

BLESSED

SEEKING GOD'S APPROVAL
ABOVE ALL ELSE



BLESSED RADIANT GROUPS

WEEKLY GUIDE

Week 1	Jesus' First Sermon
Week 2	The Poor in Spirit
Week 3	Those Who Mourn
Week 4	The Meek
Week 5	The Hungry and Thirsty
Week 6	The Merciful
Week 7	The Pure in Heart
Week 8	The Peacemakers
Week 9	The Persecuted
Week 10	You are Salt and Light

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known teaching of Jesus, though it may be the least understood and least obeyed. From a grassy mountainside early in His ministry, Jesus made His expectations clear as He laid out His vision for discipleship.

Why is the Sermon on the Mount one of the greatest sermons ever preached? Most significantly, because it came from the lips of Jesus. In the original context, this sermon was probably much longer. It's possible that Jesus taught for several hours, and what we have in Matthew 5–7 are the condensed highlights of His teaching. This is why the Sermon on the Mount is filled with so many bite-sized truths. This is the best of the best.

The primary theme throughout Jesus' teaching is tied to the kingdom of heaven, which is another reason the Sermon is so influential. When it comes to the kingdom of heaven, Jesus doesn't cut corners or water down His message. Few passages of Scripture confront us like the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus sets a high standard, asks convicting questions and calls us to examine our lives to see if we are living as citizens of God's kingdom.

And what should believers look like? Different! According to Jesus, His true followers are to be unlike the world. As Christians, we don't imitate or look like the world around us—we follow Christ. This world isn't our home and Jesus calls us to live noticeably different.

A key passage in the Sermon on the Mount is Matthew 5:13–16. As followers of Christ, we're called to be salt of the earth and light of the world. In other words, we're called to reflect Christ and influence the world for good as living examples to those who don't know Christ. This way of living doesn't blend in with the crowd; it is distinctly different.

Just like 2,000 years ago, the Sermon on the Mount is intended to challenge us to think about what it means to follow Jesus.

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF *BLESSED*

The first word that Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount is the word, "blessed." In fact, the first nine sentences began with the same word. Clearly, Jesus is making a point about what it looks like to be blessed. Who doesn't want to be *blessed*? We all want to be blessed.

The problem is that we have the wrong picture for what it looks like to be blessed. We have a modern, American prosperity view of what it means to be blessed. We define *blessed* as *healthy, wealthy and happy*. But this is not the kind of *blessed* that Jesus had in mind. Health, wealth and happiness are temporary and subjective. These qualities shift and change over time. They don't last. They aren't eternal. Let's be honest, we always want to be more healthy, wealthy and happy. Feelings, bank accounts and personal wellness change as seasons of life ebb and flow. Coming from a single Jewish man who was jobless and homeless, Jesus must have had something else in mind.

When Jesus uses the word *blessed*, He's referring to what God thinks about you. *Blessed* is a positive judgment by God on an individual. To be *blessed* by God is "*to be approved*." When God *blesses* you, He puts His divine stamp of approval on your life. Being *blessed* is more than happiness. It is what God thinks about you, not what you think about yourself or how you stack up against the world.

THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

The question we must ask ourselves is the same question Jesus asks: ***Do I want God's approval more than anything else?***

In nine short verses, Jesus calls us to reimagine our lives as He lays out what it looks like to live a distinctly Christian life that is *blessed*. To live as followers of Jesus and citizens of heaven, to be *blessed* and approved by God, we must live in a new way and measure ourselves with a new standard.



MATTHEW 5-7

JESUS' FIRST SERMON

MATTHEW 5-7

Overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sat on a grassy hillside to deliver His longest recorded sermon. Think about this for a moment. This is the most famous sermon the world has ever heard, but it wasn't at the biggest synagogue, newest temple or a fancy town hall. There weren't lines of people scrambling to push the doors open. Jesus didn't arrive with a tour bus, best-selling book or t-shirts. It was simple and modest.

As crowds gathered in the background, Jesus sat on a grassy hill and taught with amazing authority.

The twelve disciples anxiously sat down among a small crowd. These men didn't make the cut for following other rabbis, but Jesus saw something different. Jesus saw everything differently. What's most impressive about the twelve disciples is how unimpressive they were. Filled with excitement and curiosity, twelve ordinary men sat down. They had no idea the sermon they were about to hear would change their lives forever.

Jesus' words were not like any they had heard before. Over the next several hours, Jesus taught His disciples how to live unlike the world and to live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. *He taught them how to be different.*

As the twelve disciples listened, Jesus' words were laser-focused. He set uncomfortable standards. His teaching was filled with detailed illustrations that came alive. This new way of living wasn't based on a set of rules or regulations for life in the real world. No formulas. This isn't for the feel-good Christian or the faint of heart. Like Jesus, this way of living is different—it's hard. This begins with a completely new mindset for relating to God and relating to others.

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5-7 IS ONE WHOLE SERMON

The opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount are commonly called the "Beatitudes." Here, Jesus highlights eight qualities to live by. More than an attitude that can fluctuate with circumstances, this is a mindset for how believers should relate to God and others.

The first four Beatitudes focus on our relationship with God, and the next four focus on our relationship with others. All eight build upon one another with amazing unity and brilliant progression.

It's also important to note that the first Beatitude (verse 3) and the last Beatitude (verse 10) end with the same reward, "*the kingdom of heaven.*" This means that everything in between verse 3 and verse 10, thus all eight Beatitudes, deal with the same cohesive theme. Therefore, the result that comes from living the Beatitudes is *the kingdom of heaven*. Those who embrace the Beatitudes and adopt this sort of mindset and lifestyle are the same people who are *blessed* by God and will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Like Jesus' disciples, we're called to live according to a new standard. As citizens of His kingdom, we live as God desires, not for ourselves.

