

LIVING WATER IN LENT: REFLECTIONS ON HOWARD THURMAN'S *JESUS AND THE DISINHERITED* AND THE BEATITUDES

Course Description

Jesus and the Disinherited is a 1949 book by African-American minister, theologian, and civil rights leader Howard Thurman. In the book, Thurman interprets the teachings of Jesus through the experience of the oppressed and discusses nonviolent responses to fear, hatred and oppression.

Our sessions will encompass reflections on the book as well as how The Beatitudes can frame our response to challenges such as marginalization, oppression, and fear.

Facilitators

The Rev. Andrew J. Sherman
Anita S. Sherman

Meeting Dates/Times

Wednesday evenings from 6pm - 7pm.

Sessions will meet on March 12th, 19th, and 26th, and on April 2nd and 9th in person and via Zoom.

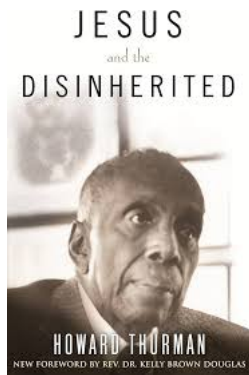
Meeting Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89708849093?pwd=WTrEtRIBxeN3WLZZow0gNjiEv47x4w.1>

Book Order Information

\$13.93 from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Link: <https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Disinherited-Howard-Thurman/dp/0807010294>



Famously known as the text that Martin Luther King Jr. sought inspiration from in the days leading up to the Montgomery bus boycott, Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* helped shape the civil rights movement and changed our nation's history forever.

In this classic theological treatise, the acclaimed theologian and religious leader Howard Thurman (1900-1981) demonstrates how the gospel may be read as a manual of resistance for the poor and disenfranchised. Jesus is a partner in the pain of the oppressed and the example of His life offers a solution to ending the descent into moral nihilism. Hatred does not empower--it decays. Only through self-love and love of one another can God's justice prevail.

Note: If anyone needs financial assistance to purchase this book, please contact Fr. Andrew.

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Contact for More Information

Anita Sherman

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BASIC SESSION INFORMATION AND OUTLINE

Our Covenant

We will call on the Holy Spirit to be present in our conversations.

We will honor our starting and ending time.

We will begin and end with prayer/meditation time.

We will honor each other's presence and perspectives.

We will practice holy listening and respond to others with grace, kindness and respect.

We will honor the confidentiality of any personal information that is shared.

Basic Course Outline

The following is a basic outline of the flow of each session. We will, of course, be flexible with this as needed and allow some variations when it would be beneficial for the overall experience.

6pm - 6:05pm	Opening Prayer and Meditation
6:05pm - 6:15pm	Opening Question Introduction to Session
6:15pm - 6:55pm	Discussion and Conversation about Course Material

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer

SESSION ONE - Wednesday, March 12; 6pm - 7pm

6pm - 6:05pm

Opening Prayer - *Blessing the Door* (poem by Jan Richardson)

First let us say a blessing
upon all who have entered here before us.

You can see the sign of their passage by the worn place
where their hand rested on the doorframe
as they walked through,
the smooth sill of the threshold where they crossed.

Press your ear to the door for a moment
before you enter,

and you will hear their voices murmuring
words you cannot quite make out
but know are full of welcome.

On the other side, these ones who wait—
for you,
if you do not know by now—
understand what a blessing can do:

how it appears like nothing you expected;
how it arrives as visitor, outrageous invitation, child;

how it takes the form of angel or dream;

how it comes in words like

How can this be?
and
lifted up the lowly;

how it sounds like
in the wilderness prepare the way.

Those who wait for you know
how the mark of a true blessing
is that it will take you where you did not think to go.

Once through this door, there will be no more:
more doors, more blessings, more who watch and
wait for you.

But here at this door of beginning,
the blessing cannot be said without you.

So lay your palm against the frame
that those before you have touched.

Place your feet where others paused in this entryway.

Say the thing that you most need,
and the door will open wide.

And by this word the door is blessed,
and by this word the blessing is begun
from which, door by door, all the rest will come.

6:05pm - 6:15pm

**Opening Question
Introduction to Session**

Opening Question: Recall a situation when you felt like “the other”, as one marginalized or “poor in spirit”.

