

Turning Your Heart Toward God



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TURNING YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD

Certain events and moments in time have changed the course of history. A few, a precious few, have even changed the course of eternity. Take for example the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His life changed not only history but even eternity.

Jesus' delivery of the Sermon on the Mount is one of those pivotal events. In what is now undoubtedly the most famous sermon in the world Jesus took righteousness to a whole new level, all in one fell swoop. He defined religion in a way that was then, and is still today, countercultural, radical, and even revolutionary.

The sermon itself can be preached word-for-word in eighteen minutes, but you could spend a lifetime studying it and never completely search out its depths. The introduction alone—the subject of numerous

books, essays, and discussions—is so powerful, so inspiring that it carries its own name exclusive of the Sermon on the Mount: *The Beatitudes*. In these few verses Jesus introduces the core belief system that changed the world.

As you study what it means to be blessed of God and how those blessings are manifest in our lives, you will see that this is the practical side of living in a real world. As we live out the blessings, we become a light shining in the darkness, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We become ambassadors for the Son of God.

We then have the opportunity to impact world—all because we studied the introduction to a two-thousand-year-old sermon.

WEEK ONE

Do you want to be blessed by God? Well, of course. We all do. We want His blessing in our lives. This week we will define, from Scripture, the word *blessed* and we will study the first beatitude to see who it is that receives the blessing of God. Start with prayer. Before we get into the study, let's spend some time in prayer, asking God to help us see these familiar verses with a heart open to His truth.

OBSERVE

Matthew 5–7 is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began His sermon with the Beatitudes.

Leader: *Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud. Have the group say aloud and mark...*

- every reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross: **†**
- draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**:

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

MATTHEW 5:1–12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

2 He opened His mouth and began to teach 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 gentle, 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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *Jesus*?
- Who was Jesus teaching?

- What did He start each statement with?

you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

OBSERVE

Let's look at what the word *blessed* means.

Leader: Read 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:13–15; and Titus 2:11–13 aloud.

- Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word *blessed*.

DISCUSS

- Who is the word *blessed* associated with in each of these passages?

1 TIMOTHY 1:11; 6:13–15

¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted....

¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without

stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

TITUS 2:11–13

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

• Who is *blessed* characteristic of?

• *Blessed* or *blessedness* is first and foremost a characteristic of God. It is part of who He is, His state of being. What difference does this make to your understanding of us as believers being blessed?

OBSERVE

The Greek word for *blessed*—*makarios*—is also used in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament completed approximately 100 BC. By looking at passages where the ancient translators used *makarios*, we gain insight regarding what they understood the word to mean.

Leader: *Read aloud the verses on pages 7 and 8.*

- *Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**.*

INSIGHT

The Greek word translated *blessed* is *makarios*. It is sometimes translated as happy, but it carries a much deeper meaning. In English the idea of being happy is based on favorable circumstances. But to be blessed is to possess the favor of God. It is a state of being defined by fullness and satisfaction from God. To be blessed is to be walking in the fullness of God regardless of circumstances.

PSALM 1:1–2

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

PSALM 32:1–2

1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

PSALM 34:8

Taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

PSALM 65:4

How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple.

DISCUSS

- Looking at each place you marked *blessed*, what do you notice about the person who is blessed?
- What difference do these descriptions make in your understanding of Jesus' use of the word in the Beatitudes?
- Are you, by these definitions, *blessed*? If not, why not?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Matthew 5:3 aloud. Have the group say and...

- draw a box around the word *blessed*.
- draw a cloud shape like this  around the phrase *kingdom of heaven*.

DISCUSS

- Who is blessed, according to this verse?

INSIGHT

The Greek word translated in Matthew 5:3 as *poor* means “to be poverty stricken, powerless, utterly destitute, and bankrupt.” To be “poor in spirit” means knowing you have nothing to offer and acknowledging your total dependence on God. It suggests a humility, which is the opposite of pride.

- Discuss what being poor in spirit would look like in the life of a believer.
- What is promised to those who are poor in spirit?

MATTHEW 5:3

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

LUKE 18:9–14

⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹² ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

OBSERVE

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus gives us a great illustration of what it looks like to be poor in spirit.

Leader: *Read Luke 18:9–14 aloud. Have the group...*

- *mark every reference to **the Pharisee**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a big P.*
- *mark every reference to **the tax collector**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a dollar sign, like this: \$*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to the Pharisee?
- According to verse 11, what was his prayer?
- What did he trust in?
- Verse 13 begins with the word *but*, which often indicates a contrast is being made. Who is the contrast between in these verses?

- What did you learn from marking the references to the tax collector?
 - What was the difference between the two men?
 - Who was the Pharisee using to measure his righteousness?
 - Who did the tax collector use as his standard for measuring righteousness?
 - Discuss how this parable illustrates what it means to be poor in spirit.
 - Have you ever really seen your poverty of spirit? Have you recognized your inability to meet God's standards? Explain your answer.
- 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'
- 14 "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

PSALM 34:18

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

PSALM 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

OBSERVE

Look at the following Old Testament verses and note how they would relate to what you have seen so far about being poor in spirit.

