



## INTRODUCTION FROM PATRICK SHEN

Our days are full of distractions. Between our jobs, family life, and the dreams and worries that occupy our minds, we often go about our days in a very two-dimensional manner. We often engage the world and the people we encounter in ways that neglect the lessons and rich experiences it all has to offer.

My decision to begin this journey of making "The Philosopher Kings" was inspired in part by a curiosity. Having spent many years on university campuses interviewing professors - people we generally consider to be the "experts" - for my last film, I was curious about what wisdom I would find among the "non-experts" on these campuses. The simple act of truly connecting with these Philosopher Kings has enriched my life in ways I don't even understand right now. I have not only gained eight new friends and teachers, but I have expanded my understanding of the world and my place in it.

If the unexamined life is not worth living, then we, as genuine participants in the world, have an obligation to examine and engage the world. We have an obligation to see it in three-dimensions, and more importantly, to see all people we encounter as beautifully elaborate and complicated humans that have much to offer to our collective effort to sustain and further our humanity. It is only when we begin to truly see others, that we are able to see ourselves.

Sincerely,



Patrick Shen  
Director



## A GUIDE FOR THOUGHT & DISCUSSION: THE PHILOSOPHER KINGS AND THE BEATITUDES

All of humankind was made in the image of God, Our Creator. When we as Christians reminisce on the story of creation, we read of the six days it took God to create the heavens and the earth as well as all animals and people. God beautifully designed matter and life. After His completion, "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good." In other words, in God's holy rest, He engaged Himself to what He had made and paused to enjoy it. Humankind, indeed, was made in the image of God. At a human level, we see parents of newborns doting over their children with joy simply enjoying the life they bore. The child is the "apple of the eye" of the parent. Likewise, all of creation is the apple of God's eye. He designed us, knows our hearts, and sees us.

All people are significant to God. While this is true, that God sees all people, there are those that are particularly blessed and find God's approval. Who are these people? Jesus gives us a list of attributes of these people in his Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>1</sup>Now when He saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, <sup>2</sup>and He began to teach them saying:

<sup>3</sup>Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

<sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matthew 5:1-12)

The Philosopher Kings is a rare window of opportunity for us viewers to catch a glimpse into the lives of people who are typically unnoticed by a majority of our society. Most people do not consider custodians as particularly special or blessed. Rather they are regarded as lower-class people who are merely serving and surviving. The film, however, enables us to genuinely see custodians as human beings as opposed to mere android-like people picking up after our messes. As their stories are told throughout the film, these custodians transcend their occupation and become emotional, artistic, beautiful, valuable, heroic, and impart deep wisdom. They even incarnate the Beatitudes taught by Jesus Christ.



## THE PHILOSOPHER KINGS

**Jim Evener** - Jim was one of the two employees we saw working for Cornell University. He was shot and wounded in combat and later abandoned by his wife. Also Jim was once told he would never walk again, but did anyway. Today, in addition to working, Jim plays bass in a band.

**Gary Napier** - Gary is also an employee at Cornell. He has developed a personal relationship with other faculty and students at the school. Gary is a perpetual learner and embraces opportunities to gather information and wisdom everyday.

**Melinda Augustus** - Melinda works for the University of Florida. She keeps the museum there spotless. Melinda comes from a large family who suffered a great loss when her mother was accidentally put in a coma. After grieving many years, Melinda found the courage to move on. She draws inspiration from her workplace - even from butterflies.

**Josue Lajeunesse** (la-zhun-ess) - By day, Josue is a janitor at Princeton University. By night, he drives a cab. Josue comes from the poorest country in the Americas: Haiti. In spite of his humble upbringings and current situation, he works for the sake of his family and his country. He and his brother have embarked on a water project to provide potable water for their village where people take a physically taxing hike just to obtain clean water.

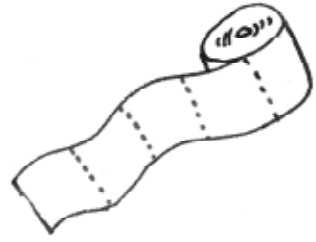
**Oscar Dantzler** - Oscar's mother told him once, "If you can't keep the house of God clean, you ain't gonna keep no place clean." Hence, Oscar is the custodian for Duke University's Chapel. After his job is complete at Duke, he's going fishing.

**Corby Baker** - Corby is a custodian at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle. He mentioned his difficult upbringing with an abusive father. More recently, he experienced a rough breakup with a girlfriend. These challenges, however, didn't stop him from making the most of his life. He continues to create and make social statements through his artwork.

**Luis Cardenas** - A custodian at Caltech, Luis lost his left arm in a severe car accident. The man responsible for this accident, Luis forgave. He continues to work hard providing for his wife and children. His family is a refuge for Luis.

**Michael Seals** - Michael is an employee at UC Berkeley. Michael has an upbeat personality. His son once told him off telling him to never say anything to him. Later Michael's son learned to see his father in a different light and is now proud of his father. Michael felt the proudest when his son encouraged him saying, "Dad, I'm proud of you."

## CONTEMPLATION & DISCUSSION



Let us now consider the custodian-philosophers, our lives, our world, and see if we might glean some wisdom as we associate their lives with the Beatitudes spoken by Jesus.

### "Blessed are the poor in spirit"

The Kingdom of Heaven, according to Christ's word, belongs to those that are "Poor in Spirit". Being poor in spirit has less to do with one's financial state and more to do with one's spiritual posture. Those that are poor in spirit possess a kind of humility that recognizes their need for God.

- 1) How do some of the custodians in the film realize their own limitations?
- 2) How are they often prompted to look outwards for help?
- 3) Which of the custodians in the film do you see expressing dependency on God or other people?
- 4) Where do you see yourself NOT "poor in spirit"?

