BE WITH ME

Year 9

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

ENGLISH CANADIAN CATECHETICAL SERIES
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Dear young men and women,

Welcome to a new program! I would like to say hello on behalf of the bishops of Canada, and especially your own bishop. We think young people are a very important part of our Church, and we have made this program available to you to share with you the rich tradition that is ours as Catholic Christians.

We know that teenagers face unique challenges and many difficult problems. God does not leave you on your own to cope as best you can, but reaches out to you in more ways than any of us can imagine. I say that because hope is what Jesus Christ wants us to have, and hope is what we need in our lives to live as Jesus’ followers.

We know also that you have a sense of enthusiasm and excitement that some of us have lost. That is why we want this program to be especially for you. Jesus and his Church are for everyone – including teenagers. When we speak of Jesus to you, we have to try to speak in ways that are real for you.

We called this program *Be With Me* because that is a prayer that a lot of us, both young and old, often make in our hearts to God. It’s a great prayer, because that is the very same thing God is saying to us. This program is a little different from others you might have done recently, because it doesn’t talk so much about belief in God, but about how to live what we believe. It tries to help you be a follower of Jesus facing the real situations that young persons face. We have tried to make the stories and examples ones that people of your age meet daily. In these real life situations, especially when we just don’t know what is the best thing to do, God says to us, and we say to God, “Be with me.”

I’ll end with two things about church: if you are involved in your parish, help make it more “youth friendly” for other teens. If you are not involved yet, try it – you will probably find there a caring and supportive community: one that makes prayer, hope, and life itself a lot easier.

I think you will really enjoy this program. Have a great year!

Your brother in Jesus Christ,

[Signature]

Raymond J. Lahey
Bishop of St. George’s
Corner Brook, Newfoundland
Unit 1

Be With Me
Who do I want to be with?

Time Together That Counts

Sometimes Tara felt like school was one long soap opera, and classes were just the commercials that paid for it. During lunch and in the halls she would get a quick glimpse into someone’s life and soul. Then her conversation would be interrupted by class. After class she’d be drawn into someone else’s crisis, then another class, then another lesson in real life. By the end of the day her life, her heart and her energy could be going in a million different directions, and algebra and grammar seemed totally irrelevant. Take today, for example.

It had started off as a perfectly normal Thursday; Tara even felt prepared for all of her classes. She was just closing her locker and heading off toward math class when Jess came walking down the hall. Tara waved hello, saying, “Hey, Jess! What’s up? I haven’t talked to you in over a week. How are things going with you and Chris?”

Jess looked sad. “Not so great. We’re never really with each other. I mean, we see each other all the time, but it’s always in a group. We never do anything with just the two of us. Every time I suggest we go out, Chris wants to ask someone else to go, too. And every time Chris asks me to do something, it always turns out that someone else is doing it with us. We always have fun; but I’m beginning to think that Chris doesn’t really want to be with me.”

At that point the bell rang, and there was no time for Jess and Tara to talk more. Tara headed off feeling just a bit sad. She really liked both Jess and Chris, and they had seemed so “right” for each other.

Chris sat right in front of Tara in math, and Tara found it hard to concentrate on what the teacher was saying. She just kept thinking about what Jess had said. When the class was over she walked with Chris.

“So, Chris, how’s life?” Tara tried to sound nonchalant. “I was talking with Jess a little while ago and she said things with you two were a bit rough.”
A strange look crossed Chris’ face. It was rapidly followed by a grin. “Very funny, Tara. You had me going there for a second. I guess Jess was telling you about how much time we spend together.”

“Umm, yeah, something like that.”

“We have an amazing relationship! We spend almost all of our free time together and we never get tired of each other! What’s more, we always have a blast. We like to do the same things and spend time with the same people! I’ve never felt so close to anyone. Say, Jess mentioned something about going to see a movie tonight. How’d you like to come with us?”

“Thanks, Chris, but I’m busy tonight. Maybe you and Jess should just go alone.”

“I’m sure we will, if no one else feels like coming. Talk to you later.”

