

JOURNEY into a *Blessed*-Filled LIFE

**Discovering Our
Wonderful Life with God**

Studies from the
Beatitudes and Beyond

CLARK TATUM

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Journey into a Blessed-Filled Life

Discovering Our Wonderful Life with God: Studies from the Beatitudes and Beyond

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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Introduction | vii |
| 1. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit <i>(Matthew 5:1 – 5:3)</i> | 1 |
| 2. Blessed Are the Mourners <i>(Matthew 5:4)</i> | 15 |
| 3. Blessed Are the Meek <i>(Matthew 5:5)</i> | 29 |
| 4. Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst <i>(Matthew 5:6)</i> | 45 |
| 5. Blessed Are the Merciful <i>(Matthew 5:7)</i> | 59 |
| 6. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart <i>(Matthew 5:8)</i> | 73 |
| 7. Blessed Are the Peacemakers <i>(Matthew 5:9)</i> | 87 |
| 8. Blessed Are the Persecuted <i>(Matthew 5:11-12)</i> | 101 |
| 9. Blessed Are the Salt Shakers and the Light Shiners <i>(Matthew 5:13 – 5:16)</i> | 117 |
| 10. Blessed Are Those Who Persevere <i>(Matthew 11:6 / James 1:12)</i> | 133 |
| 11. Blessed Are Those Who Hear and Obey <i>(Luke 11:28)</i> | 149 |
| 12. Blessed Are the Givers <i>(Acts 20:35 / 2 Corinthians 8:1-12 / 2 Corinthians 9:6-8)</i> | 163 |
| 13. Blessed with an Eternal Inheritance <i>(Ephesians 1:13-14 / Matthew 25:31-46 / Luke 16:19-31)</i> | 177 |

Acknowledgments

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Dr. Terry Boring

in appreciation for the spiritual encouragement, guidance, and friendship he showed me. Terry was a fellow worker and soldier of Jesus Christ. He was dedicated to the study of God's Word and motivated others to dig deep into the Scripture. He understood the blessing that comes with a heart that hungers and thirsts for God's righteousness. Terry was an honest, transparent, multi-talented, hard-working, and loving servant of Jesus Christ. His insight into the Christian perspective was a constant encouragement to me and his mission-minded heart remains a blessing.

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Introduction

The journey into a *Blessed-Filled Life* is the ultimate adventure of following Jesus. God desires to bless His people over and over and over again. We are reminded of just how much God wants to bless us from the words Jesus used in the early verses of Matthew Chapter 5. Jesus begins His longest recorded sermon in Scripture (Matthew 5-7) not with commands, but with blessings tied to certain attitudes we need to develop as followers of Christ. Jesus desires His disciples to live with a spiritual happiness that can rise above even the most discouraging times. However, for this to become a reality we must pay careful attention to the foundational attitudes Jesus expects us to incorporate into our lives. There is only one foundation in life that lasts and that is the life built on the authority, power, and dominion of the awe-inspiring Creator God. This study of “The Beatitudes and Beyond” will help us discover our wonderful life with God.

Whatever evil forces are seeking to wreak havoc in our lives and hold us back, bog us down, and spin our wheels, we must, remember these forces do not have all authority and power. The

spiritual forces of evil do not have power over our spiritual life or death. Ephesians 1:19-23, ¹⁹*“and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”* The primary fact that runs through Scripture is that our spiritual enemy is no match for God’s Almighty power that now works in us who believe. The resurrection of Jesus grabs our attention, solidifies our hope, and changes our lives. God wants to strengthen us with spiritual power. When God’s power is working in our inner being, we will have spiritual strength. The “inner man” or “inner being” in Ephesians 3:16 refers to the spiritual man that directs our thoughts, actions, and motives. The inner man strength God provides us fuels our minds with the passionate desire to do God’s will. It provides us the energy to do what is right in God’s eyes regardless of how many people around us are doing wrong. Philippians 2:5, *“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.”* The Lord gives us a great example to follow and part of that example is having the right attitude. We ought to ask when we face a difficulty or problem, “What would Jesus want me to do?” When we are tempted to be angry and we know we should not be angry, we need to ask, “What would Jesus want me do?” When we are tempted to worry, it is time to ask, “What would Jesus want me do?” What would Jesus want me do at the office in this situation? When we ask this question, we will always come up with an unselfish, humble answer to do what is right in the eyes of God.

The Beatitudes are attitudes we are to be embracing, that naturally flows into action, so the light of Jesus can shine through us. Christ-like conduct flows out of Christ-like character. We are to be stamped by Christ, not by the culture around us. The study of God’s Word will help us live a victorious Christian life and experientially know

eternal blessings. Evil cannot destroy the blessings God has given us in Christ or take away our eternal inheritance unless we choose to turn away from God's resurrection type of power. We can enjoy God's power at work in us and believe God will work all things for our eternal good. Not all things are good, but God is good. God's power did not spare Joseph from prison in Genesis 39, but God's power did get him through this difficult time. And in time Joseph was blessed to oversee that very prison. God's power did not prevent Moses from being exiled in Midian, but by God's power Moses was able to stand up to Pharaoh with mighty miracles and deliver God's people from their bondage in Egypt. God's power did not prevent Jairus' daughter from dying in Matthew 9, but by God's power she was raised to life. God's power did not prevent Bartimaeus from being born blind, but by God's power his sight was restored (Mark 10). God's power did not prevent Paul and Silas from being beaten and thrown in jail in the city of Philippi, but by God's power their chains came loose and salvation came to the house of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). God is the ultimate power in the universe. When we make the decision to follow Jesus, we become connected to the source above all sources, to the power above all powers, to the name above all names. Christians are joined with the most powerful force in the universe – God Almighty! The Bible reveals that in Jesus' presence the weak became strong and the helpless found hope in Him. The Bible reveals that one of the most amazing things about God's power is that it can be at work in us who believe. There is no greater blessing than having His great power at work within us. God has always wanted to pour out His blessings on His people and the Beatitudes is just one of the places in the Bible that remind us of this fact.

