

Plan Be Study Guide

Plan Be – Leaders Guide

Starting a group

1. Find out who may be interested in studying the beatitudes.
2. Work out a convenient time and comfortable place to meet for ten weeks.
3. Encourage everyone who wants to be in the group to buy a copy of **Plan Be**
4. Invite everyone to read the introduction to the book before the first meeting.

Facilitating a group

Most groups find it important to have someone lead or facilitate the group meeting. It doesn't have to be the same person every week. People may take it in turns. But always start with a more experienced leader to show others with less experience how it is done.

Facilitation is very important given the diversity of people within a group. There is likely to be a range of ages, a mix of spiritual experiences and a variety of viewpoints on social & political issues. Some people may also have better interpersonal skills than others (e.g. some will be better listeners, some may have more empathy than others.)

People move through three stages in developing their participation in a group:

Inclusion (*how can I feel part of the life of this group?*)

Influence (*how can I have some say in what happens?*)

Intimacy (*how can I feel close to the other people?*)

The facilitator is a person who will help other people in a group participate more fully.

The facilitator of a '**Plan Be**' study group needs to find ways to:

- ❖ Welcome people.
- ❖ Invite each one to participate.
- ❖ Value each one's contribution
- ❖ Encourage each one to offer their own contribution while still being open to the ideas of others'.
- ❖ Encourage people to exchange differing viewpoints in a spirit of humility (building each other up) rather than merely debating opposing positions (and tearing one another down);
- ❖ Challenge people to help each other step out of their comfort zones, and take small but significant moves to embody the Be-Attitudes in their daily lives.

There are two parts to any successful group:

the **content** (in this case: working through **Plan Be** in the group), and

the **process** (the group dynamics - relationships within the group etc).

In facilitating a '**Plan Be**' group the aim is to try to encourage the group to work through the **content** (a discussion of the Be-Attitudes) through a **process** that embodies

the **content** (practicing the Be-Attitudes in the group while discussing the Be-Attitudes) by

- ❖ always remembering the most vulnerable people in the group;
- ❖ empathising with those in the group who are struggling,
- ❖ speaking up for those in the group who aren't listened to,
- ❖ being committed to develop a group process that is fair to everyone, etc

Leading a discussion in the group

The Readers Guide provides an outline for discussion of each chapter. However, do not feel you need to rigidly adhere to the outline – use it as a ‘fallback position’ to keep the conversation moving along. It may be more productive to start by inviting people to share their immediate responses to the week’s reading. Follow up the ensuing discussion by using the questions to address any areas that have not already been covered.

Make sure you finish the last discussion by discussing the way forward from there for people - either as a collective (perhaps by forming a Plan Be Support Group) - or as individuals (perhaps by accessing some of the resources available on www.wecan.be).

And celebrate the progress you have made on the journey so far by sharing a meal.

Plan Be – Readers Guide

Week one – Plan Be

(Read up to page 8)

Do you share the author’s concerns about the state of the world?
When did you last say – or hear – similar things?

What do you think of the idea that ‘we only change ourselves’?
How do you feel about praying the alternate ‘Serenity Prayer’?
Why does the author criticise the idea of doing ‘big things’?
Why does the author stress the importance of ‘little things’?

What does the author call ‘Plan A’?
Why do people so often opt for ‘Plan A’?
What are the weaknesses of ‘Plan A’?
What does the author call ‘Plan Be’?
Why do we so seldom opt for ‘Plan Be’?
What are the strengths of ‘Plan Be’?

How many times have you heard anyone speak on the beatitudes?
What if anything do you remember about what they said?

Re-read the beatitudes and reflect on them:

Which of the beatitudes do you like best? Why?

Which do you find most difficult or challenging?

What do you think of the names the author gives to the virtues celebrated in the beatitudes? Can you think of any better names?

What difference do you think it would make to your family and/or community if you were able to embody these Be-Attitudes better?

Week two -

Blessed are the poor

(Pages 9-14)

This chapter begins to challenge the ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’ view many people grew up with. How would you describe Jesus’ character in the passages referred to?

What does Luke’s version of the first beatitude tell us that Matthew’s version doesn’t? Why is Luke’s version important to take into account?

Who do you think are the poor?

Who do you think are the rich?

Why does the author suggest that he is ‘rich’?

Which category would you place yourself in? Why?

What does Jesus say to the poor?

What does Jesus say to the rich?

What kind of society does Jesus envisage?

How did the early church make this dream come true?

What is the ‘good news’ in this for the poor?

What is the ‘good news’ in this for the rich?

How do you feel about the author’s call to be with the ‘poor in spirit’?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – by being with the poor more in spirit?

Week three -

Blessed are those who mourn

(Pages 15-20)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – by being with the poor more in spirit? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to explore an attitude that modern society tends to avoid. Why does the author suggest that in today's world you need to do a bit more 'mourning'?