Before diving into the rest of this study, which focuses on the Beatitudes (5:1–16), put yourself into the shoes of the disciples by reading the whole Sermon on the Mount. Like a master storyteller, Jesus teaches with memorable illustrations to etch His truths into the minds of His disciples. Don't skim these words. Feel the weight contained within these truths. Read slowly and deliberately. Ask the Holy Spirit to pierce your soul.

Like the disciples who sat with Jesus, read Matthew 5–7 aloud and try to read it in one sitting without distractions.

MATTHEW 5-7

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless you

righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

²¹ "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.²⁶ Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.²⁹ If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

³¹ "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

³³ "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

³⁸ "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the

just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

6 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

² "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵ "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this:

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

¹⁶ "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will

reward you.

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

7 "Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

⁶ "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if

his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

¹² "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

DISCUSS THIS

JESUS' VISION FOR DISCIPLESHIP

After hearing Jesus' teaching, the crowd was astonished at the authority by which Jesus spoke. Imagine hearing this message for the first time. How would it have been unlike anything taught at that time?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

As a sermon, Jesus is teaching one cohesive idea. In your own words, what is the driving point or main idea throughout Jesus' message?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Jesus speaks with authority and raises the bar with His message. What do you think is the most challenging statement for believers? What is the hardest statement for you to embrace and live out?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

The world has its own picture of what it looks like to be blessed. *Blessed is the person who is successful. Blessed is the man who is strong. Blessed is the woman who is popular. Blessed is the good-looking family who have everything together.* In your own words, how would you define the meaning of *blessed*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is your biggest takeaway from the Sermon on the Mount?

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
MATTHEW 5:3

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:3

The disciples knew what it was like to be poor. Several men walked away from their family businesses and gave up their inheritances. They weren't following Jesus to increase their retirement. Of the twelve disciples, eleven came from historically looked down upon areas and grew up with little means.

Teaching the twelve disciples not to think too highly of themselves wasn't the issue. These men were all too familiar with poverty. How encouraging it must have been to hear Jesus say you must be poor (in spirit) before inheriting the kingdom of heaven. This is relatable. But Jesus wasn't talking financially—He was talking spiritually.

To be poor in spirit is to acknowledge your spiritual bankruptcy. Before God, we are sinners who deserve nothing but His judgment. We have nothing to offer and nothing to buy God's favor. Left to ourselves, we are powerless, helpless, morally unclean and personally unworthy. God isn't impressed with self-righteousness.

Similar to today, the word "poor" can refer to a person who relies on the generosity of others. They are totally dependent on outside help for survival.

If we take this meaning and combine it with the words "in spirit", we now have the idea of a person who is spiritually bankrupt. *Blessed* are those who are so desperately poor in their spiritual resources that they realize they must have help. The poor in spirit see themselves as spiritually needy and dependent.

Before God blesses us, we must first recognize our position and need for God's help. Instead of rolling up our sleeves of moralism or trying to prove our personal self-worth, we throw ourselves at the mercy of God and admit that we have nothing of value to bring to the table.

Poverty of spirit is the antithesis of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. It is the awareness and admission that we're utterly sinful and there is nothing inside us that can achieve God's approval. Those who foolishly deceive themselves into thinking there is something special within them for God to accept them will be tragically disappointed. Apart from God, we cannot save ourselves. But when God intervenes and extends His generous hand to us, we are divinely blessed.

Only the spiritually bankrupt and those who cry out for God's help, while depending entirely on God's grace to meet their needs will experience God's deliverance and inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus didn't grow up in an affluent or middle-class family. When Jesus was born, angels announced His birth to poor shepherds (Luke 2:18–15). When Jesus was presented in the temple, His parents were permitted to sacrifice a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons because they could not afford to purchase a lamb (Luke 2:22–24). Although He was the Son of God and King of kings, Jesus came from a poor family, and He came to save those who are poor in spirit.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He opened the scroll to Isaiah 61:1 and read this opening line: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor."* In Isaiah's context, the poor were the exiled people of Israel who had not compromised and who looked to God alone to save them and establish His kingdom. These are the people to whom God comes. Poverty of spirit is where our relationship with God begins as we recognize our position before a holy and infinite God. As believers, we are perpetually poor and reliant on God. Only when we confess that we are completely dependent on Him can we be approved by Him who is rich in mercy—this is how we are blessed.

DIG INTO THIS

LUKE 18:9-14

What stands out in this passage about *the poor in spirit*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

REVELATION 3:17-18

What stands out in this passage about *the poor in spirit*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY VS. SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Why is humility a prerequisite for the Christian life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How does recognizing ourselves as spiritually poor affect the way we live each day? How can you cultivate this identity in your life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What does dependance on the Lord look like in real life? What are some practical ways to apply and grow in this mindset?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Jesus sets a high bar for discipleship, yet only He can perfectly live up to His own words. How does knowing God's approval is based on what Christ has done for you, not what you strive to accomplish yourself, impact the way you view the Sermon on the Mount?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you talk about spiritual bankruptcy, when people are self-sufficient and don't recognize they're spiritually impoverished?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



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

MATTHEW 5:4

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:4

Building upon the first Beatitude is the second Beatitude, "*Blessed are those who mourn.*" Mourning carries the idea of weeping with grief and sorrow. Mourning is an emotional response that contains deep sadness, regret and remorse.

For those who are enduring deep sorrow, Jesus meets them in the middle of their pain and promises His comfort. This Beatitude provides encouragement for those who are experiencing seasons of mourning, knowing that they will receive God's *blessing*. Yet as believers, there is a universal mourning we all share as we grieve over our own sin and the sin in the world around us.

