

THE BEATITUDES: WISE WORDS OF JESUS

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BLESSINGS FROM HEAVEN

Have you ever wondered how to find true happiness and purpose in life? Countless people have found the answer in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. One of the most well-known of Jesus' teachings is a passage often called "The Beatitudes". It is found in Matthew 5:3-12.¹ In this booklet, you will see how the principles Jesus shared in the Beatitudes have shaped the lives of key leaders in modern times. You will also discover how these principles can change your life forever.

"Beatitude" is an ancient word that means supreme bliss; absolute joy and happiness. Jesus spoke eight "beatitudes"; and each one begins with the word "blessed": "blessed are the poor in spirit"; "blessed are the meek"; "blessed are the peacemakers". When Jesus used the word "blessed", He meant

¹ Read online at https://www.blueletterbible.org/nkjv/mat/5/3/s_934003

that those who live by the principles of the Beatitudes will experience genuine, inner happiness, the happiness every person on Earth longs for in their deepest heart.

Living on Earth, it is easy to have a false idea of what God is like. Many people wonder, if God is good, why is there so much suffering? One of the most important reasons Jesus came to Earth is to show that God is not the author of evil, suffering or death. Jesus' emphasis on the word "blessed" in the Beatitudes, shows clearly that God wants every person to experience true joy! And God is the source of that joy (Psalm 16:11). Lasting joy can only come from God. By living out the principles of the Beatitudes, you will share in the joy of heaven even while you are living on Earth!

We can understand Jesus' teachings in the Beatitudes better if we think about the context in which His words were

spoken. Although Jesus lived on Earth a long time ago, the issues He addressed, such as greed, pride and power are the same ones we grapple with today. The Beatitudes present timeless truths that are still more relevant to us living in the twenty-first century, than they were in the first century AD, when Jesus spoke them.

The Beatitudes are the start of a longer sermon by Jesus, recorded in Matthew Chapters Five to Seven. This sermon is often called "The Sermon on the Mount", because Jesus spoke it on a mountain. This mountain was located in the region of Galilee, in Palestine. Jesus lived in Galilee from 29-30 AD. At this time, literally thousands of people were eager to see Jesus, be healed by Him, and hear Him speak. Many of them had heard Jesus' own announcement, "The kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:14,15). Many of those listening were Jewish. At this time, the land of Palestine

was being ruled directly by the cruel Romans. The people hoped that Jesus would drive out the hated Romans, and make the nation of Israel wealthy and prosperous, as it had been in the past. But in the Beatitudes, Jesus taught the people that true happiness does not come from external circumstances; and that true peace involves more than just political agreements. Let's find out the secrets of heaven's happiness that Jesus shared so long ago.

CHAPTER 1: **THE POOR IN SPIRIT**

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

What a strange opening! Now, as in Jesus' day, most people believe that riches bring happiness. However, Jesus said that it is the poor in spirit who are blessed. But when we understand what this Beatitude means, we see that it

is the foundation of everything in the kingdom of God.

Jesus' main focus in this Beatitude is not actually a person's financial situation. Nor was He saying that people are worthless and insignificant. In the Bible, the word for "poor" is sometimes translated as "humble" or "lowly" (compare, for instance, Job 24:4; Psalm 9:18; 10:12,17; 69:32; Proverbs 14:21). Isaiah 57:15 says that God dwells with those who are of a humble spirit. In the Bible, the humble are contrasted with those who are proud or haughty (see, for instance, Proverbs 3:34; 16:19). Those who are haughty are so full of their own self-importance that they have no time for God. The "poor in spirit" are those who recognise that without God they are helpless. This leads them to put their full trust in God alone.

The result of this kind of inner humility before God will be shown in the things

a person does. The life of Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), first lady of the United States of America from 1933-1945, is an example of this.

Eleanor's childhood was traumatic. Both her parents died when she was very young, and she was raised by a grandmother who was cold to her. She experienced the horrors of World War I (1914-1918) and the Great Depression (1929-1933). In 1921, her husband Franklin Roosevelt (1882-1945) contracted polio, which left him paralysed from the waist down. In addition, their marriage was often strained.

Yet despite all this, Eleanor worked alongside Franklin to guide the USA through the dark days of World War II. During this time, and indeed throughout her life, Eleanor lived to bring happiness and freedom to others.

Eleanor had a compassionate empathy

for all who were disadvantaged. Despite being first lady, she would often be seen distributing food and gifts in the alleys of the slums of Washington. She also used her political and social position to advocate for civil rights on behalf of all those who were oppressed, whether they were African-Americans or Jews or women. Perhaps her greatest achievement was leading the drafting of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights.

