

SESSION 1: THE BEATITUDES

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:17-26

QUESTIONS

1. "Blessed are" was a form of speech that Jesus' listeners were familiar with. The Bible is full of people identified as blessed. In the following passages, identify who is blessed and describe the nature of the blessing:
 - a. Deuteronomy 33:29
 - b. Psalm 1
 - c. Psalm 32:1-2
 - d. Psalm 41:1-3
 - e. Psalm 84:4-7
 - f. Psalm 94:12-13
 - g. Psalm 112:1-9
 - h. Psalm 119:1-2
 - i. Proverbs 3:13-14
 - j. Isaiah 30:18
 - k. How do the Beatitudes of the New Testament compare to these "blessed are" statements from the Old?
2. Keep in mind that each of the Beatitudes is comprised of three elements: *a pronouncement of blessing, a quality of life, and a reason why the recipient should be considered blessed*. The first element is found in the word "blessed", which introduces each beatitude. The second element does not describe different groups of people, but a composite picture of the kind of person who will inherit Christ's kingdom. The third element looks ahead to some aspect of the coming kingdom. Using the two Beatitudes in this session, discuss the three different parts.

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SESSION 2: THE BEATITUDES

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:17-26

QUESTIONS

1. The Beatitudes in focus tonight refer to the meek, hungry, thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers and the persecuted. Which one of these conditions do you relate to the most right now? Share your connection to the one you chose and what it means to you.
2. Discuss how our life as a Christian can turn into a list of to-do's or check-box items. How does a "check-box" approach differ from Jesus' wish for His followers?
3. Describe a time when you've found yourself in the state of one of the Beatitudes. Did you experience the reward listed, or are you still waiting for it?
4. The reasons given for every "blessed" condition are associated with a special fellowship with God (they are filled, shown mercy, see God, called children of God, theirs is the kingdom of God). Discuss how it feels to have such great promises of fellowship with God. These are promises of the future, but describe how you can feel the effects of these promises already today.
5. From the video/script: *"choosing the way of a disciple of Christ is not easy. It is a struggle with yourself. Jesus calls us to self-sacrifice and to live outside the norm of culture."* How have you experienced this struggle? Discuss how living to the standard of the Beatitudes that Christ gave is countercultural.
6. Read the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19: 16-22. What did Jesus ask the man to do? Do you see traces of the Beatitudes in this story? Why did the man go away sorrowful?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: THE BEATITUDES

If you're looking for a practical guide to your walk of faith, look no further than the Sermon on the Mount. This great sermon and guide to discipleship was given early in Jesus' public ministry. It's recorded in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and contains, among other guiding principles, the nine sayings known as the Beatitudes. Both Jesus' entire Sermon on the Mount and the nine Beatitudes direct the Christian's focus towards the kingdom of God. The main purpose behind this sermon was to prepare the disciples for their mission. In addition, many had gathered from the surrounding areas to hear Him that day and to be healed.

The sermon begins with a contradiction to the conventional wisdom of that time. Traditionally, one thought God's blessing was with the wealthy and privileged, while those whose lives were marked by continuous struggle, hunger, weeping and shunning by society were rejected by God. Jesus declares the opposite. When He says the poor and hungry are blessed, Jesus not only connects with the marginalized, but also paints a picture of God in an unexpected way. Where people saw God identifying with the influential, Jesus' presence among the sick, the lame, and the outcast demonstrate God's solidarity with the less privileged. Now God's strength is revealed in weakness; God's overabundant riches are made known in poverty; God's powerful presence is made known in the one who realizes his dependence on His Creator.

Can we see a similar disconnect today between the teachings of Jesus within the Beatitudes and the current pop culture or even our own beliefs? Our culture today places priority on quite the opposite of what Jesus taught. In contrast to the Beatitudes, we could summarize this thinking in the following ways:

Blessed are the rich, in things and in self-assurance.

Blessed are those untouched by loss.