When we mourn over sin, we have empathy as we consider the perspective of God and how sin violates His love. We mourn our severed union with God like a shattered relationship. Yet, in sadness we are also filled with immediate hope and comfort as the Spirit moves us to God's mercy.

Mourning over sin is also a commitment to think and act differently. Having a contrite heart is more than moping around or feeling sorry for yourself. Mourning takes ownership. It admits faults and confesses wrongdoing and takes restorative steps to repair damages. It is a verbal acknowledgment and an emotional response. No rationalizing. It's a change in thinking that alters how you live and delights in obedience and the commitment to increasingly become more like Christ.

It can be tempting to think of faith as separate from feelings, but Jesus says the way we should respond to our spiritual condition is by mourning and crying out for God's saving help through repentance.

The opposite of a hard and unrepentant heart is one that is tender. It's a heart that is easily and quickly convicted by sin. It's a heart that expresses itself in deep sorrow and repents in humble brokenness. As followers of Christ, we should grieve over sin in our life and be moved to tears as we see pain and evil in our world. Worldly sorrow is self-centered. It revolves around the pain that is felt by self instead of dishonor that is cast upon God. People who have worldly sorrow are defensive about their sin and attempt to justify it, explain it away or even straight up deny it.

The world tries to change us from the outside in, yet Jesus changes us from the inside out. God-honoring actions can only come after God has first changed us internally as we mourn over our sin. When was the last time you wept over sin or the sin around you?

The reward that follows those who mourn is overwhelming comfort. True repentance brings comfort as God sears our shame and removes our guilt with His righteousness. His comfort is restorative. God removes our sorrows and consoles us through His Holy Spirit. He mends our relationship and doesn't hold His wrath against us.

When you are honest with yourself, broken before God and vulnerable around others, you are becoming a person who mourns over sin. In God's grace, He invites us to cry out as we admit our struggles and confess our sin. Rather than trite answers or quick solutions, God works to move us toward deeper worship and trust in Him as we turn from ourselves and grieve over sin.

Jesus takes a moment in this well-known sermon to comfort those who are hurting. Whether it be grieving over loss, deep pain or our own sin, mourning is a reality of living in our broken world. However, Jesus promises that those who mourn will be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

2 CORINTHIANS 7:5-13

What stands out in this passage about those who *mourn*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

ROMANS 7:21-25

What stands out in this passage about those who *mourn*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

GODLY REPENTANCE VS. WORLDLY REPENTANCE

Has the Lord comforted you during a season of mourning or sorrow? What did that look like?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What is the difference between godly repentance and worldly repentance?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why is it difficult to admit sin, either to ourselves or others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Citizens of God's kingdom should grieve over their own sin and the sin of the world. How do we mourn over sin caused outside of us?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Sin never affects just one person, it impacts everyone around them. How have you been impacted by the sins of others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.
MATTHEW 5:5

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:5

Have you noticed that it's far easier to be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that we're sinners than to allow other people to speak into our life or call us out when necessary? If someone points out a possible sin issue in you or questions your integrity, how do you respond? Do you listen with grace, or do you become defensive and want to punch them in the nose? Rather than retaliating, meekness is a posture of self-control and receptivity. Meekness is a desire to advance the interest of others, namely God, ahead of your own.

A meek person is not a weak person, but a strong person in Christ. Their strength is tender because they have been molded by God. Once our will is transformed and surrendered to God, it's easier to become servants of God and submit to Him without resistance. Rather than pushing our own agenda or assuming we know best, we can lean into God's plan and allow Him to speak into our lives and tell us what to do. As pride, control and power lose their grip on our hearts, our lives begin to reflect the priorities of God's Kingdom.

The word "meek" can be translated as gentle, humble, considerate or courteous. Meek people turn the other cheek. But, these aren't the people who we expect to inherit the earth, right? Aren't they more likely to be ignored and steamrolled by others? How do people who are meek affect change or influence others?

In the Old Testament when the wicked seemed to triumph, the people of God still had confidence that all things belonged to Him. Although the godless boasted and threw their weight around, real power was far from them. The same is true for us today. We don't have the ability to control the world around us. We are universally dependent on God who rules and reigns over all. Thus, deep trust in the sovereign power of God is critical to living a life of meekness.

Meekness is not spineless timidity or cowardliness. It doesn't mean avoiding confrontation or being wishy-washy. It's not shyness or niceness. It's more than good manners at the dinner table. In short,

meekness is strength under control. The one who is meek has a gentle spirit because he or she trusts God. This means they're not a push-over because they possess both strength and self-control.

Meekness is a humble view of oneself expressed in our attitude to others. It makes us gentle, humble, sensitive and patient.

Are you harsh? Are you mean in your treatment to others? If gentleness is absent from your speech, be careful. If you make sure you get your way and care little about how your actions impact others, watch out. If you assert yourself over others to advance your own causes, be concerned. If you retaliate against those who do evil instead of extending love, this is dangerous territory. If you are overconfident and demand that people need to get used to you because this is how it is, you are not meek.

So how do we become people who are meek? We must yoke ourselves to Jesus and learn from the example of our Master. "*Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light*" (Matthew 11:29–30). Sharing the same yoke, the untrained ox learn the proper pace from the older and more experienced ox. The younger ox also learn how to take directions from the master.