Eleanor was brought up as a Christian, and in later years she maintained that people need "something greater than their own powers to turn to and depend on"; the "spirit which (says), 'I myself am weak but Thou art strong Oh Lord!'"² She felt that this inner spiritual growth would be the source of caring

² Roosevelt, E. (2021). What religion means to me. Forum 88 (December 1932): 322-24. Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. Retrieved 23 March, 2021, from <https://erpapers.columbian.gwu.edu/what-religion-means-me>

for others. And we see these outward actions in her life.

The Bible reveals that everyone on planet Earth, whether they are aware of it or not, is involved in a huge cosmic war between good and evil (Revelation 12:7-9). This epic controversy began when the highest created angel became proud, and chose of his own freewill to rebel against God's goodness and love (Ezekiel 28:12-18; Isaiah 14:12-14). This shows that self-interest lies at the root of all the misery and woe that we experience in our world today.

The Bible also reveals that God loves people so much that He sent Jesus to live a totally humble, selfless life, and ultimately to die on the cross, to give every human being another opportunity to choose good, and gain eternal life. Those who are poor in spirit are those who, like Eleanor Roosevelt, recognise their need of God's help. They are willing to do things God's way, not their own.

This Beatitude promises that those who plead for strength from God, will enjoy the blissful peace of heaven, even amid the sorrows of Earth.

Life application: Do you feel overwhelmed by life's problems? Do you feel your need of Someone bigger than yourself to reach out to? Then you are poor in spirit. You can claim God's promises with a short prayer like this: "God, I need You in my life. Please help me to live Your will today and every day."

CHAPTER 2: **THOSE WHO MOURN**

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

On the surface, this Beatitude may seem the most contradictory of them all. How can anyone who is sad experience supreme happiness? More than this, the original Greek word used here for

“mourn” does not mean to be just a little bit sad. It refers to deep, heart-rending grief, such as a person might experience at the death of a loved one (compare with Mark 16:10; James 4:9).

What this Beatitude tells us fundamentally is that there is a time and place for sorrow (Ecclesiastes 3:4).

Many of the greatest discoveries of life are found through the depths of sorrow. It is through sorrow, for example, that we often see the meaning of true friendship or true love. This is illustrated in the story of Horatio Spafford.

Spafford was a prominent lawyer and devout Presbyterian church elder in the prosperous city of Chicago in the mid-nineteenth century. He had a beautiful wife Anna; and four daughters Annie, Maggie, Bessie, and Tanetta. The family had planned to go on a holiday to Europe in November 1873, but at the last minute, Spafford was detained

by business. It was decided that Anna and the girls would travel on ahead, while Spafford was to follow several days later.

Anna and her four daughters boarded their steamship the *S. S. Ville du Havre* and embarked on their journey. Tragically, however, the *Ville du Havre* was rammed by another vessel and sank in less than 12 minutes. Although 61 passengers and 26 crew were saved, 226 souls perished, including all four Spafford children. Several days later, a sailor found and rescued Anna, who had survived by clinging to a piece of the ship's wreckage.

From Cardiff, Anna wired her husband a message which began, "Saved alone, what shall I do?"

Spafford booked passage on the next available ship. As he passed the spot where the *Ville du Havre* had gone down, he penned the words to the

now-famous hymn, "It is Well with my Soul":

*When peace like a river attendeth
my way,*

When sorrows like sea billows roll,

*Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught
me to say,*

It is well, it is well with my soul.

Like Spafford, many have experienced the truth that it is often in the darkest moments of life, that God's presence seems nearest. At the most spiritual level, all those who recognise the goodness of God, will feel a deep sorrow for doing wrong (Romans 2:4). Jesus promised that those who mourn in this way will receive a wonderful blessing from God: comfort. God does not want us to be continually bemoaning the sadness in the world. In fact, Nehemiah 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength". Whatever your circumstances, God is right beside you, to help you and give

you the courage to face every challenge of life.

Life application: 2 Corinthians 1:3,4 says that God wants to comfort us. God wants to comfort you. Will you open your heart to His invitation today?

CHAPTER 3: **THE MEEK**

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

In western culture today, meekness carries with it the idea of being a "push-over"; of being someone who stands for nothing, and just accepts abuse from others. However, that is not what Jesus meant here.

In the Bible, the word translated as "meek" can also be interpreted to mean "humble" or "gentle". A person who is meek is not someone who is controlled by others, but one who chooses to follow God's way. A person who is meek

is not concerned about their position in society. A person who is meek is willing to serve others.

A modern example of meekness is Gladys Aylward. This brave and self-sacrificing lady put her own needs aside and allowed herself to be controlled by God for the good of others.