Chris headed down the hall leaving Tara to shake her head in confusion.

“Yo, Tara. Wake up! I’ve called you twice.” Lou was standing right next to Tara and shaking her arm.

“Oh, sorry, Lou. I guess I was lost in thought. I was trying to figure out relationships.”

“They can be pretty messy and confusing things until you find the right person. I am so glad that I met JB. We just spent one of the best weekends I’ve ever spent. We were supposed to go hiking but the weather was lousy so we just hung out and read books and played computer games. It was one of the first times we just spent time together without having to do anything.”

“That’s cool,” Tara agreed, and then she added, “you two are really lucky.” Tara did believe that JB and Lou were lucky; their relationship wasn’t nearly as confusing as Jess and Chris’ was. Or so she thought until lunch, when JB sat next to her.

“Hi, Tara. How was your weekend?”

“Pretty good. How about yours? Lou said you guys didn’t hike after all.”

“No. Thanks to the stupid weather, it was a pretty boring weekend. Once the hike was cancelled, we both just did our own thing. This was supposed to be our great weekend together and it was one big flop. I feel pretty bad. The hike was my idea and I didn’t have a backup plan.”

Tara was frantically searching for an appropriate response when Des joined them. “Hey, JB, hey, Tara, could I ask you two for some advice? I don’t know what to do about Cam. I think something’s wrong. We talk and talk and talk every day, but we never talk about anything that matters. What’s the point of being with someone if you don’t share important stuff? What should I do?”

“Have you talked with Cam about this?” Tara asked.

“Of course not. That would be talking about important stuff. I’m afraid if I tried to do that the relationship would be over, and I really can’t handle a breakup right now. Tara, why don’t you talk to Cam for me? You two have been friends forever.”

“Maybe. But I’m not making any promises. I really think you should do the talking yourself. Things may not be what you think they are. Anyway, I’ve gotta go. If I’m late for another class Mr. Carroll said I’d lose 5 points.” Tara dashed down the hall and slipped through the classroom door just in front of the teacher.

Tara told herself that she wasn’t going to say anything to Cam, but that afternoon when she and Cam were sitting next to each other in science she found herself
asking, “Are you going with Des to the big dance?”

“I don’t know. I guess so.”

“What’s the matter? Aren’t things going well with you two?”

“Oh, everything is great. It’s just that I don’t know if a dance is really our thing. I’ll ask Des tonight. It’s the most amazing thing. I’ve never known anyone else I could talk to like I talk with Des. When we’re together, there’s no pressure to be profound. If we’re thinking about silly things then we talk about silly things. We’re so close that anything we happen to be thinking about is worth sharing.”

It was all Tara could do to keep from groaning. Why was it that everyone seemed to have a different idea of what it meant to be with someone? She wanted to help her friends, but she had no idea which ones were right and which ones were wrong about how relationships should be. Why did it always seem like she left school with less understanding of life than she came with?

**Reflection Questions**

1. Do you think that Jess and Chris spend enough time together? Why or why not? How important do you think it is for two people to spend time together alone if they really want to get to know each other? How important is it for two people to spend time together as part of a group if they really want to get to know each other?

2. JB and Lou have very different opinions of the quality of the time they

spent together on the weekend. Do you think that quality time together means doing something together? Explain your answer.

3. Consider the relationship between Cam and Des. Why does Des think they never talk about anything while Cam thinks they talk about everything? How common do you think this situation is? How important do you think it is to talk about silly things?

4. How could Tara help her friends? How could they help themselves?

**Bonus Question:** Who did you think were the males and who did you think were the females in this story? Why?

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**A Christian Perspective on Being with Others**

God has given each one of us the freedom and responsibility to shape our own relationships. God has not told us exactly how those relationships should be shaped. Instead, God has simply told us that they should be shaped in love.

Because we all have different personalities, we all need different things from relationships. We all have different ideas about what makes a good relationship, too. Some people like to spend time with their close friends in a big group. Others need a lot of one-on-one time. Some people think that quality time together is time spent doing the same thing. Others think that it is time spent “doing nothing” together. Some people think it is important to talk about significant things. Others think that good friends can share even the most insignificant things. Some think that good friends never run out of things to say. Others
think that good friends don’t have to say anything.