The same is true for us. We learn by being yoked to Christ as we surrender to His direction and place ourselves under His teaching. We follow His pace rather than trying to run ahead by ourselves. Jesus promises if we are yoked to Him and keep our eyes focused on His kingdom, we will learn to walk with gentleness and humility. This is where true strength comes from—supernatural strength that is outside of ourselves. Those who are meek, will be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

PSALM 37

What stands out in this passage about those who are *mEEK*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1 PETER 2:18-25

What stands out in this passage about those who are *mEEK*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL

The Bible is filled with many paradoxes: *the last will be first; it's better to give than receive; if you want to find your life, you must lose it; the least is the greatest; poor are rich; weak are strong; leading is serving.* Why does the Bible flip the world's standards upside down?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How would you describe someone who is meek? In the Bible, Moses and Jesus are two people known for their meekness (Numbers 12:3 & Matthew 11:29). Share how you have encountered the meekness of someone you know.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why is meekness not viewed as a compliment by the world?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you tend to respond when people point out your flaws?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why are we typically more concerned about making ourselves stand out rather than putting the needs of others ahead of ourselves?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

MATTHEW 5:6

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:6

A person who is marked by poverty of spirit (5:3), who grieves over sin (5:4) and approaches God with meekness (5:5), should be hungry and thirsty for righteousness (5:6). Jesus vividly declares that those who follow Him cannot get along or survive without righteousness. Like food and water, righteousness in God's kingdom is a necessity.

Although it might be hard to relate, it wasn't uncommon for the disciples to not know when their next meal would be. Access to fresh and clean water wasn't the same as today. Without running water or a stocked pantry, the sensation of hunger and thirst was a normal experience for the disciples. They had enough food to survive, but these men were rarely full. Sadly, it's still this way in many parts of the world today as over 25,000 people die from hunger each day.

Rather than drifting through life, Jesus wants His people to pursue His will and be filled with His righteousness. This isn't about following a set of rules or traditions. It's about satisfying ourselves in Christ. God's will isn't a checklist of things to do. It's about becoming like Christ. The more we pursue the things of God, the more we are filled. The more we are filled, the hungrier and thirstier we become. Rather than craving what the world has to offer, which always leaves you empty and longing for more, have you tasted the fullness of God? Are you spiritually satisfied? What is your appetite for the Lord? Jesus calls us to be hungry and thirsty for righteousness.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are consumed with righteousness. They have an insatiable appetite and intense longing to be more like Christ. Without this, they will starve. Without it, they will die from thirst. The world is hungry for health, wealth and happiness and yet it is famished. Satisfaction and fulfillment is only possible when we draw close to God and devour His will.

The theme of *righteousness* is a consistent thread woven throughout Scripture. In the Old Testament, the word *righteousness* often refers to the fair treatment of the poor, marginalized and oppressed. God's people longed for the coming of the Messiah who promised to restore God's Kingdom and avenge God's people.

In the book of Romans, the word shifts to the idea of *positional righteousness*. God declares that those who believe in Him are not guilty of sin because He transfers the perfect righteousness of Christ to our account. This is the imputed righteousness that we receive at salvation when Christ's righteousness is bestowed upon us, and God declares us holy based on Christ's redeeming work.

Yet in the Sermon on the Mount, the meaning of the word *righteousness* is determined by the seven occurrences in Matthew 5–7. Here, the word conveys the idea of a personal righteousness that works itself out in conformity to God's will. This inner righteousness flows outward through visible actions that reflect the patterns of God's kingdom. This sort of righteousness doesn't earn salvation; rather, it is the fruit and evidence of a relationship with Christ. More than good intentions, this is obedience in action. This way of living is manifested through daily decisions to please the Lord.

Using extreme terms, Jesus calls us away from dehydration and starvation. Our appetite is like a bottomless pit that yearns for more, yet we can never have enough God. We can never have enough righteous living. This isn't a vain striving for personal glory—this is a genuine passion to become like Christ and live out His difficult demands to be different from the world. He calls us to be holy.

This way of living rules out the self-satisfied, spiritually content, religiously full and half-hearted followers of Christ. It's not possible to get enough Jesus—you always want more. The world is full of empty cups and unsatisfying buffets, but God offers a divine feast. Living a righteous life is what it means to be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

ISAIAH 55

What stands out in this passage about those who *hunger and thirst*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

JOHN 4:1-42

What stands out in this passage about those who *hunger and thirst*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

AN INSATIABLE APPETITE FOR MORE

We hunger and thirst for many things besides righteousness. What are you hungry and thirsty for that you know cannot truly satisfy?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Today, life is ruled by luxuries, not necessities. How does our modern culture of indulgence impact the way we view hunger and thirst?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Going to church, reading the Bible and praying before meals seems to fall short of what Jesus is teaching. Does Jesus satisfy you? In what ways are you hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you know when you are growing in righteousness? What should you look for and how do you continue to hunger and thirst for more?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you respond when you see extreme unrighteousness in others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy.
MATTHEW 5:7

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:7

While the first four Beatitudes focus on our relationship with God, the last four Beatitudes are geared toward how we relate to others. Understanding this connection is key to interpreting the sermon. These eight character qualities aren't a collection of ideas or well-crafted intentions. This is what Jesus expects from His disciples. These aren't suggestions. They are the standards for His kingdom.

Christ is the perfect example of someone who modeled these truths. Jesus didn't just preach a lofty sermon or teach a lecture on kingdom living. Jesus showed His disciples, and us, how to live and what it looks like to be citizens of His kingdom. The Beatitudes are spiritual truths rooted in action. These statements must be applied. This is the whole point of Jesus' message. The Sermon on the Mount confronts us with hard truths that test our faith so we can examine if we are following Christ. We must seek to live out these truths and apply them in our daily lives.