Chapter 1

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

(Matthew 5:1 – 5:3)

Matthew 5:1 begins what is called the “Sermon on the Mount” and right at the start of Jesus’ sermon is what is often called “The Beatitudes.” In simple terms the Beatitudes are attitudes we are to be incorporating into our lives as Christians so we can be the light of the world. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 5:14, *“You are the light of the world.”* The word “you” in v.14 is plural in the Greek and it means all followers of Jesus are to be lights in this world. Jesus went on to say in v.16, *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

We will dive more into the idea of letting our lights shine for Jesus in another chapter in this book, but for now I only plant the seed that the words spoken by Jesus in the Beatitudes will equip us to be the light of the world. Therefore, we must pay close attention to the foundational words spoken by the Lord in the early verses of Matthew Chapter 5.

Surely, you have noticed we have instruction manuals today for just about everything. Weed eaters, lawn mowers, dish washers, washing machines, even alarm clocks come with instruction manu-

als. Why most of us have accumulated a drawer full of instruction manuals for things that don't matter all that much. But where is the instruction manual for what really matters most in life? Where is the one that comes with a child? Where is the manual that teaches us how to maintain a healthy marriage? Where is the manual that tells us what to do when a friendship turns sour? I hope most of us who have picked up this book to read have already figured out where the manual is for the most important things in life. The Word of God is our instruction manual for the most important things in life – the eternal blessings of God. The Beatitudes are an important part of our instruction manual for life with God. When Jesus called his disciples to be lights in this world, He didn't call them to follow Him without giving them instructions on how to be lights in this dark world.

Jesus began his ministry with a message as to where we can find a blessed life. To have a truly blessed heart we must apply the words Jesus spoke to His earliest disciples. And whether we have heard these words in Matthew 5 before or heard them, God wants to change our hearts for the better. If we apply the teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes, they will change our hearts from the inside out through the power of His Word.

Hebrews 4:12, ¹²*"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* God's Word is powerful! When the Bible declares the Word of God is "living and active" it means there is life and power in the Word. We cannot separate God from the Word in which He spoke and any attempt to do so will lead to disastrous results. God is the source of all power and life and a brief reading through the first two chapters of Genesis puts an exclamation point on this truth. Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* The eternal God who is life and wants to extend eternal life to all of His creation spoke words and the world was born. Psalm 19:1, *"The*

heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

God opened His heart of love to us in the Creation account and life burst into existence, but it didn't stop there. God's heart of love continued to seek us out so we might know the blessing of abundant life. It was God's plan for the heavens to one day open and to send Jesus who is the very existence of eternal life to this earth in the flesh. Why? The Bible explains Jesus robed Himself in flesh and blood so we might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10b). What an amazing blessing! God desires above all things to bless us and the Beatitudes continue to remind us of some of the blessings His faithful followers will receive. God's message brings spiritual life into our spiritual deadness and awakens us to the blessings God desires to pour out into our hearts.

Matthew 5:1-2, ¹*"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them, saying."* Jesus then goes on beginning in v.3 to make eight statements that are life changing and life challenging. King Jesus lays out before us in a few short verses the kind of people He wants us to be. The more we follow His plan the more we will be like Jesus and the brighter our lights will shine to His glory. This is the starting place on discipleship. Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* This statement and the other statements Jesus made in this section of Matthew can potentially bless us and not only change our hearts, but where we will spend eternity. If we apply ourselves to understanding these words, we will be well on our way to experience a spiritual heart transplant.

According to the Bible, the heart is the center of a person's life. We normally associate the heart with our emotions, but the Bible often associates the heart with a person's thoughts as well as their emotions. The heart is that spiritual place within us from which everything about us flows; it is the executive center of one's life. In

the same way that physical life flows from and through the heart, everything else about us – what we think, what we feel, and ultimately what we do also flows from and through the heart.

Two things we must remember as we begin to work our way through the Beatitudes:

First, the values Jesus lists in the Beatitudes can only be lived out by faithful followers of God. While we will explore shortly the depth of what it means to be “poor in spirit,” for now let me simply point out these are individuals who have realized their need for God. They have come to see their sin for what it is and the consequences of unrepentant sin and resolve to give their hearts fully to Jesus. The Great Physician can perform spiritual heart transplants. Ezekiel 36:26, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* David had a request of God in Psalm 51:10, *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”*

Psalm 51 was written long before Matthew 5:3, but Psalm 51 shows us the importance of not covering up our sins or ignoring it like David did for some time. The sins David had tried to cover up had pushed vertebra against vertebra and brought about heaviness in his chest that had robbed him of a joyous spirit. The weight of unconfessed sin was bone crushing for David. He had taken his crushed bones to worship hoping there might be something there to make him feel alive, but due to his unwillingness to confess his sin he only felt the weight of his sin pressing heavier on him. David knew there was no joy to be squeezed from his crushed bones, no spirit to enliven him, no wind that will help him sing God’s praise. Psalm 51 takes the bundle of sin in David’s life and places it on the scale and through God’s prophet Nathan, David finally sees his sin for what it is and what it has done in his relationship with God. Therefore, David asked God on Psalm 51:12, *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*

The temptation is to read Psalm 51 as someone else's psalm. A Psalm for someone who's committed adultery or murder, but this Psalm is for all sinners who may have chosen to follow God and walk closely with Him but have since drifted away. Could we possibly sing the words "Just as I Am," as encouragement for sinners to walk the aisle while forgetting we too are sinners and in need of restoration. Maybe we fear that once our sin is known, there will be no remedy, no solution, and no way to merely move on with God and if so, that is Satan's lie! We may realize the cure for who we are goes beyond simply behavior modification. We may hope against hope that the good we do will somehow outweigh the bad. Maybe we think that somehow being faithful in our church attendance will solve our unwillingness to come clean.