Of all the facts the author cites about today's world, which one struck you the most?
How did you react to that fact?
Why is it so hard for the rich to identify with the poor and 'mourn with those who mourn'?

How does God respond to the plight of the poor? Why?
What does the author mean when he says we should 'sympathize with God' and 'empathize with our neighbours'?
How is it possible to develop 'sympathy with God'? Is there a way you could do it?
What would it mean for you to develop more 'empathy with your neighbour'? How?

What did 'wailing', 'lamenting' and 'crying out loud' mean for Jesus?
What would 'wailing', 'lamenting' and 'crying out loud' mean for you?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by mourning with those who mourn?

Week four -

Blessed are the meek

(Pages 21-30 Including 'A widow shows the way forward')

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by mourning with those who mourn? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to develop a capacity that has always been much praised but seldom practiced in society. What does the author say it means to be genuinely 'meek'?
What is the relevance of the reference to the process of 'domesticating a wild horse'?
How would you describe in your own words what it means for a person to be 'meek'?

Anger has been defined as 'an explosion of significance in the face of indifference'.
How would you define anger yourself?
What are the dangers associated with being angry?
What are the dangers associated with not being angry?

When did Jesus get angry? Can you think of any other examples?
How did Jesus get angry 'without sin'? Can you think of some examples? ¹

What are some of the things that make you sad that should make you mad?
How could you get angry without getting aggro?

¹ Note - Jesus was never violent - he used the whip in the temple to drive out the animals not on the people. And - in so doing - my mate Peter Milne reminds us – Jesus saved all the animals from being sacrificed!

How could you be less reactive/more proactive?

How can you practice self-restraint?

How can you practice self-control?

What is most inspiring about the example of Gladys Staines?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – and getting angry, but not aggressive?

Week five -

Blessed are those who seek righteousness

(Pages 31-36)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – by getting angry but not aggressive? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to move beyond personal piety to a quest for social justice. The author says that the quest for ‘justice’ is a central concern in the scripture and the words used for ‘justice’ are used in the Old and New Testaments over a thousand times. What are the texts that talk about the quest for ‘justice’ that are the most telling for you?

What are some of the ways the author says Jesus strove for justice in his society?

How did Jesus confront injustice in his society?

How did Jesus deliver the poor from exploitation by the rich?

How did Jesus liberate the powerless from oppression by the powerful?

How did Jesus free people from cycles of violence and counter violence?

How did Jesus create just communities intentionally committed to including outcasts?

What would it mean for you to ‘hunger and thirst’ for justice in your world like Jesus?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – and striving for justice like Jesus did?

Week six -

Blessed are the merciful

(Pages 37-42)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus’ values – by striving for justice like Jesus did? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to extend the same mercy you want yourself to others.

What does the author call ‘the Mercy Rule’?

How significant is it that the same rule can be found in every religion?
What do the different versions of 'the Mercy Rule' in different religions tell us?
Which version do you relate to best? Why?

How does Jesus invoke the rule in the case of the woman caught in the case of adultery?
What difference does it make in her case for her accusers to take the rule into account?

Can you think of cases where others have extended mercy to you?
What difference did it make to you?

To what extent does Jesus suggest you should show mercy to others?
How difficult do you find it to show that kind of mercy to others? Why?

How does your capacity to feel empathy for others affect your capacity to show mercy?
How can you develop empathy for people who aren't like you – whom you don't like?

How do you imagine Jesus might invoke 'the Mercy Rule' in the case of a man or woman with HIV/AIDS?

In what other situations do you imagine Jesus would invoke 'the Mercy Rule' today?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – and show more mercy to others?

Week seven -

Blessed are the pure in heart

(Pages 43-52)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by showing more mercy to others? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to clean up your act completely – and be 'pure of heart'.

What is your immediate reaction to someone who tells you to 'clean up your act'?
How do you feel when someone tells you that 'you should get your act together'?

What does the author suggest that Jesus means when he says you should 'be perfect'?
What do you think of what he says - that it's about 'faithfulness', not 'faultlessness'?

(If you find this all this talk about 'being perfect' a bit daunting, please give yourself a break and take some time to read Jarrod McKenna's reflections on 'Be purple! And other unhelpful commands' in pp 85-93 at the back of the book before you go any further.)

How do you respond to the inner voice that calls you to realise your full potential?
The author looks at the biblical guidelines given to help you realise your full potential.

The author says that these guidelines include the 'Old Rules' - given to Moses on Mount Sinai - and the 'New Rules' - given by Jesus to his disciples in his Sermon on the Mount.

Most people are familiar with the Old Rules that a lot of people often refer to as 'the Ten Commandments'- like 'don't kill', 'don't lie', 'don't steal', and 'don't screw around' etc.

Most people say they that these are reasonable guidelines for life. What do you think?

Then Jesus comes along saying that the 'Old Rules' are good as far as they go, but they don't go far enough. And he proceeds to give his disciples a whole set of 'New Rules'.