Introduction to Session

— Brief bio review of Howard Thurman (refer to description in the Course Description)

— Chapter Focus: Forward, Preface, Ch. 1: “Jesus — An Interpretation”

— Beatitudes:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Chapter Summary (from *Super Summary Study Guide*)

In the first chapter, “Jesus — An Interpretation”, Thurman acknowledges the failures of the contemporary Christian church to address the disinherited, particularly African Americans. He offers, through a series of personal, biblical and historical examples, a defense of Jesus as a champion of the poor. Jesus was a Jewish person in occupied Roman territory and was clearly cognizant of the scope of Roman oppression. He taught charity, love and forgiveness and preached faith in God over the state. Thurman contrasts Jesus’s radical message with the toned-down words of the apostle Paul, whose status as a Roman citizen gave him a more favorable view of authority.

6:15pm - 6:55pm
about Course Material

Discussion and Conversation

Fr. Andrew and Anita share brief reflections about readings from the book and the Beatitudes for this session.

Questions to ponder:

- What portions of the book particularly caught your attention?
- How might generational wealth/wellbeing/status/power contribute to creating systems of oppression?
- How might generational oppression/poor spiritedness/marginalization/mourning affect us spiritually, psychologically, emotionally as both oppressor and oppressed?
- What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”, to “mourn”?
- Why would Jesus identify poor spiritedness and mourning as states of blessedness?

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer

SESSION TWO - Wednesday, March 19; 6pm - 7pm

6pm - 6:05pm

Opening Prayer - *Come to the Edge* (poem by Christopher Logue)

Come to the edge.

We might fall.

Come to the edge.

It's too high!

COME TO THE EDGE!

And they came,

And he pushed,

And they flew.

6:05pm - 6:15pm

Opening Question

Introduction to Session

Opening Question: Recall a situation when you felt gripped by fear.

Introduction to Session

— Chapter Focus: Ch. 2: "Fear"

— Beatitudes:

- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Chapter Summary (from *Super Summary Study Guide*)

Fear is a constant psychological symptom among the disinherited. It is a product of violence and the looming threat of violence on the part of the oppressor, and it takes a significant toll on the psyches of both the individual and the community. Fear is reified and passed on to children, robbing them of childhood innocence and creating a cycle of harm and anxiety. Thurman contends that the Christian belief that humans are children of God can build self-worth and act as a bulwark against fear. Faith can overcome fear, and it is therefore a particularly useful tool for the disinherited.

**6:15pm - 6:55pm Discussion and Conversation
about Course Material**

Fr. Andrew and Anita share brief reflections about readings from the book and the Beatitudes for this session.

Questions to ponder:

- What portions of the book particularly caught your attention?
- What does it mean to be “meek” [in Greek - praise — gentle, mild, humble; in Hebrew - anav — "Anav" is often translated as "humble" or "lowly" as well, and is considered a positive quality in the Hebrew tradition, particularly when referring to someone who is not aggressive or self-assertive despite having power or authority]
- Why would the meek be fit to inherit the earth? What particular qualities do they have for this honor?
- How do the meek interpret self-worth?
- How do the meek respond to fear?

- How is fear weaponized by the powerful?
- What is “righteousness” and how can fear corrupt or disrupt righteousness?
- What is “hungering and thirsting for righteousness” and how can this be an antidote to fear, control and oppression?

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer

SESSION THREE - Wednesday, March 26; 6pm - 7pm

6pm - 6:05pm

Opening Prayer - Prayer for Mercy from the Centre for Divine Mercy;
<https://centrefordivinemercy.org/divine-mercy-prayers>

Eternal God, in whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us, that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will, which is Love and Mercy itself. Amen.

6:05pm - 6:15pm

Opening Question Introduction to Session

Opening Question: Recall a situation when someone was merciful to you.

Introduction to Session

— Chapter Focus: Ch. 3: “Deception”

— Beatitudes:

- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Chapter Summary (from *Super Summary Study Guide*)

In his chapter on deception, Thurman explains how the weak have learned to deceive the strong in order to survive. He considers the moral elements of this phenomenon and gives credence to the fact that deception often seems to be the only option when 'he choice seems to be the ghetto or suicide'. Thurman argues, however, that deception eventually corrodes the soul, and sincerity is both drastically better aligned with God's wishes and more likely to achieve social equality in the long term.

6:15pm - 6:55pm Discussion and Conversation about Course Material

Fr. Andrew and Anita share brief reflections about readings from the book and the Beatitudes for this session.