Godly sorrow demands a change of heart and direction. We can't really go in the right direction, without our hearts being "poor in spirit." This is why David said, *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10). David turns to God and longs for a new heart, a clean heart, a pure heart, a willing heart, a consistent heart, and a heart of integrity. After all David had such a heart for a long time. He was quote, "the man after God's own heart." David needed a spiritual heart transplant in his repentance to God and for this to happen he needed to have the poverty of spirit attitude Jesus addressed in Matthew 5:3.

Secondly, we must understand that Jesus is not just talking about attitudes in this message; He is also talking about actions. He's saying our beliefs must impact our behavior. Therefore, Jesus is not saying, "Live like this in order to be saved." He's saying, "Live like this because you are saved." I mentioned this in the introduction, but it is worth repeating here – Christ-like conduct flows out of Christ-like character. We are to be stamped by Christ, not by the culture around us, and the Beatitudes are attitudes that are to be lived out in our lives. We will be reminded through this study that a faithful Christian is one who both embraces and embodies the Beati-

tudes. When Jesus called his disciples to follow Him, He gave them words that would revolutionize the way they thought about spiritual things. The Beatitudes are qualities to be lived out in our day-to-day lives.

As we come to Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus' public approval ratings were soaring and by that, I mean His ratings were at an all-time high. Jesus was extremely popular, and the crowds were eager to hear his message. The people at large were looking for something new and refreshing and many had already realized not only was Jesus different in His power, but His words had a power different from anything they had heard before. Listen again to Matthew 5:3, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* In the original language, the word translated "blessed" is the Greek word "MAKARIOS." This was a very expressive word and was typically used to express joy or happiness that was not dictated by outward circumstances. Now here comes the rub in trying to get a handle on these phrases that begin with the word blessed. The statement in v.3 and those that follow in Matthew 5 seem to contradict the conventional wisdom we have been taught most of our lives. Consequently, we could say we find in the Beatitudes some oxymorons.

An oxymoron, as you well know, is a combination of contradictory words; words that, if you stop and think about them, don't seem they should be linked together at all, but we put them together anyway. I've always been amused at the many oxymorons we use daily. Like: Fresh-frozen – found missing – jumbo shrimp – almost exactly – icy-hot – clean dirt; and my most favorite of them all – short sermon. Biblical wisdom turns conventional wisdom on its head. Jesus often said things like, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35). Our world says, *"It is more blessed to get than to give,"* so His words make our heads spin a little because they go against conventional wisdom.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* Now if Jesus had consulted the wisdom of religious spin-doctors of His day working off conventional wisdom, they would they have said, "Now hold on Jesus, if your intentions are to score points with the people and build a large following you've got to change your platform and bury the phrase, *"blessed are the poor in spirit."* They might have said, "Jesus, if you keep talking like that, you are going to thin the ranks out pretty fast!" In other words, "You need to tell them you are going to do something about the Roman Rule." If you want to get votes from most of the people you need to tell them, "Blessed are the powerbrokers; blessed are the educated; blessed are the assertive and the self-confident." But if the spin doctors of the day would have said those things, or thought those things, it was because they didn't understand who Jesus really was. Jesus was not a political candidate clamoring for votes that day in Capernaum.

He was and is God's Son sent from heaven to teach people how to live a blessed life. His words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," still strike at the conventional wisdom of the world today. The world says, "Blessed is the successful. Blessed is the wealthy. Assert yourself and care for no one except yourself." But here is the problem with that type of thinking; it is foreign to our heavenly instruction manual that leads to a blessed-filled life. Time for a warning here. If we are trying to immerse the values and philosophies of the world and make them work within the framework of Christianity, it will not end well. If we ignore following Jesus' manual for life in the Beatitudes we will miss out on the blessings of Heaven. Following the world's values and philosophies just don't work! Jesus knew what we needed, and He gave us words that would guide our minds to be retrained and reoriented to a new way of thinking and a new way of living.

As Jesus begins the Beatitudes He starts with the words, *"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* **What does it mean to be poor in spirit?** We need to nail the answer to this down

because whatever it means we better figure it out and apply it to our lives if we want to experience the kingdom of heaven. Does poor in spirit mean that God is calling us to give all of our possessions away and take a vow of material poverty? Absolutely not! Jesus was not talking about poverty in that sense. Rather, He was talking about spiritual poverty as he used the phrase poor in spirit. Jesus didn't say here, "Blessed are the poor in pocketbook." Now can Jesus bless the genuinely poor, homeless, and helpless? Of course, He can; but the word translated "poor" in v.3 isn't tied to the wallet or purse at all, but to a particular attitude of the heart. The word "poor" in this text comes from a Greek word that means poorest of poor kind of poverty. It speaks of one who is totally and absolutely at the mercy of another for his or her DAILY survival. Since Jesus connected the Greek word "poor" (POCHOS) to the word spirit it symbolizes those who put their full trust in God. Being poor in spirit implies a recognition in our spirit that we are lost, destitute, needy and we are utterly dependent upon God! Poverty of spirit is the attitude that is created in us by asking God to show us our sin and the consequences.