Blessed are the powerful.

Blessed are those who are "realistic" about righteousness, compromising at every turn.

Blessed are those who demand justice and want an eye for an eye.

Blessed are the crafty and opportunistic.

Blessed are those bold enough to make war.

Blessed are those who, doing good things, receive many accolades.

Blessed are those who, following Jesus, are widely praised and adored.

Is this the way we view blessings today? Do we look for the fulfillment of our prayers based on our own material gain? God's blessing isn't something that we can earn or deserve, and the Sermon on the Mount isn't a list of things to accomplish. Rather, it outlines a completely different lifestyle. God's blessing comes by changing the way you live your life, by changing your very nature and becoming more like Christ. You need to live for God and for others, instead of for yourself.

Being a disciple of Jesus is a lifelong journey. When you gradually become like Him and share His Gospel with the world, you become "the light of the world", as Jesus tells His disciples, letting your light shine before others, so they can see your good deeds that glorify God. Jesus insists that his followers have a penetrating, preserving, and transforming effect on society.

So what comprises a Beatitude? First, it's a pronouncement of blessing. Second, a new way to live our lives that brings us into the nearness of the Kingdom of God. And lastly, a reason why the recipient should be considered blessed. Today we'll look at two of the nine Beatitudes to learn what Jesus was teaching His original audience and what they mean for us today as His disciples. We'll continue with the rest of the Beatitudes next time.

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

The poor in spirit humble themselves before God, surrender themselves to Him and allow Him to guide their lives. Their understanding of their own nothingness and sinfulness leaves them spiritually poor, and in this poverty of the spirit, they seek and find the kingdom of heaven.

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

The word "mourn" in Greek is the most intensive kind of mourning. It was used when Jacob thought that his son Joseph was dead. It can have three distinct meanings: first, a deep sorrow for the loss of a loved one or an affliction. Second, sorrow over the condition of the world and the feeling of helplessness to do anything about it. And third, grief over our own sinful state. Being poor in spirit means we mourn over our own shortcomings and sin. It is necessary for us to suffer for our sin. This suffering means we recognize that we have disappointed the Lord because He wants us to be like Him. In our mourning we are led to repentance, humbleness,

and dependence on the mercy of God. This grief drives me to change because I've failed Him again. And again I need His grace and forgiveness. Then when we hear the absolution, the Lord's peace moves over us and we are comforted.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

The Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes

The setting on a mountain in Galilee evokes primarily the imagery of Mount Sinai, where God's will for Israel was revealed through Moses. "Sitting down" (v.1) and "opening his mouth" (a literal rendering of v.2) seem to be incidental features, but actually suggest Jesus' divine authority. Jesus addresses his teaching primarily to his disciples, but its power is demonstrated in its impact on the crowds, who are astounded at his teaching and follow him (Matthew 7:28).

The first part of the Sermon, 5:3-12, is known as the Beatitudes because of the repeated word “blessed”, which indicates God’s favor toward certain types of people. There are eight beatitudes; the last two (v. 10 and 11), which concern persecution, are counted as one. Each characteristic or action of those blessed is followed by a promise that carries an eschatological ring. The first and eighth beatitudes anticipate the same reward, the “kingdom of heaven,” while “righteousness” is mentioned in the fourth and eighth beatitudes.

Jesus' teachings and the Old Testament

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus affirmed the authority of the principles of the Old Testament. Jesus' statement in 5:17 indicates that he brings the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament to their desired end. His teaching does not abolish the Old Testament, as some of his opponents charged. Rather, his teaching transcends the Old Testament and brings it to its intended completion. Jesus illustrated in 5:21-48 how to apply the Old Testament to the new situations his coming has introduced by making new applications of the Old Testament.

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: THE BEATITUDES

You'll remember that we left off last in our last session talking about the Beatitudes and how they demonstrate beliefs and practices of Christlike people living under God's rule. The promises proclaiming God's future actions provide encouragement to these who live distinctively as disciples. Let us now continue our study of the remaining seven Beatitudes.