No one of these perspectives is more Christian than another. Each friendship must be shaped by the needs and the personalities of the people involved. From a Christian perspective, the thing that makes some friendships better than others is not the way friends spend time with each other, but the attitude friends have toward each other.

In being with one another, we are called to take on the attitude of Christ, who “humbled himself” (Philippians 2:5-8) to be the kind of friend others needed. As the Son of God, Jesus could have expected people to do things his way and serve his needs. Instead, he was willing to serve the needs of others and to be with them as they needed him to be. Jesus’ words and example show us that in friendship, we must balance our own needs with the needs of others. When two people understand “being together” in two very different ways, each one must be willing to give up a little in order to truly “be with” the other. Let’s say that for one person, being together means doing something together. For another, it means sharing personal time in the same place. Those two people must do a little of each if they wish to really “be together.”

From the Christian perspective, a good friend is willing to be with another person in a way that respects that person’s dignity, feelings, values and needs. A good friend will share both laughter and tears, will give and receive, will say both “yes” and “no” to you. A good friend will accept you as you are and will challenge you to be more. Above all, a good friend is someone whose whole attitude says, “You are important to me.”

Learning to Be

Most of us would like to have good friends and to be seen as a good friend. But most of us have times when our own wishes and our own likes and dislikes blind us to the wishes and needs of our friends. Sometimes we hurt our friends and weaken our friendships. We do this not because we mean to, but because we don’t stop and think about how our actions will affect others.

If we really want to be a good friend, we must develop the habits of friendship. Then the kinds of things we do without thinking will make our friendships stronger, not weaker. In other words, if we really want to be a good friend we need to become virtuous.
Virtues are attitudes and habits that make us more likely to choose what is good even when we don't stop to think first. Virtues help us to take control of our lives. They help us channel our emotions and avoid doing things we will regret.

We develop virtues through education, prayer and practice. The more often we act out a virtue, the stronger that virtue will become.

Over the course of this program, we will be exploring a variety of virtues we need to develop if we wish to be the best people and the best friends we can be.

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**The Attitudes of Friendship**

*The following conversation between two teenagers from Capernaum in Galilee was overheard the day after Jesus preached his famous “Sermon on the Mount.”*

**Reuben:** So what did you think? Isn’t Jesus amazing? Aren’t you glad I convinced you to come with me today?

**Zach:** Not really. I don’t see why you’re so worked up about this guy. He’s a nut! The things he was saying today made no sense at all! “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” What is that supposed to mean? Or “blessed are those who mourn”? That’s total nonsense! There’s no blessing in being sad.

**Reuben:** I disagree. In fact, I thought what he said made a lot of sense. It made me think about the way I’m living my life right now.

**Zach:** How?

**Reuben:** It made me think about what I need to do to really find happiness – or, as Jesus says, blessings. Come on, think about it. Who would you say was really blessed?

**Zach:** I don’t know. Famous people, rich people...

**Reuben:** Come off it. I know you don’t buy that stereotype. The rich and famous are just as likely as anyone else to be miserable – maybe even more likely.

**Zach:** Okay, people who are really cool about everything – you know, people who are okay with who they are and are able to cope with every situation. People that other people want to be around.

**Reuben:** Exactly! The way I see it, Jesus was telling us how to be, as you put it, cool.

**Zach:** There is no way you could do the kinds of things he was talking about and be cool. What normal person would want to hang around with the kind of person Jesus described today?
Reuben: Lots of people. Think about it. What kind of people do you really like to be with?

Zach: I don’t know. People who are themselves, who don’t put on an act when they’re with you. People who let you see their good points and their bad points.

Reuben: I think you just described the first step in being poor in spirit. People who are poor in spirit don’t try to have some kind of image. They admit their weaknesses.

Zach: You mean they stand around like a bunch of weak whiners? That wasn’t quite what I had in mind.