Gladys was born in approximately 1902 to a working-class family from North London. From her teen years, she worked as a cleaner in private homes, but her dream was to minister to others in the land of China. After failing a course for aspiring missionaries, Gladys decided to make her own way to China. When she arrived, Gladys helped an older missionary, Jeannie Lawson, to establish a guest house in Yangchen, which they called the "Inn of the Eight Happinesses". Gladys shared with travellers who stayed at the Inn how they could experience happiness, through living the principles that Jesus

taught in the Beatitudes.

About a year after Gladys arrived in China, Jeannie Lawson passed away. Gladys was left to manage the guest house with only the help of the cook. However, just a few weeks later, the local mandarin offered her a position working for him. In her new role, Gladys had many opportunities to visit people in their homes. There, she was able to tell them about God's love and grace.

When a riot broke out in the men's prison, Gladys was amazed when the mandarin sent for her. Although she was only a small lady, she walked into the courtyard and shouted at the prisoners to be quiet until the riot stopped. She listened to their concerns and helped to improve the terrible conditions in the prison.

Gladys started taking orphans into her home, adopting many of them as her own children. By the time war came to

Yangchen in 1938, Gladys was looking after 100 orphans. To protect her children from the invading Japanese, she set out on an epic 27-day journey on foot over the mountains. When she arrived to safety, she collapsed from typhus fever and pneumonia. However, she did recover, and began to work at new projects, including the establishment of a leper colony in Szechuan, near the borders of Tibet.

The life of Gladys Aylward has been the subject of many books, and even a Hollywood movie. Her life shows that meekness isn't weakness. Those who are meek are strong and self-controlled. They sacrifice themselves for others.

Life application: In his book *Live More Happy*, Dr Darren Morton shares three keys to "serving smart": serve sincerely; serve using your signature strengths; and serve sustainably.³ Take a few

³ Morton, D. (2018). *Live more happy*, pp. 149-166. Warburton, Australia: Signs.

moments to think about how you can use your natural abilities to do simple things for those closest to you. Then, grow your service from there. Pray for God's guidance, and He will open amazing doors for you that you never dreamed possible.

CHAPTER 4: THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6

Have you ever felt hungry? Really hungry? So hungry that you have felt faint? Many of Jesus' listeners were subsistence farmers and fishermen under Roman oppression. They were never far from starvation. They knew what hunger meant.

Have you ever realised that you have done wrong? Have you ever felt guilty,

and longed for peace of mind? This is spiritual hunger. It is thirsting for righteousness.

Martin felt this kind of hunger. As a monk, he practiced self-harm for religious purposes. He wanted to stop sinning in order to be acceptable to God. His rigorous routine began at 2AM every morning. He prayed seven times a day. He fasted to the point of emaciation. He beat himself with a whip. He punished his body by sleeping on the bare floor of his room, without blankets, even in the bone-chilling cold of winter. Sometimes he would lie out in the snow for long periods. Had it been possible for righteousness to be gained through self-torture, Martin would certainly have achieved it.

Martin was a tormented soul. He was looking for something that every person in this world craves: the peace of a clear conscience. But despite all his efforts, Martin found no peace. His

conscience told him he was unworthy of God's favour.

One day, however, Martin discovered a Bible chained to a wall in the convent where he lived. He began to spend every spare moment reading it. In the Bible, Martin discovered God's love and forgiveness. He discovered a now-famous text, Romans 1:17, "The righteous shall live by faith" (ESV). He learned that it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). Martin Luther was so inspired by the love and forgiveness of God, that he felt that he needed to share this with others. He took a bold stand against the leaders of the church in his day, who were abusing their power and position for the sake of monetary gain. His courage and determination was the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation.

Do you feel a deep longing, a soul hunger, to be genuinely good, to the very core of your being? Do you have regrets over past mistakes that you have made, and wonder how these can ever be made right? In this Beatitude, Jesus assures us that the blessing of true peace and satisfaction does not come to those who make themselves righteous through self-torture; it comes to those who recognise that they can never make themselves righteous; that they need the righteousness of God. God is the only source of righteousness. He is the only One who can satisfy your hunger and thirst for goodness in your life. He offers His righteousness to you as a free gift, "without money and without price" (see Isaiah 55:1-9; Romans 6:23). More than this, God can recreate your heart, and give you power to make good choices in the future. God doesn't just leave you in the mire of sin; he frees you from it completely.

He does not ask you to torture yourself to become righteous; instead, He asks that you follow the example of Christ, who lived to bless others.

Life application: Do you hunger and thirst for God's goodness? If so, you can claim His promise by praying, "Dear God, I know I have done wrong. I need Your righteousness. Please forgive me for my sins, and change my heart so that I can be righteous like You."