Poverty of spirit is coming to grips with the fact that we can do nothing meritoriously to commend ourselves to God. It's the realization that we are not adequate to do life without God guiding us and helping as only He can. Being poor in spirit involves the realization that all our good work cannot buy entrance into heaven. Poverty of spirit is the attitude that is created in us by asking God to show us our sin and the consequences. To be poor in spirit is to resonate with the words of Jesus when He said, "*Apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). In the context of John 15, we learn from Jesus' teaching that we must remain or abide in Him to have a productive and fruitful spiritual life. He is the Vine, and we are the branches and if we remain in Him, we will bear fruit. Jesus said it. John 15:5, "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*"

Spiritually speaking we have no life apart from our connection with Jesus. Being poor in spirit will let this sobering truth sink in and transform our hearts so we can be blessed. We have no spiritual fruit bearing potential unless we are attached to the True Vine (John 15:1).

Consider this – Have you come to a place in your life where you have seen your own poverty of spirit before Almighty God? Have you come to a place where you have realized the benefit of asking the Lord for His help? I believe one of the greatest places we can ever arrive at in our life is to come to the place where we 100% realize that Jesus is all you can really count on in life and we can count on Him! Being poor in spirit will help us get to this place and receive the blessing God promises His people. What do you say to those people who say, “Isn’t Christianity a crutch for people who are weak and can’t make it on their own?” I have heard that question more than once and you have likely heard it as well. I don’t know about you, but when I first started hearing that question it bothered me. I considered the question to be an insult because I would think, “I am a fairly strong, together person,” but I see things differently now. I have had a heart transplant because if someone asks me today: “Isn’t Christianity a crutch for people who are weak and can’t make it on their own?” I would answer unashamedly, “Yes, it is! I need Jesus sinless blood applied to my life and you too need Jesus. The difference is I’m not ashamed to admit it!”

We all need the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ, the Lord. It doesn’t bother me anymore when someone asks this question because I fully understand where they come from and from where they are, it is a logical question. It is a question based on conventional wisdom and not wisdom from above. I have thought a lot about it, and I have asked myself, “Why is the thought that Christianity is a crutch considered to be a valid criticism of Christianity?” If we have ever injured an ankle or knee and have been forced to use crutches – crutches are helpful! If we sprain or break

our ankle and it's the size of a grapefruit we don't think that crutches are a bad thing at all, but rather they're helpful and we are glad we have them. Therefore, why is a crutch suddenly a bad thing when it relates to Christianity? I think it is because for most people it's a frontal assault on their pride. Being dependent on God by being poor in spirit goes against conventional wisdom.

What is Jesus teaching us in this Beatitude? The value of humility in the sight of God. Humility and dependence on God are written all over this first Beatitude. It is like the teaching that comes out of what Jesus said in Matthew 18 to his disciples who were wrangling for positions in the kingdom. He said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:3). Humility is a basic element in becoming a follower of Christ and entering the kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is giving us insight on the entrance to the kingdom of Heaven and what a blessing that is. If we are going to have harmony in our relationships and the most important relationship of all, we need to be humble. God opposes the proud and that is a serious thing. What does God do for the humble? He provides grace and blessings to them. We should realize that even in those relationships where conflict is inevitable because of sin God will bless us if we maintain a humble attitude. Small children have the poor in spirit quality as they exhibit a dependence on their parents and an absence of pride. We cannot be filled with the blessings of the kingdom until we empty ourselves of pride. Being poor in Spirit is to embrace the attitude of Isaiah the prophet who said, *"Woe is me! For, I am a man of unclean lips"* (Isaiah 6:5). It's the spirit of the tax collector in (Luke 18:13) who said, *"God have mercy on me, a sinner."* It's the attitude of Paul saying, *"I am the chief of sinners, but God had mercy on me"* (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

I don't know where you are in your spiritual pilgrimage, but I remind you that you don't need a religious system, you need a Savior and His name is above every name. The Bible says in Acts

4:12, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* Never forget there is no one higher or name more powerful in all of history in the order of hierarchy, than Jesus Christ. His resume was unlike anyone else's, being exalted to the highest place. Philippians 2:9-11, ⁹*"Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* What exactly did Jesus, who has a name that is far above every other name, do according to the Letter of Philippians? He voluntarily humbled himself and suffered death on the Cross, so that by His sacrifice we might live forever with Him.

The Cross proves how much Jesus wants to have a relationship with us. His resurrection three days later proves He can make that happen! Jesus came to save sinners and show them the pathway to blessedness on the way to heaven and how to get to heaven. He did that by offering forgiveness to those who will admit they need Jesus, the Savior. If anyone asks us, "Where is this world ultimately headed?" we can say with confidence to a place and time where everyone will confess Jesus is Lord, but only the faithful will enter the kingdom of heaven.

God wants to bless us and only He can cleanse us, but we have some responsibility in taking out the garbage. We all understand the value of taking out the garbage in our homes. Garbage stinks! Jesus wanted to offer us hope and His help to take the garbage out of our lives. God's plan for implanting the attitudes of Christ in our hearts involves our willingness to cooperate with Him. Jesus can help us get the garbage out of our hearts. The only way we can make this a reality is by following God's path and God's plan and the Beatitudes is a big part of His plan. When we get serious about filling our blessing cup that only God can fill, we will humble ourselves and journey with Jesus. God is the author of healthy change, and He will

help us grow in the attitudes of Jesus. When we follow Jesus, we will learn to love what He loves, and we will learn to hate what He hates. The Great Physician hates pride-filled hearts. Jesus diagnosed correctly the problem of those who were religious folks filled with pride in His day. He called out the hearts that were intent on selfish ambition and vain conceit and called on them to humble themselves.