With four Beatitudes complete and four more to go, Jesus doesn't ease up on His teaching. This isn't a time to pull over and rest. Jesus continues to move through the Beatitudes with a high bar for living. But again, Jesus never promised this would be easy. He promised, you will be *blessed*—you will be *approved by God* as you live this way.

The progression that Jesus lays out is both profound and practical. The person who knows they are spiritually bankrupt (5:3), grieves over their sin (5:4), submits to God's will in all things (5:5) and longs for godly righteousness (5:6), is the same person who shows mercy to others because they have received God's mercy. As Jesus extends mercy to us, we are called to show mercy to others. In light of our relationship with the Lord, mercy is the first quality that should flow out as we relate to others—and it's also our reward.

God's mercy is perfectly expressed to us through Christ, who took God's wrath in our place. Because of God's mercy to us, we can see people through God's eyes and have compassion for them. We can extend mercy by being generous, gracious and loving. A merciful person remembers his own sin and God's mercy toward him. He understands the weaknesses of others and forgives, even when it is not deserved.

Mercy is more than pity. Mercy is compassion in action. Mercy is doing something tangible to alleviate distress and despair. Mercy is getting down on your hands and knees and doing what you can to restore dignity to someone whose life has been broken. It takes sacrifice and is rarely convenient.

According to Jesus, the reason the merciful will be blessed is because they will be shown mercy themselves. For those in Christ, we have received extravagant mercy from God and we are called to show mercy to others. This means there is a direct correlation between the mercy that you show others and the mercy that God shows you. This truth is taught in other passages of Scripture (James 2:13, Matthew 6:14–15). Being a person who is merciful is evidence that you have received God's mercy.

While it's tempting to assume we have this covered or think this teaching must be for someone else, we must measure ourselves against the strong teaching of Jesus and examine our own lives. Are we living as citizens of His kingdom? Are you prone to extend more mercy to yourself or others?

While nobody becomes a Christian by showing mercy, the question remains – if you are unwilling to show mercy, are you a follower of Christ? If you remain callous to human needs and refuse to do anything about it, what does that say about you? Are you readily willing to forgive? Extending mercy is how you can be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

LUKE 10:25-37

What stands out in this passage about those who are *merciful*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

MATTHEW 18:21-35

What stands out in this passage about those who are *merciful*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

COMPASSION IN ACTION

To be *meek* is to acknowledge to others that we are sinners. To be *merciful* is to have compassion for others, for they are sinners too. What risks have you recently taken to show mercy to others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Being merciful is a requirement for receiving mercy. Why do you think how we treat others will directly affect how God treats us?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Who is a person in your life to whom you have a difficult time showing mercy? Why is it hard to be merciful? How can you adjust your attitude so showing mercy to this person can become easier?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Following His progression, why do you think Jesus begins with mercy as the first word to describe how we should relate to others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Can someone who hasn't received mercy, show mercy to others?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.
MATTHEW 5:8

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:8

Jesus was hard on the Pharisees even though they lived moral lives with impeccable standards. In terms of obedience, the Pharisees were nearly perfect in many ways. Why was Jesus so hard on them? Because their hearts were far from Him. Jesus demands more than dutiful actions—He desires our hearts. As citizens of God’s kingdom, God cares deeply about our inward character and the true reality of our heart.

According to the Bible, our heart is more than an organ that pumps blood throughout the body. The heart is the control center of our thoughts, attitudes, motives and actions. It ties together our mind, emotion and will, and is the driving source of feelings and actions.

If we didn’t have a heart, we couldn’t sense love or be able to show love in return. Thus, God created us with a heart so we could relate to Him through our affections. In a very real sense, our heart is at the center of our relationship with God and the gateway of our whole being. Our heart is the filter for how we process and make decisions for life. As a control center, our heart is responsible for filtering everything that comes in and purifying everything that goes out. This means we must screen anything that might contaminate or pollute our heart. Jesus wants our heart to be pure.

Since this Beatitude is related to the inner workings and intentions of the heart, it forces us to consider intrusive and intimate questions: What do you think about when your mind slips into neutral? What do you want more than anything else? What and whom do you love? To what extent are your actions an accurate reflection of your heart? Are your words pure? What about your thoughts? Are your motives true? To what extent do you cover up what is hiding in your heart? These are the questions that we often neglect but Jesus cares about.

The Bible describes the heart as sinful, deceitful, evil and wicked. This is why God promises to give us a new heart when we are born again. This new heart is tender and feels the conviction of sin. It longs for grace and is filled with eternal hope. This heart is bent toward the will and way of God.

This heart is new, yet it is still not perfect, so we must continue to battle against sin and fight temptation. What's different with this new heart is that it is no longer captive or stuck in sin. This heart allows us to filter our lives through the presence of God's Spirit.

As followers of Christ, we strive for purity because pure is what we will ultimately be in heaven when sin is fully removed and we are surrounded by the glory of God. Thus, Jesus teaches that our present efforts should be in step with our future hope. In other words, is your heart preparing you for the person that you will be in heaven?

This means that our eyes must be pure and carefully guard what we see. Our minds must be pure and filter unclean thoughts. Our motives must be pure and replace anything that does not reflect Christ. Our feelings must be pure and cleansed before the Lord. Purity impacts everything. But unlike the Pharisees, life is not about avoiding sin or performing religious exercises until we master them. It's about abiding in Jesus and cultivating a relationship with Him so that we increasingly absorb His values and way of living. Rather than trying to make our old self acceptable, we are called to die to it and live according to a new life that is only possible because Christ lives in us.