***Leader:** Read Psalm 34:18 and 51:17 aloud.*

- *Have the group say and mark every mention of **God**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a triangle: *

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about God in these verses?
- How do these insights relate to what we have been studying?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Isaiah 57:15 aloud. Have the group...

- mark every synonym and pronoun referring to **God** with a triangle.
- underline each occurrence of the words lowly and contrite.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to God?
- What does He want to do for the lowly and contrite of spirit?
- How does that relate to what Jesus said about the poor in spirit?

ISAIAH 57:15

For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

ISAIAH 66:1–2

¹ Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?

² “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

OBSERVE

In Isaiah’s day the people were going through the motions of worship without having a heart for God.

Leader: *Read Isaiah 66:1–2 aloud. Have the group say aloud and...*

- mark each reference to **the Lord**, including pronouns, with a triangle.
- underline the phrase **humble and contrite of spirit**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the Lord in these verses?
- What does God look for in a person?

OBSERVE

After Matthew, a tax collector, began to follow Jesus, he held a dinner at his house.

Leader: *Read Matthew 9:10–13 aloud. Have the group...*

- mark each reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross: †
- mark every reference to **the Pharisees**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a big P.

DISCUSS

- Who had Matthew invited to dinner?
- Why do you think he may have invited this particular group of people?

INSIGHT

The Jews hated tax collectors because they collected money to support the Romans. They often collected more than was needed and kept the extra for themselves.

MATTHEW 9:10–13

10 Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”

12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

13 “But go and learn what this means: ‘I

desire compassion,
and not sacrifice,' for
I did not come to
call the righteous,
but sinners."

- How did the Pharisees react to this scene?
- Keeping in mind that the Pharisees were the religious leaders of the day, why do you think they responded in this way?
- What did Jesus' words demonstrate? Who did He come to call?
- What did Jesus tell the people to do in verse 13, and why? How does it relate to the previous verses?

OBSERVE

At one point early in His earthly ministry, Jesus returned to His hometown of Nazareth and went to the synagogue, where He was asked to read from the book of Isaiah.

Leader: Read Luke 4:18–21 aloud. Have the group...

- mark each reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross.
- underline the phrase **to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.**

DISCUSS

- What ministries had Jesus been anointed to do?
- Do you see any possible parallel between this passage and what we have seen about being poor in Spirit? Explain your answer.

INSIGHT

The portion of Scripture Jesus read was Isaiah 61:1–2, a messianic passage. By adding “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” Jesus claimed to be the Messiah who would bring in the long-promised kingdom of God.

LUKE 4:18–21

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,

19 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:4–9

⁴ although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;

⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

⁷ But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ More than that, I count all things to be

OBSERVE

As we bring this lesson to a close, let's take a look at how the apostle Paul demonstrated poverty of spirit.

Leader: *Read Philippians 3:4–9 aloud. Have the group say and...*

- circle each occurrence of the pronoun **(I)** which refers in this passage to **Paul**.
- draw a squiggly line like this  under each of these phrases: **counted as loss, to be loss, suffered the loss, and count them but rubbish.**
- mark each occurrence of the word **righteousness** with a big **R**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about Paul in verses 4–6?

- Verse 7 starts with the word *but*, which, as we've seen, often indicates a contrast is being made. What contrast was Paul making in verses 7 and 8?
 - For what reason was Paul counting these things as loss and what would the result be?
 - What are the two different kinds of righteousness described by Paul?
 - Which righteousness did Paul place his confidence in?
- loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
- ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

- Paul counted or considered the things in his life and made the decision not to cling to any righteousness of his own. Have you done that?
- Can you identify any factors in your life that may be keeping you from seeing your true poverty of spirit? What are they? Wealth? Worldly wisdom? Strong natural abilities? Your own righteousness?

Leader: *If time allows, take this opportunity to lead the group in a time of prayer and reflection.*

WRAP IT UP

It seems to be ingrained in our human nature to think that we are better than perhaps we really are. This is especially true when it comes to standing before the Righteous Judge of the universe. All too often, when it comes to sin, we justify our actions by comparing ourselves to someone we believe is worse than we are. It's as if we believe God grades us on a curve. *Sure, we tell ourselves, I'm not perfect, but I look pretty good compared to that other person.*

The Pharisee from Jesus' parable in Luke 18 saw himself that way. Compared to others, he judged himself to be a pretty good guy, far more righteous than the average, ordinary sinner.

But that's not the way God judges. His standard is perfection, not goodness. Romans 3:10 tells us, "There is none righteous, not even one." No one measures up to the standard known as righteousness. Paul goes on to say in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all have come short of the standard.

As you saw this week, our only hope for blessing is to admit our utter dependence on God. "God is opposed the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Those who are walking in the fullness of God, those whose inheritance is heaven are those who are poor in spirit. Only the ones who realize that they have no righteousness of their own to offer God will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Put yourself in the parable of Luke 18. Who are you? Deep down in your heart, deep in your soul, which man do you resemble?

God be merciful to us, the sinners!

Ask God to show you your poverty of spirit so that you can find fullness in Him.