When our children were young, we added a few chickens to our list of the many animals we chose to feed at our house daily. I had heard this principle before, but I observed it in person the first few days of feeding the chickens. I saw for myself that if you spread out a little food the chickens will form a hierarchy, or in everyday language a poking, or pecking order. It seems that it happens almost instinctively as the chickens strike at each other to determine who is in charge. They will determine through this process who the number one chicken will be. The number one chicken does not look out for the interests of the other chickens. The number two chicken does not care at all about number three or four either. The principle is almost comical if there were not so much application to the way many people live their lives today. Chicken number one pokes and pecks at chicken number two without much payback from chicken number two. Chicken number two turns rather quickly after being poked by chicken number one and begins to poke and jab at chicken number three. The same thing takes place with chicken number three. Chicken number three will soon take out its frustration on chicken number four. The last chicken, in this case number four, had to be miserable because he was poked at but had no one to poke.

We do not like to admit it, but the bullying and jabbing order does not belong entirely to chickens. This type of thing happens everywhere, and it is terrible, and it breaks God's heart. When we follow Jesus, it should break our hearts too. It can happen at school, at work, why it might even happen at a church function. The sin of pride can affect Christians as well as non-Christians. Jesus' first

beatitude should put an end to the prideful heart. James 4:10, *"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up."* Blessed is the one whose spiritual cupboards are bare whose spiritual pockets are empty. Blessed is the one whose human strength is depleted and in humility seek God. Jesus gave us the Beatitudes to guide our minds into a new way of thinking and a new way of living. How many problems in our world would disappear if we all practiced the attitudes of humility and unselfishness? Think about it. What would happen even in the church family if everyone was more interested in serving the needs of others than having their own needs met? We will do well to camp out for a while in the Beatitudes as we seek to live a blessed-filled life.

CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS

To Teach, Train, and Transform Lives

1. What will happen if we apply the teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes? What does it mean when the Bible declares God's Word is "living and active?"
2. Describe what God wants to do for us above all else and why? Why are the Beatitudes an important part of our life with God?
3. Name two things to remember as we work our way through the Beatitudes. The faithful Christian will do what two things with the Beatitudes?
4. What Old Testament passage indicates God can do a spiritual heart transplant? Explain David's request to God in Psalm 51 and why he needed this to happen.
5. What is the Greek word translated "blessed" in the Beatitudes? What was this word typically used to describe?
6. How do the Beatitudes seem to contradict what we might call conventional wisdom? What was Jesus trying to accomplish for us in the Beatitudes?
7. What is the Greek word "poor" in Matthew 5:3 and what did it symbolize? Why is it important that we figure out what it means to be "poor in spirit" and apply it to our lives?
8. In one or two words what is the teaching in this Beatitude? How is this teaching similar to what is said in Matthew 18:3?
9. List some examples from the Bible of what being "poor in spirit" may look like?

Chapter 2

Blessed Are the Mourners

(Matthew 5:4)

I introduce this chapter with a story I heard years ago about Albert Einstein. We've all heard his name and he was most known for his high intelligence. When I think of the man Albert Einstein two things immediately pop into my head – one is his high IQ. No one argues the fact that he was extremely intelligent, but the second thing I think is he may have originated the concept of a bad hair day. If you have ever seen a picture of the brilliant Mr. Einstein, you will know what I am talking about. Anyhow, the story I heard makes a valid point for our consideration. Apparently, there was an interesting incident from Einstein's life that occurred while he was on a lecture tour of our nation's universities. He traveled across the country speaking of his theory of relativity. Now, as intelligent as Einstein was, it is a fact, he never learned to drive and never had a driver's license. He had a chauffeur drive him from university to university. As they were driving along one day to one of these tours his chauffeur told the brilliant scientist, "Mr. Einstein, I've heard this lecture so many times now I think I could give it myself. It just so happened Mr. Einstein's throat was sore and he wasn't feeling good

that day, so he said, "Well let's try that – I need to rest my voice." He communicated to his chauffeur that the people at the university he was scheduled to speak at had never met him or seen him and suggested he put on his coat, and he would wear the chauffeur's uniform and cap. According to the story, Einstein further said, "When we get there, I will introduce you as Dr. Einstein and you can introduce me as your chauffeur." Everything went according to plan. The chauffeur delivered the speech flawlessly while Einstein sat at the back of the lecture hall, trying to recuperate while enjoying the speech. But then something happened, the two of them had not considered. At the end of the lecture the moderator stood up and said, "Well we have enough time for someone to ask Dr. Einstein one question." A professor in the audience asked a complicated, technical question involving higher mathematical formulas of which the chauffeur did not understand. However, the chauffeur being quick on his feet said, "Sir, the answer to that question is so simple I am surprised you don't know it. To show you anybody should be able to answer a question like that, my chauffeur is going to come up here and answer it!" Mr. Einstein was intelligent, but if there is any truth to that old story his chauffeur was obviously wise. And we want to be wise but not wise according to this world. We desire to be wise in the eyes of the Lord. If we will act on the principles and attitudes Jesus listed in the early verses of Matthew 5, we will be well on our way of having wisdom from above.