Questions to ponder:

- What portions of the book particularly caught your attention?
- What is the dynamic of deception? How does it originate and evolve?
- How do you see deception used in various ways — to manipulate, control, self-protect, disrupt, etc?
- What is the relationship between mercy and deception?
- What is the reciprocal nature of mercy?

— Why are peacemakers given the gift of being called “children of God”? What particular characteristic(s) do peacemakers and children of God share?

— How do we move from deception to mercy and peacemaking?

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer

SESSION FOUR - Wednesday, April 2; 6pm - 7pm

6pm - 6:05pm

Opening Prayer - Prayer excerpted from *The Five Earth Touchings* by Thich Nhat Hanh

In understanding and compassion, I bow down to reconcile myself with all those who have made me suffer.

I open my heart and send forth my energy of love and understanding to everyone who has made me suffer, to those who have destroyed much of my life and the lives of those I love. I know now that these people have themselves undergone a lot of suffering and that their hearts are overloaded with pain, anger, and hatred. [...] I pray that they can be transformed to experience the joy of living, so that they will not continue to make themselves and others suffer. I see their suffering and do not want to hold any feelings of hatred or anger in myself toward them. I do not want them to suffer. I channel my energy of love and understanding to them and ask all my ancestors to help them.

6:05pm - 6:15pm

**Opening Question
Introduction to Session**

Opening Question: Recall a situation when you observed hate in action.

Introduction to Session

— Chapter Focus: Ch. 4: “Hate”

— Beatitude:

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

Chapter Summary (from *Super Summary Study Guide*)

Hate, according to Thurman, arises in situations 'in which there is contact without fellowship'. The strong hate and therefore persecute the weak, and weak hate the strong for their unjust actions. Again, Thurman understands the attraction of hatred. It seems to serve as a generative force for the disinherited and allows for an otherwise absent sense of resolve. Hatred, however, does not discriminate and ends up destroying all parties involved.

6:15pm - 6:55pm Discussion and Conversation about Course Material

Fr. Andrew and Anita share brief reflections about readings from the book and the Beatitudes for this session.

Questions to ponder:

- What portions of the book particularly caught your attention?
- What is the origin of hate? Where and how is hate born?
- How are hate, fear, power, and deception connected?
- How and why can hate be attractive to both oppressor and oppressed?
- What does “pure-heartedness” look like?
- How do the “pure in heart” see God? How does hatred cloud our God-seeing?

- What purifies our hearts? What contaminates our hearts?
- How are purity in heart and other Beatitudes related?

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer

SESSION FIVE - Wednesday, April 9; 6pm - 7pm

6pm - 6:05pm

Opening Prayer - 1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of humans and of angels but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give away all my possessions and if I hand over my body so that I may boast[a] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways.

For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

6:05pm - 6:15pm

**Opening Question
Introduction to Session**

Opening Question: Have you ever been persecuted for doing or saying something you felt was right?

Introduction to Session

— Chapter Focus: Ch. 5: “Love”

— Beatitude:

- Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Chapter Summary (from *Super Summary Study Guide*)

Thurman argues for the practice, application, and eventual triumph of love over hate. He presents Jesus’s life and teaching as examples of love and forgiveness for the enemy. Love requires situations in which mutual humanity can be recognized and social context be put aside. Thurman condemns segregation because of its inherent inequality, but also because it precludes such humanizing situations. Thurman concludes with an appeal to the disciplined practice of love and forgiveness on the

part of the disinherited because it will lead to salvation in the eyes of God and offers long-term viability as a strategy for liberation.

**6:15pm - 6:55pm Discussion and Conversation
about Course Material**

Fr. Andrew and Anita share brief reflections about readings from the book and the Beatitudes for this session.

Questions to ponder:

- What portions of the book particularly caught your attention?
- What is the nature of “righteousness” and how does it differ from *self*-righteousness?
- What do those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness have in common?
- Is undergoing persecution and suffering integral to inheriting the kingdom of heaven?
- In the first Beatitude, Jesus says that the *poor in spirit* will inherit the kingdom of heaven. In this last Beatitude, Jesus says *those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness* will inherit the kingdom of heaven. How are these connected?
- What is our true inheritance from God?
- How do we use our sacred inheritance to move from fear, deception and hate to love?

6:55pm - 7pm

Closing Prayer