Now, the author says, that it is important to note that: Jesus sets out the 'Old Rules' in his first set of statements ('You have heard...'); he unpacks the problems merely keeping the 'Old Rules' do not solve in his second set of statements ('But I tell you'..); and then he typically sets out the 'New Rules' that can solves these unresolved problems in his third set of statements ('Therefore...'). You can study these in the table on pages 50 to 51.

What difference does it make to the way you understand the Sermon on the Mount, to see the 'New Rules' in the third set of statements rather than in the second set of statements?

The author refers to the 'New Rules' of Jesus as a brilliant set of 'doable realistic ideals' a whole new set of 'creative innovative transforming initiatives'. What do you think?

How do you think you could use these 'doable realistic ideals' to realise your potential?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – and practice his doable realistic ideals.

Week eight -

Blessed are the peacemakers

(Pages 53-58)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by practicing his doable realistic ideals? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to renounce violence and to resolve conflicts peacefully.

What does Moses say about the right to retaliation?

How have Christians, Muslims and Jews invoked this right to justify revenge?

How does Jesus differ from Moses in his views on violence?

What do you think of the idea that the Jesus movement was a Jewish peace movement?

What evidence is there in the first three hundred years of church history for that thesis?

What do you think of the list of 'just' war principles outlined by Ambrose and Augustine?

Do you think these principles rationalise the use of violence or limit the use of violence?

Using this list as guidelines, how many wars do you think may have been justifiable? Do you think any of the current wars could be considered 'just' according to these criteria?

What do you imagine would be the difference between an approach to conflict based on 'an eye for an eye' and an approach to conflict resolution based on 'turn the other cheek'?

How practicable do you think 'do no harm to your neighbour is as an approach? Can you think of any examples of nonviolent action that have brought about significant change?

What would it mean for you not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – and practice creative nonviolence?

Week nine -

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness

(Pages 59-64)

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by practicing creative nonviolence? What lessons did you learn from it?

This chapter encourages you to be willing to risk being persecuted in order to do the right thing – to be willing to suffer yourself, rather than to inflict suffering upon other people.

Why do you think the author stresses that Jesus does not bless being persecuted as such? What are the dangers in seeking persecution as a validation of a person's righteousness?

Still, those who pursue justice in an unjust world will inevitably be persecuted. Why? Can you think of any stories about people who were persecuted for righteousness?

Why did Jesus say that the people who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed?

How does the author suggest it is possible to overcome evil though being persecuted? Give an example.

How does the author suggest it is possible to accomplish good though being persecuted? Give an example.

How does the author suggest it is possible to witness to Christ though being persecuted? Give an example.

What action(s) have you been thinking you should take in order to do the right thing, but have been scared of taking because of the possible consequences? How do Jesus' words, blessing those who are 'persecuted for righteousness sake' speak to you in your situation?

Reflect – is there any change, even a very small one, you can make this week to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – and risk suffering in order to do right?

Week ten -

We can be the change we want to see

(Pages 65-84 Including 'Wecan.be')

What did you try last week in order to start aligning your life more closely to Jesus' values – by risking suffering in order to do right? What lessons did you learn from it?

Did you check out the www.wecan.be website?
What parts of the site did you find most helpful?
How do you react to Jim Dowling's criticism?
What do you think of Kristin's example in pp74-82?

How do you feel about the challenge 'to be the change' the author outlines in pp65-67?
Could you write your own version of the Be-Attitudes?
Could you learn the Be-Attitudes off by heart?
Which Be-Attitude do you think you practice best?
Which Be-Attitude do you feel you should practice more intentionally?
You may like to begin by praying that God will help you to live that Be-Attitude.
You also may like to interview somebody in your community who embodies that Be-Attitude and ask them some tips on how they practice this virtue so well in their lives.
Don't make big plans to practice this Be-Attitude spectacularly, just seize the next little opportunity that will come your way to pray the Be-Attitude and practice it sincerely.

What do you think of the suggestions about publicising the Be-Attitudes?
Could you, for example, write out your own version of the Be-Attitudes and stick them on your diary or journal, post them on your blog site or the wecan.be website, make copies of them and give them to your friends, or put them up on notice boards...etc?

If you want to, you can sign off on the Be-Attitudes pledge in the book.
You can download and print off copies of the pledge from www.wecan.be

What do you think about forming a Be Group or Be-Attitude Group?
Could you form a group? If so, how would you go about it?
If not, think of how you can get the support that you need.

If you want a 'Be the revolution' T Shirt you can order it from Angie Andrews at www.lastfirst.net
You can download many stories the author has written that embody the Be-Attitudes for free from <http://www.daveandrews.com.au/ccwc2.html> and you can also download some easy-to-play and easy-to-sing songs the author has written for Be Groups from <http://www.daveandrews.com.au/songs.html>