As God's people we are a blessed people and our mission to "Let our Lights Shine for Jesus." To help us shine for Jesus we are looking at the short list of statements Jesus made in the early part of Matthew 5, called "The Beatitudes." We are doing this because Jesus wants us to incorporate certain attitudes into our lives that exhibit the spirit of discipleship. Discipleship is the desire to follow Jesus and learn from Him. As we integrate the Beatitudes into our heart, we will be most blessed, and our Christian light will be bright and

inviting to those around us. In the first chapter of this book, we noted the Beatitudes are counter-cultural in that they go against the grain of society's norms. And of all the Beatitudes, the one in Matthew 5:4, is perhaps the most counter-cultural. Jesus had just told his disciples in v.3, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Jesus wasn't speaking of physical poverty in v.3 as poor in purse or wallet – it was about spiritual poverty. Poor in spirit references individuals who have realized their desperate need for God and have chosen to give their hearts fully to Jesus. The poor in spirit have hearts filled with humility and understand their need to depend on Him to survive spiritually. I believe the next Beatitude in v.4 builds upon one's humility and trust in Jesus to not only guide them through this life, but to grace them into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:4 reads, "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*" Verse 4 involves more than the physical or emotional mourning, but on the surface the idea that mourners are blessed seems illogical. Who in their right mind wants to mourn? Mourning means tears, grief, loss; we think of cemeteries, empty places at the table, and shattered dreams. Nobody wants to mourn, yet we know mourning is inevitable. Sooner or later, everyone must pass through it. Grief is a normal part of the Christian disciple's experience, it is universal. In God's school of wisdom, we learn to mourn is to feel grief over something. Mourning makes no distinction between race, creed, or color. Grief touches everyone, because everybody at some point experiences loss. While someone's death is the most obvious cause for mourning, it isn't the only cause. We identify mourning most often with the loss of an individual, but it also could be the loss of a job, or a relationship, maybe even our health. When we mourn something, we don't just feel the loss, we express it.

We should appreciate the fact that Jesus never tried to ignore the sorrows of life or deny their existence. What He did do was trans-

form them. This is why the apostle Paul could share this bit of wisdom from above as the Christians mourned the loss of their loved ones. 1 Thessalonians 4:13, *"Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope."* Test. The phrase "fallen asleep" is used in v.13, v.14, and v.15 in the context to describe believers who have died with their belief in Jesus. This is a wonderful way to speak of death for the believer. In John 11:11 when referring to Lazarus who had been in the tomb for several days, Jesus said: *"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."* When we die physically our bodies are "asleep" in the sense that they will wake up again and be resurrected, but our souls do not sleep.

Have you ever wondered what happens when you die? I suspect we have all thought about it. Here is the short biblical answer as I understand it. What happens when we die depends on what happens before we die. The Bible tells us that all humanity may be divided into two groups – the saved and the lost. The moment of physical death we have a great division in humanity. The saved have hope rooted in Christ, but the lost have no biblical hope. In 1 Thessalonians 4, the emphasis is on the saved and it is this group that occupies the primary discussion in this passage, but the lost are mentioned as those who "have no hope." It is natural to grieve the loss of a loved one or friend. There is nothing wrong about shedding tears when someone we love and care about leaves this life. Although, it is quite possible to weep over the loss of a loved one while at the same time rejoicing for the one who has gone on to be with the Lord. That is why Paul says when death invades our loved ones or brothers and sisters in Christ, I do not want you believers to grieve as those who have no hope. Plainly the apostle writes, *"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him"* (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The saved that have fallen asleep in Jesus appears to me that in some way go to be with the Lord prior to the Judgment scene in

Matthew 25. I admit I do not understand everything on this, but I believe when a person experiences physical death it is a separation of body and spirit (James 2:26). The spirit inside leaves the body at death to go to one of two places (Luke 16:19-31). The believer's spirit goes to be with God in comfort awaiting their eternal reward while the spirit of a non-believer goes to a place of discomfort, pain and agony awaiting the final Judgment laid out in Matthew 25 and Revelation Chapter 20.

The blessings God has in store for His people are not all on the other side of our earthly life. We can know some wonderful blessings here and now. Jesus gets to the point to help us enjoy a state of blessedness now. Matthew 5:4, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* As we consider Jesus' words carefully, we find a blessing that comes with mourning, and it is the blessing of being comforted. The blessing is not in the mourning itself. The comfort is in the blessing that comes as a result of having the right attitude and in this case a grieving spirit that lines up with God's Spirit. **The blessing in v.4 does not exist entirely in the experience of grieving, but in the value of it.** The idea is similar to the first beatitude when Jesus said, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* He was teaching the blessing is for those who realize their spiritual cupboards are bare. In other words, being poor in spirit is the understanding that without God, we are lost and spiritually destitute. Not only do Christ-like people have desperate hearts that will seek Jesus, but they must have broken hearts over sin. If we are going to be light shiners for Jesus, we will need to acquire wisdom from above that will change our hearts to see our need for God and our sin for what it is and does. We touched on this idea in some detail in the previous chapter by looking at some words from David in Psalm 51. David wrote Psalm 51 after he was confronted and convicted of his sin with Bathsheba by the prophet Nathan. David mourns over his sin and pleads for God to be gracious to him.

While we mourn over our friends and loved ones who have gone on before us, the primary mourning of which Jesus speaks to His disciples in this second Beatitude is spiritual in nature. Jesus is not simply talking about physical mourning like that suffered in the loss of a loved one. He's referring to a mourning that stems from the realization that our sins, our transgressions, have offended Almighty God. When we say we're broken-hearted over sin, we say that the deepest part of us has been affected. The result of this type of spiritual mourning is that we think differently, feel differently, and live differently. Unless we realize that we will never make it into the kingdom of God and enjoy heaven one day without Jesus; we lack the spirit of discipleship.