Reuben: People who are poor in spirit aren’t whiners. They admit their strengths as well as their weaknesses. It’s just that they know that those strengths don’t make them better than anyone else. People who are poor in spirit admit that they need God and that they need other people. They don’t try for that false, macho image that gets so boring after a while. The way I see it, you can’t be okay with who you are if you always have to worry about blowing your image. And there will be a lot of things you can’t cope with if you’re never willing to admit that you need help.

Zach: All right, so maybe one of the things Jesus said kind of makes sense. Maybe you will be happier if you’re poor in spirit.

Reuben: You mean, maybe you’ll even understand that the kingdom of God is around you?

Zach: Whatever. But you’ve got to agree, admitting you’re not perfect isn’t enough. There’s more you have to do to be able to cope in every situation. And to be the kind of person others want to be around, you need to do more than just admit that you need them to be around. There are a lot of things that are pretty important. Jesus didn’t talk about them.

Reuben: Like what?

Zach: Well, for one thing, he didn’t seem to realize that there are things you have to have to make it in today’s world. Everybody knows that in this day and age you’re going to be out of everything if you don’t own at least some of the right things.

Reuben: I thought you said the important thing was to be okay with who you are and able to handle every situation. Doesn’t that mean being able to
cope no matter what you do or don't own? The way I see it, the real secret is to not be too attached to things, to not get bent out of shape about what you do or don't have, or about what other people do or don't have. If you can be relaxed no matter what you're wearing, or riding, or whatever, if you can share whatever you have without making a big deal of it. If you can admire what someone else has without getting jealous, you've got it made.

By the way, that attitude toward things is another side of being "poor in spirit." So is not always having to have your own way. That's important if you want to be the kind of person others want to be with.

Zach: All right already! I'll admit, maybe there is something to being poor in spirit, but there is no way you'll convince me that it's cool to be meek or to mourn!

Reuben: Would you care to make a bet? Tell me, if someone is the kind of person you want to be with, what do they do when they think you should change or when they don't like your ideas?

Zach: Well, for one thing they don't try to force me to change, and they don't treat me like an idiot, even if they think my ideas are stupid.

Reuben: So what do you think meekness is? Being meek means not trying to get your way by using physical, verbal or emotional violence. If people avoid making you feel stupid and they don't push you around even when they're right and you're wrong, they are being meek. Personally, I think it takes a lot of courage and confidence to be meek. If you're okay with who you are, you won't try to manipulate other people.

Zach: Of course there are some advantages. In the long run, you probably get farther if people don't think of you as their enemy.

Reuben: Zach, Zach, do I hear you saying that the meek will inherit the earth? Oh, sorry. I shouldn't tease you. It's not meek of me. Now, I believe you had a question about mourning.

Zach: Yeah. There's no way you'll prove that one is a blessing.

Reuben: I bet the people you like to be with notice and understand when you are sad or upset. They don't make fun of you. They know when you want to be cheered up and when you just need someone to be sad with you. Suppose your friend's parent just died. Would you be a good friend if you avoided
him or her because you didn’t want to be sad?

Zach: No, but what’s your point?

Reuben: If we’re not sad when things aren’t going well for our friends, it means we’re pretty selfish and self-centred and not much of a friend. That’s hardly the kind of person others want to be with. Now take that a little further. Say you don’t notice or feel sad that so many things in the world aren’t the way they should be. If so, you’re probably arrogant and greedy. If you’re not unhappy that people are suffering, it probably means you benefit from the suffering. That’s not exactly cool! If you don’t mourn some of the time, you ought to be uncomfortable with yourself, and when God’s plan for justice is fulfilled, you will be.

Zach: I suppose you’ve worked through all of those sayings that Jesus had, haven’t you?

Reuben: Pretty much. I figure the one about hungering for righteousness means that you can’t be cool unless you stick up for people when they’re being treated unfairly. If I were naming people I want to have around, near the top of my list would come two guys who took my side when everyone else was against me. When my brother became a tax collector, a lot of people said every member of our family should be shunned. They wanted to kick me out of our school. These two guys stuck up for me. They made other people see that it wouldn’t be fair to punish me because of what my brother did.