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

Here, meek doesn't mean timid or nervous. It means submitting to God and having the inner fortitude and strength to patiently bear insults and adversity by responding with love. God will vindicate those who trust Him instead of those who try to obtain rewards their own way. Jesus exemplifies the character of the meek because He didn't come forcefully overthrowing Roman rule, but rather came to the destitute, lifted their burdens and brought the kingdom of God to them.

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

In the fourth Beatitude, our Lord declares that those who feel a most intense desire for righteousness will obtain it. For Christians, the promise is clear and definite. Notice it doesn't say those who are righteous, but rather those who hunger and thirst for - or seek - righteousness. This is about a continual striving to be right with God. This isn't possible on our own. We can be righteous by the law, but that leads to self-righteousness. Only through the righteousness that God gives through Christ can we be filled and satisfied. When we strive to be right with God, it carries over into our actions and relationships with our neighbors.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy means showing compassion and goodness to others. Jesus teaches that we should love our neighbor as our self, and those who receive mercy from God should have mercy on others. The Greek word for "mercy" has its root in the Hebrew word meaning "to get inside someone else's skin." God came in the skin of man through Christ to be able to identify with us. We should also suffer together and empathize with the pains and sufferings of others.

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

The pure in heart are free from evil desires and purposes. They exclude all uncleanness from their lives which enables them to understand the motives and actions of God. Our hearts

aren't pure in their human state, but can be cleansed through the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. We have to make a decision to have a pure heart, and through repentance allow it to be fully washed. The pure in heart can see God's presence in their lives now, and in the future they'll see Him face to face.

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

The term 'peacemaker' includes all who make peace between men, whether as individuals or as communities. It even includes those who worthily endeavor to make peace, even when they fail. They will be called God's children because God is a God of peace. He gave His Son to be born into this world as the Prince of Peace. Here's another example of how Jesus turns traditional belief on its head. Here on earth, the instigators of war stand highest, but in God's kingdom, peacemakers outrank them.

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

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Those who suffer because of their loyalty to the kingdom of heaven are blessed by being bound more closely to that kingdom for which they suffer. The Lord tells us upfront that we'll suffer and the world won't be kind towards us because of our choices. Choosing the way of a disciple of Christ is not easy. It is a struggle with yourself. Jesus calls us to a life of self-sacrifice and living outside the norm of culture. He asked the rich young man to do the same. The man was seeking righteousness, but he couldn't make the choice to go down the path of discipleship. Those who choose the path, who model their lives after these Beatitudes will see the kingdom of heaven, both today and in the future.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Catechism References

4.6 God's blessing (excerpt)

Blessing is synonymous with God's saving and healing activity upon both mankind and the creation. The conviction that man's entire existence is dependent on God's blessing points to an image of mankind that derives from belief in God as the almighty Creator and Sustainer of all creation. By grasping the gifts of God in faith and allowing the Lord to lead them, human beings can partake in blessing.

4.6.2 God's blessing in the old covenant (excerpt)

In the old covenant, the blessing of God manifested itself primarily in the daily life directly experienced by the people, and encompassed all areas of life, for example victory in battles against enemies, longevity, wealth, numerous descendants, and fertile soil. Even in the old covenant, however, blessing already had a dimension which surpassed earthly welfare, as becomes clear in God's promise to Abraham: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing."

4.6.3 God's blessing in the new covenant (excerpt)

Starting in the new covenant, divine blessing was imparted through Jesus Christ. The Lord blessed through His word, through His miracles, and through His conduct. His ultimate blessing was given when he offered up His sinless life on the cross. Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." Believers know that being chosen in Jesus Christ incorporates the calling to inherit the blessing. They demonstrate their thankfulness for God's blessing through a life defined by the fear of God, obedience of faith, and selflessness.