The apostle Paul writes about a spiritual type of grief in 2 Corinthians 12:20-21, ²⁰*"For I am afraid that when I come, I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. ²¹I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged."* The New International Version uses the word "grieved" in Matthew 5:4 and Corinthians 12:21 as does the New Living Translation. Paul says he "grieved" over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented. The New King James Version uses the word "mourn" as does the New American Standard Bible. The original Greek word translated "grieve" or "mourn" in 2 Corinthians 12:21, is "PENTHEO." I find it interesting that this word is the exact same Greek word used in Matthew 5:4. This word "mourn" or "grieve" in the English text characterizes those who mourn over the guilt of their sins as they would mourn for the dead. Any parent that has dealt with a rebellious child can easily relate to how Paul felt toward the Corinthians when they got off heaven's course. His sentiment was parental in nature. The concept of mourning over sin comes into further focus

in 2 Corinthians. The Holy Spirit through Paul wrote: *"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death"* (2 Corinthians 7:10). In this passage, Paul talks about a godly sorrow that leads to repentance. When he speaks of godly sorrow, he is talking about a person who understands their sin has broken God's heart. He is identifying the person that has repented of sin and by God's grace they've been forgiven and now strive to go in a new direction. Paul also talks about a worldly sorrow – a sorrow that is self-centered. Worldly sorrow is sorrow; but it's not sorrow that derives from offending God. Worldly sorrow is a sorrow that occurs from being caught in sin and leads to spiritual death.

One of the biggest problems threatening our culture is that we have lost our sense of seriousness of sin. What we laugh at and weep at often indicates our values in life. Perhaps the most serious problem today is we have lost our sense of seriousness of sin at times even in the church. It seems to me that too many religious folks have lost their healthy sense of the fear of God. We are living in a day of moral chaos. We are coming closer if we are not already there to living out the words found in the book of Judges where everyone did what was right in their own eyes. We are living in a sea of moral relativism where just about everyone is deciding for himself what is right and wrong. We are living in a world where most folks are deciding for themselves what is right instead of "Thus sayeth the Lord." However, to come into a relationship with God and be a blessed people we must acknowledge Him as Lord and Savior and that He alone sets the standard for moral conduct. To acknowledge God's authority means we no longer call the shots and make the rules – He does! It means to submit our life to the authority of His Word and that His Word becomes our guide for living. If we are going to let our light be seen, we are going to have to seek to live by God's eternal wisdom. The faithful Christian must acknowledge he no longer call the shots – God does! They will agree with God when

He calls something a sin. It means they understand God doesn't make mistakes like we do with our words, and He always says what he means. I make some honest mistakes sometimes with my words – we all do. Sometimes we say wrong things or say things that we don't mean, but we can be sure that God always says what He means. God doesn't make mistakes when He says He loves us, but at the same time He takes our sin seriously. How seriously does God take sin? God watched His only begotten Son suffer as those nail-like spikes were driven through Jesus' flesh. He stood by as the sinless blood poured out from the body of Jesus on the Cross because He knew it was the only way to deal with our sin.

There is a big difference between a mistake and a sin. A mistake is goof-up, an error, a miscalculation. We can regret a mistake. We might even try to make amends for a mistake, but what we mourn as a believer is sin, our sin as well as others. The sin that led us to think or say or do the wrong thing and go in the wrong direction. We were made to be generous, but we tend toward greed. We were wired to worship God, but we tend to worship cars, sports, nature, or even ourselves. There is a big difference between sinners and mistakers. And yes, "mistakers" is likely a word I made up, but the truth is we're not just "mistakers," we are "sinners." That's the bad news, but there is good news for sinners who will mourn over their sin – *"they shall be comforted."* When we say the word "sin" in our life we are acknowledging there is a giant moral absolute out there and we are accountable. When we say the word "mistake" we don't really have to ask anyone to forgive us even though it might be nice. If we made a mistake, there may be consequences but nothing like if we sinned according to God's law. Here is the biggest difference between sin and mistake. If everything we do wrong can be boiled down to making a mistake, that makes me a mistaker – which implies we don't have sin. If I don't have sin, I'm not a sinner and without sin I don't have any need for a Savior. But there is a big difference between a sin and a mistake. Mistakers are all about

trusting in self to get things right. If we are just a mistaker then all we must do is do better. Mistakers must try harder next time, but if I'm a sinner, that implies simply trying harder isn't going to help me. If I'm a sinner, I need a Savior and until anyone comes to the point of acknowledging they are a sinner and in need of a Savior they will miss out on the blessed life.

It is difficult to admit personal responsibility. It is difficult to admit the role we play in our failures and even in our sins. Too often, instead of fixing the problem, we settle for fixing blame on anyone other than ourselves. Whether it is in our relationships, our career, or our spiritual life, improvement begins with accepting responsibility for our own sins and turning to God for help. When faced with his own sin, King David said to God, *"I have sinned greatly by doing this. Now, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing"* (1 Chronicles 21:8). **The primary step toward spiritual wholeness is taking personal responsibility for our sin.** Only after we take responsibility for our actions and turn to God can we begin to move forward into a blessed life. **Taking sin seriously means to mourn over our sinful condition.** In the aftermath of David's sin with Bathsheba and his conspiracy to have her husband killed, he said, ³*"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight"* (Psalm 51:3-4a). David, like most people tried to conceal his sin, but God eventually brought it into the light and David heart was broken over his sin. David was a man of God who blew it in a big way. He committed sins we simply wouldn't expect a man after God's own heart to commit. And it wasn't one of those cases where he accidentally committed a sin before he realized what he was doing. No, he put a great deal of thought and effort into committing his sin, and then he went to even greater trouble to try and cover up his sin. When the smoke finally cleared, people were dead and families destroyed. However, the most amazing fact about this part of the story of David is that God still loved David. God was

patient and gracious with David when David humbled himself in the sight of God and mourned over his sin. God forgave David and gave him a clean heart.