Zach: Everyone knows that you have to stick up for your friends when they’re not being treated fairly. I think good friends should even stick up for you when you deserve what you’re getting. The people I think of as cool are the ones who gave me a second chance when I messed up.

Reuben: Hah! Got you again. You just agreed that to be cool you have to hunger and thirst for righteousness and be merciful and forgiving when someone does something wrong.

Zach: This is scary. You’re almost beginning to make sense!

The people I really like to be with are my friends all the time, no matter what. They aren’t hot one day and cold the next. They’re committed to me.

Reuben: They’re pure of heart.
Zach: Also, they help me out of a jam and help me patch things up.

Reuben: They're peacemakers.

Zach: Okay, one more. If you're really cool, you don't run away from your friends just because they've become unpopular.

Reuben: In other words, if you're really okay with who you are, you're not afraid of being persecuted for sticking up for the people and things you believe in.

Do you realize that all of the things that Jesus said will bring blessings, you're also said will bring blessings? We both agreed that the people who are really happy are the ones who are genuinely cool. Then you admitted that to be really cool you have to be poor in spirit. You have to be gentle with people. You have to mourn when other people mourn. You have to want righteousness for them. You have to be merciful when people need mercy. The friendship in your heart has to be pure; you can't be out to get something. You have to help make peace, and you have to stick by the people you care about no matter what.

Like I said, Jesus isn't crazy.

Zach: All right, so maybe he's not as crazy as I thought. I suppose if you're really a cool person to be with, those are the attitudes you'll have toward your friends.

Reuben: Of course, Jesus was telling us that we should have these attitudes all the time and with everyone, not just with the people we've chosen for friends.

Zach: You mean I should be honest and generous with everyone?

Reuben: Yep.

Zach: And I should be sad whenever anyone is sad?

Reuben: Uh huh.

Zach: And I should be merciful and forgiving and ready to make peace with everyone, even people who aren't so anxious to make peace with me?!

Reuben: Yep. Even with your enemies. That's what he said brings blessings both now and in the world to come.

Zach: Now that's crazy!!

Reflection Questions
In many ways, the message of the Beatitudes is very much the opposite of the message we get from our culture.

1. Jesus says that in order to find true happiness we must be poor in spirit. What does Reuben tell Zach about this? How is this different from what our culture tells us?

2. Jesus says that it is a blessing to be meek. How does Reuben explain this? Compare this to the message our culture gives.

3. Our culture emphasizes the importance of feeling good. How can it be a blessing to mourn?

4. Choose one other beatitude and explain how it is counter-cultural (goes against what our culture tells us).
Beatitude

The word “beatitude” means “blessing” or “promise of true happiness.” In biblical times, beatitudes were often given as directions for life. Most of the beatitudes of the Old Testament were statements of popular wisdom or common sense, such as “Find wisdom and you’ll find happiness” (see Proverbs 3.13). The Beatitudes that Jesus gives are different. They direct us along paths where we would not normally expect to find happiness. What’s more, the happiness or blessing that they direct us to is one that we will find in our earthly life and in eternal life with God.

Jesus’ Beatitudes will lead us to the happiness of true and lasting friendship with others and with God. The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes are the stepping stones on the path to the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons [and daughters] of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3-10
Unit 1 Summary Statements

- The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes are stepping stones on the path to the kingdom of heaven. They show the way to true happiness, which comes from our friendship with God and others.

- God has given each of us the freedom and responsibility to shape our own relationships. All our relationships should be rooted in the love of God and our neighbour.

- The word “beatitude” means “blessing” or “promise of true happiness.” The Beatitudes that Jesus gives us direct us along paths where we would not normally expect to find happiness.

- Virtues are attitudes and habits that make us likely to do what is good even when we don’t stop to think. Becoming a virtuous person takes prayer, education and practice.

Key Terms

- beatitude
- virtues
- the Ten Commandments
- the Beatitudes
- kingdom of heaven