### "Blessed are those who mourn"

Those who mourn are those who express suffering. Rather than denying the reality of pain, mourners embrace it. Christ's life, in part, was marked by an agonizing suffering, which ultimately led to a shameful death on the Cross. Jesus says those who grieve will, indeed, be comforted.

- 1) Which custodians do you see embracing their pain as opposed to denying it?
- 2) How has their embrace of suffering actually strengthened them?
- 3) How has your own pain, in fact, become a "blessing in disguise"?
- 4) How can you use that pain to help others?

### "Blessed are the meek"

Jesus is both the Lion and the Lamb. He exhibited meekness by being mild and gentle as opposed to being aggressive and domineering. Christ-like people who can evenly balance their passions will inherit the earth by bearing insult and attack without seeking vengeance.

- 1) Do custodians ever bear insult? If not directly, are they ever victims of passive aggression?
- 2) When you experience insult or harm, what is your typical response?
- 3) Who is the person you can be meeker towards?
- 4) Who did you see displaying meek strength in the film? How so?

*"I'm a poor man, but I'm  
proud of myself"*



### "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus says, will be filled. They prioritize righteousness as of utmost importance. A person who seeks righteousness may not necessarily have attained it, but will consistently pursue it.

- 1) Do any of the custodians in the film stand out as one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness?
- 2) Which Philosopher King do you see overcoming obstacles for the sake of a righteous cause?
- 3) After watching the film, is there a righteous cause you are inspired to pursue? If you are not pursuing that cause, what is holding you back?

### "Blessed are the merciful"

In the book of James we read, "Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:13) Showing mercy towards someone is forgiving the person for what is rightfully owed to you. It is essentially letting someone "off the hook" for an injustice committed. From another perspective, mercy can also be bearing someone else's burden.

- 1) Where in the film do we see acts of mercy displayed by the custodians?
- 2) When have you been shown or experienced mercy? How was that a freeing experience for you?
- 3) Think globally for a moment. What countries have the opportunity to show mercy to either its own people or to other nations? Is there something you can do to help those nations?

### "Blessed are the pure in heart"

Jesus promises that the pure in heart will see God. To be in the presence of God requires internal purification. No human is completely pure, but God does intervene in human affairs so as to purify His children.

- 1) Among the custodians, were there any that you saw being "purified"? How so?
- 2) How is God purifying your own heart? What does it feel like?
- 3) Which custodian might you consider as a direct or indirect mentor in purity? Why?

*"Life should be about doing  
what you love"*



Custodian at Cornish College of the Arts by day, and aspiring artist by night, Corby Baker is seen here with one of his many creations inspired by his desire "to bring things into reality that have never existed before."



Josue Lajeunesse, a custodian at Princeton University, works practically around the clock to fully support his family in Haiti. On a rare trip back home, Josue breaks down after seeing the squalid conditions of his family's village largely unchanged.

## "Blessed are the peacemakers"

Today's peacemakers will be called "sons of God". There is no better model for a peacemaker than Christ Himself who by dying on the Cross reconciled humankind's relationship with God. A peacemaker works for the sake of reconciliation.

- 1) Which Philosopher King do you see as a peacemaker? And how is this person blessed for it?
- 2) Was there any custodian that struck you as being particularly peaceful? How was this expressed?
- 3) In your current situation, do you have opportunities to be a peacemaker?

## "Blessed are who are persecuted for righteousness"

At this point in our discussion, it is obvious that there is flow of attributes Jesus lists for those who are genuinely blessed meeting God's approval. Yet, the Lord concludes this portion of teaching with a sobering reality. Those that are blessed will be persecuted.

- 1) What sort of persecution do you imagine people, such as custodians, face?
- 2) In this humble, non-glamorous occupation, which of the custodians do you see successfully overcoming his or her persecution?
- 3) Have you been persecuted for your faith? How did you handle it?





Vietnam Vet, and Purple Heart recipient, James Evener sweeps the halls of the philosophy department at Cornell University.



Melinda Augustus dusts a massive Earth mural at the University of Florida's Museum of Natural

## CONCLUSION: SOME POTENTIAL APPLICATION

When we watch movies, we not only kick-back and enjoy the movie but when the movie ends, we often like to add our own two cents. We become amateur movie-critics. "Oh the cinematography was great, but the acting wasn't very believable." "I really like all the special effects!" "The movie started well, but had a weak ending." The Philosopher Kings is a film that's difficult to critique. In fact, it's one of those films that critiques you, the viewer. It captivates your mind and gives you a renewed perspective on yourself as you relate to others and the world we coexist in. So here are some thoughts and questions to continue meditating on:

- 1) In your life, who are the people, whether intentionally or unintentionally, you see but don't really see?
- 2) Ever thought about breaking the ice and maybe starting a conversation with that person?
- 3) How about a simple smile and hello while looking the person in the eye?
- 4) At your next event or party, don't forget, as President Clinton mentioned, that you are leaving a job behind for the people who are going to pick up after you. How about sincerely thanking them for what they do?
- 5) If you work in a consistent office type of setting, what if you did a fun experiment. How about cleaning up your own trash bags just for the sake of sharing another co-worker's burden?
- 6) Again, from President Clinton's words, acknowledge those around you. Break the common habit of pretending that some people around you don't exist. Because now you are enlightened to the fact that the marginalized of our society have quite remarkable and inspirational stories and possess profound wisdom.
- 7) Without telling the person, privately pray for someone's well-being and to be blessed.
- 8) Finally, someone once said, "A man with a true experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument." Ponder this statement. And may the lives of the Philosopher Kings be a prophetic word of encouragement for you to live your life to the fullest under any circumstance. You only live once. So like the Philosopher Kings, learn to master that life you have.

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