My basketball coach in junior high school was way too predictable. We could lip sync his pregame speeches. His favorite speech always included something like this: "Boys the game begins the moment we run onto that court, and you can do it." Our enthusiasm and passion were always high on the other side of his locker room speeches. We would run out on the court, do our pregame warm-ups and execute perfect layups. We would pass the ball around and do all these things that he said would intimidate our opponents before we started the game. Invariably we believed the coach time and again, but soon the game would start, and we would run into a brick wall. It didn't take long into the real game that a player on the other team would soar over one of our players and make a spectacular shot. We would just watch in awe as he made basket after basket. All our practice and sweat and confidence went right out the door pretty quick for we all thought how in the world could we compete with that? There is a story in Luke 7 about a sinful woman, that makes me feel a little like I did on that junior high basketball team. Although, there is indeed a blessing for us to appreciate in the account of this sinful woman and how she interacted with Jesus. Maybe we have wondered how we can compete with her story, but by God's grace we can. Here's the story. Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee for dinner and while they were reclined at the table, a woman entered the house uninvited and knelt at Jesus' feet. She was a public sinner and had lived in the arena of sin so that all were aware of her sinfulness. The Bible reads, Luke 7:37-50, ³⁷*"When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,* ³⁸*and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.* ³⁹*When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he*

said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.' ⁴⁰Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. ⁴¹'Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴²Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' ⁴³Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said. ⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' ⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' ⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' ⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

The people who were there were unable to absorb the significance of this woman's act of repentance and worship and questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins. "Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'" (Luke 7:50). Don't miss the woman's blessing and the transforming power behind the statement Jesus makes. Jesus didn't say, "Your tears has saved you." Nor did He say, "Your putting oil on my head and pouring perfume on my feet has saved you." He said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Her brokenness (mourning her sin) demonstrated that her faith was the genuine article. What am I getting at? Overflowing gratitude is the natural response we should have when we realize the depth of our sin and the greatness of God's love and mercy toward us! According to Matthew 5:4 the result of our mourning over our sin is that God moves on our behalf. When we come to the place of godly sorrow, God promises that we will experience His blessed comfort. What

does this mean? It means that if we will come to God in our humility and brokenness, the sin and the load of guilt we carry will be forgiven.

Notice what begins in mourning in Matthew 5:4 ends in comfort. Here are three quick truths that comfort. **One, our sins can be forgiven.** First John 1:9 reminds the Christians walking in the light of God (1 John 1:7) that, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* **Two, there is life beyond the grave.** Most of the mourning we do in this life is over the separation of someone special. We ought to mourn death and loss, because it does hurt deeply, and death was not what God intended for us, but thank God death has been swallowed up in victory through Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). The Bible says, Jesus has conquered death (Hebrews 2:14-15). As surely as He raised Lazarus to life in Bethany, He can raise us to live again, and those we love as well. We who mourn with the wisdom from above are blessed people. **Three, things will improve for those who mourn.** The Bible ends with the vision of a new heaven and earth, a holy city coming down from heaven. If we want to see heaven's horizons, we must begin now to place earth in our rearview mirror. In heaven, *"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will pass away"* (Revelation 21:4). Everything that is wrong with this world will one day be made right. We don't have to put on plastic smiles when we go to work, school, or church assemblies. No matter what is happening around us or to us we are blessed people.

Prayer

Dear God in Heaven, we thank You for the hope the gospel (the death, burial, and resurrection) brings. We thank you that when sin brings us low your Spirit of love, mercy, and grace is there to bring us comfort. And for this we praise You! We thank You for the promise of Your Word that tells us that those who mourn will be comforted. And while we thank You for

Your promise of comfort, we must confess that while we desire the comfort You alone can bring, we sometimes lack the spirit of brokenness over our sins. We ask You to help let our hearts be broken by the things that break Your heart and restore to us a sense of the sinfulness of sin. We ask Your assistance in being reawakened in our hearts as to why Jesus came to this earth. Help us to show You and our Lord Jesus how much we appreciated the atoning sacrifice for our sins. In Jesus' name we offer this prayer. Amen!

CHAPTER 2 QUESTIONS

To Teach, Train, and Transform Lives

1. Instead of Jesus ignoring the sorrows of life or denying their existence what did He do? What bit of wisdom did the Apostle Paul share with Christians who mourned the death of their loved ones?
2. What phrase is commonly used in Scripture to believers who have died with their belief in Jesus? What is a short biblical answer to what happens when we die?
3. What is the blessing that comes with the mourning in Matthew 5:4? While we mourn over the loss of our friends and loved ones Jesus is including another type of mourning – what is it?
4. What is the grief or mourning highlighted in 2 Corinthians 12:20-21? What is the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow?
5. Describe one of the biggest problems threatening our culture today? What will a faithful Christian acknowledge in a world of moral relativism?
6. Describe the difference between a mistake and a sin. If we are a sinner what do need most of all?
7. What is the primary step toward spiritual wholeness and moving in the direction of a blessed life with God?
8. When we take sin seriously, we will naturally do what over our sinful condition? What is the response should we have to the greatness of God's love and mercy toward us!
9. List three truths that bring faithful followers of Jesus comfort.