal and was part of the preparation prayers of priests before Mass. Thomas Cranmer translated the prayer into English and from there it has entered almost every Anglican prayer book in the world', first appearing 'in the *First Prayer Book* of Edward VI (1549), and carried over unchanged... [into] *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662)'.<sup>75</sup>

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name: through Christ our Lord. Amen



## Discussion questions for small groups

### Pure in heart

#### Starter (15 mins)

- In which situations do you find it necessary to wear a mask and put on a show, making yourself out to be someone different from who you are?
- Why is this peer-group pressure so important to you?

#### Main course (60 mins)

- What is Jesus commending in this beatitude?
- In which sections of the sermon on the mount is this underlined and illustrated?
- How important is personal integrity on your frontline, in your workplace or wherever God has placed you?
- Do you think we should expect a match-up of personal and public life from our political leaders?
- How can the church free itself from accusations of hypocrisy? Can you give examples?
- If God is 'looking into our hearts' when we worship, what does he hope to see?
- How can we match up our life with our lips?

#### Dessert (15 mins)

- Allow the Lord to search your heart to find the areas where you are tempted to wear a mask, to lack consistency of life and lips, and to have double standards.
- Ask for cleansing and forgiveness, and reach out to him to receive his healing touch.
- Pray to be filled with the Spirit so that your worship and your life may honour God with a glorious consistency, bringing honour to his name.

## 7

# LIVING WITH RECONCILIATORY LOVE

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

MATTHEW 5:9

## Divided world

Looking at the social landscape of Western civilisation, it is not hard to see how divided we are in so many ways. Social class is still the major category of social division, despite the inadequacies of applying Marxist definitions now to the new world of international markets and global economies. Other factors are also very significant in fostering division: race, nationality, gender, religion, political persuasion, age, location, education, employment, mobility, access to technology, health and disability all contribute to differences of outlook and value systems, sometimes leading to conflict. Social divisions have close links to social inequality, because these divisions often indicate the degree to which people can access resources and opportunities. The 'under-classes' of migrant, prison and homeless communities are below the radar of mainstream society much of the time, except when there is an outbreak of violence or social disruption. While national and cultural identities can and should be celebrated, for example in the competitive rivalries of sport, these also often spill over into national rivalries, ethnic struggles and social conflict. Tragically, the end of the Cold War has ushered in a new era of wars centring on the Middle East, the Baltic States and the Far East.