Pure in heart is about a singular devotion to God. More than filtering media or dressing modestly, purity is about being wholly committed to what God values and not what the world offers. As we filter our hearts through God's Spirit and trace our life around Christ, this is how the watching world will see the glory of God. Our hearts are to reflect God's heart. This is how we will be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

PSALM 24

What stands out in this passage about the *pure in heart*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

MATTHEW 23:25-28

What stands out in this passage about the *pure in heart*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

PERSONAL HOLINESS AND DEVOTION TO GOD

What distracts you or draws you away from devotion to God?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What are some distinguishing marks of someone who is pure in heart?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

If *pure in heart* isn't about being perfect or free from sin, what is it?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

How does sin cloud our ability to see God? Do you have an example?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What are some practical filters to guard or monitor what enters your heart and what you allow to come out of your heart?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.
MATTHEW 5:9

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:9

The devil is a peace-breaker. He steals, kills and destroys. He twists, manipulates and deceives. He devours and tears down. He stirs up conflict, delights in controversy and celebrates inexpressible evil. It's no surprise the world is filled with violence, hate and unthinkable acts of injustice. But Jesus is a peacemaker. In God's sovereignty, Jesus saw the gravity of depravity and refused to sweep our sin under the rug. Instead, He chose to do something about it. Jesus made peace with the holiness of God through His blood and became a peacemaker on our behalf. Jesus is our source of peace, and just as we have received His peace, we are called to share it with others.

In the seventh Beatitude, Jesus calls us to follow in His footsteps and be peacemakers in the broadest sense possible. This is about being an instrument of peace in every sphere of life and every opportunity. Being a peacemaker extends beyond the spiritual implications of sharing the gospel and includes all kinds of social interactions such as lessening tensions, seeking solutions, eliminating prejudice, having honest conversations, addressing sin and resolving conflict.

The word *peacemaker* is composed of two words. The first half of the word, *peace*, is the Hebrew word "shalom." This word conveys the idea of wholeness and well-being. When a Jew said, "Shalom," they were wishing someone more than the absence of trouble, but all that made a complete and whole life. God's peace is more than the absence of conflict or trouble. It envisions what life was like before sin with perfect order and relational harmony.

The second half of the word, *makers*, is a dynamic word that bursts with energy and effort. Peace is never passive. Peace doesn't just happen on its own. It takes effort. Peace is made. As citizens of His kingdom, Jesus expects that we do everything possible to be agents of peace. It's His peace. It's our job to actively distribute it.

When we put these two words together, a *peacemaker* is someone who actively pursues peace in its fullest and truest form. The people who do this are men and women who refuse to tolerate evil. They won't turn a blind eye or put up with injustice or anything shady. True peacemakers aren't afraid of making waves or stepping into awkward situations that don't personally involve them.

A peacemaker is a person who speaks up when there is a problem. They are painfully honest, yet gentle, about the true status of the world around them. They take ownership for their own shortcomings. A peacemaker isn't passive aggressive. They acknowledge issues and admit when things are not right. They don't pretend that everything is fine and refuse to avoid conflict. A peacemaker is willing to risk their own comfort and set aside their own agenda by opening themselves to potential pain because they are committed to being a part of the resolution.

Let's be honest, most of us tend to cover up and spread putty over cracked and fractured relationships for the sake of avoiding conflict or addressing the real issues at hand. It makes sense why we do this. Any time we attempt to bring peace, we risk confrontation and make ourselves vulnerable to rejection or being misunderstood. Being a peacemaker is the harder path. You will be judged. You will be wronged. It's tempting to let things slide or assume love will cover something that is wrong, but peace doesn't happen on its own. Peacemakers create opportunities for reconciliation and restoration.

As God's children, we are called to imitate Him and be peacemakers. Then, as we extend God's peace to others, the world will see that we are different and serve a higher calling that stretches beyond ourselves.

Scripture says we should *"make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3) and *"make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification"* (Romans 14:19). Being a peacemaker requires risk. Peaceful solutions are always uphill and rarely comfortable, but Jesus promises you will be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

MATTHEW 18:15-17

What stands out in this passage about those who are *peacemakers*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

What stands out in this passage about those who are *peacemakers*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

How do you deal with conflict? Do you tend to avoid it or run to it? Do you respond differently based on the context or setting?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Is being a peacemaker difficult for you? Why or why not?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What are the things that cause you to lack peace and lead to worry, doubt, stress or become anxious and troubled in life?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Why is it important to see peace as something active, not passive?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Name one relationship in which you want to grow as a peacemaker. Why?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



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

MATTHEW 5:10-12

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:10-12

However hard we try to make peace, not everyone will live at peace. Some relationships will remain strained or broken. Reconciliation isn't always successful. Rather than seeking man's approval, the blessed life is the Christian who seeks to be approved by God. What God thinks of you is more important than anyone or anything. But what about when things get rough? Does this include persecution?

Persecution is the result of the clash between two irreconcilable value systems. As a Christian, people will oppose you, slander you and judge you "*because of righteousness.*" Being despised, rejected, slandered and persecuted is a normal mark of discipleship like being pure in heart or merciful. Every Christian is called to be a peacemaker and every Christian should expect to face opposition. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will suffer for the same righteousness they crave. As Jesus calls you to follow Him, don't be surprised when hostility surrounds you. Instead, you should be surprised if it doesn't.

The world considers "*blessed*" to be those who are healthy, wealthy and happy, but Jesus flips this reality and redefines what it means to be *blessed*. Enduring suffering is a mark of genuine faith. It's evidence of loyalty to Jesus and obeying His standards. In the end, we may lose everything on earth, but Jesus promises that we will inherit everything that belongs to the kingdom of heaven. This is why Jesus expects us to rejoice in our suffering. In our suffering we are following in His steps and becoming more like Him.

Until now all the Beatitudes have been given in the third person, "*Blessed are those,*" and that is the way this Beatitude begins. But the repetition in verse 11 changes to second person in order to make the emphasis of this last Beatitude even more personal and direct. Suffering for your faith is deeply personal and won't go unnoticed.

This final Beatitude does not say, "*Blessed are the persecuted, period.*" Therefore, anytime life is hard, it's tempting to think we are united with Christ and suffering for our faith. But this isn't what this Beatitude says. The suffering that Jesus has in mind is tied to the way we live and the extent that our faith is modeled to the world. Those who live out the sermon and reflect the Christ-like character of the Beatitudes belong to the kingdom of heaven, and they should expect persecution.

The world will not tolerate those who live according to Jesus' demands. Poverty of spirit runs counterculture to the pride of the unbelieving heart. The mournful and repentant heart that is broken over its sin and the sin of the world is not appreciated. The meek person is regarded as weak. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness don't fit the mold of a world that lusts after what it can see and touch. The person who cares for those on the outskirts of society, the poor and needy, would only do this if they had an agenda. The single-minded heart that is filtered by God doesn't fit our culture. Peacemakers who won't settle for fake peace make people uncomfortable because they aren't willing to look the other way. Those who strive to be more like Christ will suffer persecution.

While believers in some parts of the world suffer greatly, some persecution is underhanded or mild. Do people roll their eyes at you? Are you not invited to certain places or parties? Are people uncomfortable around you? Do others poke fun at your faith or challenge what you believe? While this sort of persecution isn't dramatic, it is real. Christian— if you haven't experienced persecution, have you asked yourself, "Am I too much like the world?" or perhaps, "Am I too insulated with other Christians?"

We must align our expectations with what Christ actually teaches and test ourselves to see if we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus makes it clear: expect social pain and persecution because this world is not our home. Then when it comes—you are blessed.

DIG INTO THIS

JOHN 15:18-25

What stands out in this passage about those who are *persecuted*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

What stands out in this passage about those who are *persecuted*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

THE GOSPEL IS OFFENSIVE, YOU SHOULDN'T BE

What's the difference between being persecuted for the sake of Christ and drawing negative attention to yourself for being a rude and obnoxious Christian?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Do you think Christians are more likely to be persecuted for living out their faith, or is persecution more prevalent for those who claim to be a Christian but do not live out their faith?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Looking back over the list of character qualities from the Beatitudes, how might growing in these other areas help you face persecution?

.....

.....

.....

.....

When you follow the Sermon on the Mount, the devil doesn't take it kindly. Satan and his forces will discourage your efforts, distract you in your prayers and knock you down with social ridicule. Have you been persecuted? What happened? Why aren't you persecuted more?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Jesus says to rejoice when you are persecuted for righteousness. Have you ever felt relief or joy from subtle forms of persecution?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



You are salt and light.
MATTHEW 5:13-16

THINK ABOUT THIS

MATTHEW 5:13-16

Why are the Beatitudes such a loved portion of Scripture? We love them because of their simplicity. Jesus is clear in what He calls us to do. His teaching is not complicated or confusing. It's simple, yet hard. In the end, these eight character qualities give us a portrait of Jesus and who we are becoming as we follow Him. No one grieved over sin and our broken world more than Jesus. No one was more meek in submitting to God's will than Jesus. No one hungered and thirsted for righteousness more than Jesus. No one showed mercy to others more than Jesus. No one sought peace between God and man, and between man and man, more than Jesus. No one suffered unjust persecution and evil more than Jesus. As we look into these verses, we see Jesus and a glimpse of our true identity in Him.

Ultimately, the Beatitudes are not only a personal blessing, but also a guide for us to be a blessing to the world. This is why Jesus condenses all eight beatitudes into two brilliant metaphors to capture the essence of His teaching. Where there is decay, we need salt. Where there is darkness, we need light. As citizens of God's kingdom, we are a part of God's plan to stop death and stamp out darkness. It's only when we take on His character that we can reflect Christ to the world.

When the disciples heard these words, Jesus' words sounded absurd. There were only a few followers. They were mostly uneducated, disorganized and far from influencing the world. Yet, it was through ordinary men and women that Jesus changed the world.

Jesus doesn't tell His disciples, or us today, "you can be salt" or "you will be salt." He says you *are* salt. Today, right now, you are salt. When Jesus first spoke these words, He had a strange confidence in His followers. The same confidence applies to us today. Jesus believes in you. He calls you to join His mission.

During the times of the Bible, salt had five main functions:

1. Purity
2. Preservation
3. Flavor
4. Healing
5. Creation of thirst

As a disciple, we should be all of these to the dying world. The world is decomposing and rotting away, yet we are called to slow the effects of sin and positively contribute to society. Rather than being bland, we are to add flavor to the world.

Salt is only good as long as it maintains its integrity. But once salt becomes contaminated, it loses its usefulness and has no purpose. Salt can sit for years in a saltshaker, but it will never do any good until it is poured out with a purpose. The same is true for us. We are most powerful when we are spread out among the world because a little salt can go a long way. Jesus believes in you. You are salt of the earth.

In His second metaphor, Jesus extends His vision for our lives and says, "*You are the light of the world.*" In the Old Testament, light is synonymous with hope, joy, salvation and the radiance of God's glory. Just as Jesus proclaims Himself to be the light of the world (John 8:12), He applies this same image to His disciples and to us.

God did not redeem us and call us into His kingdom to hide us. We are not a country club or holy huddle where we stick to ourselves. We are to be a bright light for all to see. We are to display the goodness, greatness and glory of God. Our lives are to shine in the world's darkness as we reflect the warm glow of the gospel and the grace that is available through Jesus Christ. We should be illuminating and welcoming. Our light should awaken those around us to the love of God.

A little light makes a big impact in a dark place. Jesus says that when your light shines before others, they will see your good works. A bright life is a bold witness. It's impossible to ignore and can't be hidden. Yet, this life is not for self-glory. As God transforms you, He is glorified by your good works and faithful witness. This is what it means to be *blessed*.

DIG INTO THIS

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58

What stands out in this passage about the *salt of the earth*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

EPHESIANS 5:8-17

What stands out in this passage about the *light of the world*?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

DISCUSS THIS

WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK LIKE AND TASTE LIKE

Why do you think Jesus warns that salt can lose its saltiness or that a light cannot be hidden? How might this apply to you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Where do you see decay and darkness around you?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What does it look like for you to be useful in the kingdom of heaven?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What was most convicting from this study on the Beatitudes?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

What was most encouraging from this study on the Beatitudes?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

EIGHT COMMITMENTS OF SMALL GROUP

We want every small group member to embrace eight commitments.

These commitments are based on the biblical mandate of *mutual ministry*, which is the driving force behind small groups. While each group has its own dynamic, these commitments are intended to set clear expectations and increase ownership among each small group member. Since healthy groups thrive on participation, clear commitments are a critical starting point. ***Healthy small groups consist of members who strive to live out all eight commitments.***

1. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

I will pursue spiritual growth and encourage my group as they grow in their walk with Christ.

2. CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS

I will be present and make it a priority to know and stay connected with the people in my group.

3. ACCEPT OWNERSHIP

I will look for big and small ways to contribute and care for needs that come up in my group

4. BE AUTHENTIC

I will trust, be transparent and strive to be open while maintaining respect and confidentiality in my group.

5. EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY

I will invite my group to speak into my life while extending grace to my group.

6. CELEBRATE GROWTH

I will encourage and celebrate when God is working in the lives of my group.

7. SERVE TOGETHER

I will serve with my group and look for ways to be a witness for Christ.

8. MULTIPLY MINISTRY

I will be open to new members and as we grow, we will multiply to advance God's work so more people can experience what we have experienced.

CHARACTER QUALITIES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



WHAT IS ONE CHARACTER QUALITY YOU WANT TO GROW IN THIS YEAR?

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU AS A SMALL GROUP?

Boldness – not afraid to share your faith with gentleness and conviction

Compassion – empathy for someone and the courage to act on their behalf

Contentment – being at peace rather than given to worry, anxiety, fear, jealousy, envy or the desire for more

Even-Tempered – not reacting with sinful anger or a quick temper

Faith – unswerving confidence in God and His promise of good regardless of present circumstances

Forgiveness – releasing someone from a wrong that has been done and not being bitter

Honesty – being truthful and above reproach in all things; not deceptive, hypocritical or slanting the truth

Initiative – inviting people into your life and taking an interest in others through hospitality and service

Joy – supernatural delight in the Lord that overflows into a love for others

Kindness – putting the needs and well-being of others first

Patience – a spirit of mercy, humility and trusting that God is in control

Peace – a sense of fulfillment and confidence that comes from being rightly related to God and others

Purity – thinking and acting in godly ways while fleeing from sexual immorality

Self-Controlled – bringing thoughts, emotions and actions under the control of the Holy Spirit

Truth in Love – willingness to speak what's right while not being harsh

Wholesome Speech – quick to build others up with words that edify; not given to vulgarity, gossip, slander, lying or demeaning sarcasm

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



WHAT AREA OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH DO YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON THIS SEMESTER?
HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU AS A SMALL GROUP?

Accountability – inviting men or women into your life so you can be honest with yourself, honest with others and honest before the Lord

Bible Study – desire for God’s Word; regular time of reading, studying, meditating and applying Scripture

Corporate Worship – engaging with God and other believers by participating in weekend worship

Fasting – routinely fasting from food, media or activity to meet with the Lord through prayer, focus and dependence on Him

Giving – cheerfully and generously giving to the Lord and others through your time, talents and treasure

Prayer - a regular time of praise, confession and intercession

Rest –setting aside time to slow down and stop the busyness of life as a reminder that our final rest is in heaven

Scripture Memory – hiding God’s Word in your heart and reflecting on Scripture

Serving – looking for big and small ways to care for the needs of others



WHAT IS ONE RELATIONSHIP YOU WANT TO FOCUS ON THIS SEMESTER?
HOW CAN WE SUPPORT YOU AS A SMALL GROUP?

Spouse

Parent

Son

Daughter

Sibling

Friend

Neighbor

Co-Worker

Accept, admonish, bear the burdens, build up, care for, comfort, confess your faults, encourage, forgive, be honest, greet, honor, be hospitable, be kind, love, pray for, be of the same mind, serve, spur on, submit to and be devoted to one another.

ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH



WEEKLY GAUGE:

1. This week was great. My high was...
2. This week was bad. My low was...
3. This week was the same. I am stuck in a rut...



VICTORY AND FAILURE:

1. What is one victory from this past month?
2. What is one failure from this past month?
3. How are you being recharged?
4. What has been most draining?
5. How can we pray for you or support you?



MORAL GUARDRAILS:

1. Am I aware of any unconfessed sin in my life?
2. Do I have anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness?
3. Have I been caught in gossip, jealousy, lying or complaining?
4. Have I been with a man or woman in an inappropriate way?
5. Have I exposed myself to any explicit materials this week?
6. Have I looked for opportunities to share Christ with others?
7. How have I demonstrated love and respect to my spouse?
8. How have I sought to have spiritual input with my family?



RADIANT
GROUPS