CHAPTER 5: **THE MERCIFUL**

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Matthew 5:7

In the world today, mercy seems to be the exception and not the rule. But Jesus' words in this Beatitude show that mercy is a foundation principle of God's kingdom.

What does genuine mercy look like? Jesus told a story that perfectly answers

this question. This story is often called "The Good Samaritan", and it is found in Luke 10:25-37. This story shows that when a merciful person sees the distress of another, he or she acts to help that person, no matter what the sufferer's religion, culture or race. A merciful person will put aside their own interests for the sake of another. A merciful person is empathetic: he or she will identify with the feelings of the other person. More than this, a merciful person will demonstrate these inner feelings through their actions.

German war ace Franz Stiegler (1915-2008) gives a modern-day example of an act of mercy. It was December 1943. An Allied B-17 bomber had just finished a run over Germany; and its captain, Charles Brown, was trying desperately to get home in his badly damaged plane. Three of the planes four engines had been damaged or destroyed; its rudder, left side elevator and nose cone

were smashed, and six of the crew were badly wounded.

Stiegler, who had been waiting on the ground for his Me109 to be rearmed and refuelled, saw the B-17 bomber limping through the sky. He saluted his sergeant, boarded the plane and easily caught up with the battered craft. But as he looked through his gunsight, he stopped short at the sight of the terrified, injured crew inside. Instead of taking fire, Stiegler escorted the enemy plane back to Allied territory to defend it from further attacks.

Stiegler's example illustrates the timelessness of the vital principle of mercy. This principle runs all through both the Old and New Testaments (see, for instance, Psalm 41:1; Proverbs 14:21; Daniel 4:27). Mercy is a fundamental trait of God's character of love (Exodus 34:5-7; Numbers 14:18). And God asks His followers to be merciful, as He is merciful (Luke 6:36).

Life application: When we recognise God's mercy toward us, this softens our hearts so that we will have mercy toward others. Take a few moments to think about how merciful God has been to you. How can you copy His example in your own life? Ask God to show you how you can be merciful like Him today.

CHAPTER 6: **THE PURE IN HEART**

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

In our world today, pollution is a major issue. Even young children are aware of the many dangers of pollution. In this Beatitude, Jesus says that it is not enough just to be clean and free from contamination on the outside. The emphasis in this Beatitude is on a person's heart, their innermost being.

From our study of the other Beatitudes, we already know that true heart purity

can only come from God, who promises to create a clean heart within us (Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26). When we allow God to do this, we will love God supremely; and love others as God loves us. We will be able to do as the Bible says in 1 Peter 1:22, to "love one another fervently with a pure heart."

A modern-day example of someone who showed this kind of love is Catherine Hamlin. Catherine was born in Sydney in 1924 and became an obstetrician-gynaecologist. In 1959, she and her husband Reginald, who was also an eminent obstetrician, moved to Ethiopia in response to an advertisement in a medical journal.

When they arrived in Ethiopia, the Hamlins noticed the large number of women who were coming to the hospital with obstetric fistulas, and who were being turned away because it was thought that there was no cure for their condition. In Ethiopia, many

of these women died, and those who survived did so with horrific injuries, living miserable lives as outcasts from society. However, in the West it was known that this condition was easily corrected by surgery. When the Hamlins realised how great the need was, they decided to dedicate the rest of their lives to helping these women.

Catherine Hamlin's death in 2020 was met with an outpouring of grief in Ethiopia, and tributes from around the world. By that time, she had helped more than 60,000 women whom the world would otherwise have forgotten. Her compassion, motivated by her Christian faith, was evident in all that she did. She said, "A little peasant girl is precious in God's sight, and so they're precious in my sight too." ⁴

⁴ Payne, K. (2020, March 19). Dr Catherine Hamlin dies at 96. Eternity News. Retrieved 24 March, 2021, from <https://www.eternitynews.com.au>

This Beatitude promises that those who are pure in heart will see God. There are two ways in which the words “to see” are used in the Bible. One is in a strictly literal sense. This is true for all those who are pure in heart: one day, they will see God face to face in perfect joy (Revelation 22:4). The other way in which the words “to see” are used in the Bible is in the sense of experiencing something with deep understanding. To see God in this spiritual way means to have such a deep experience with God as to know his heart, to walk with him and to delight in his presence in this life. Jesus said that whatever we do for others, we do for Him (Matthew 25:40). When our heart is transformed by God, we will “see” Jesus in every person that needs our help. And we will reach out to help them in the same way that God has helped us.

Life application: The Bible tells us that sin is a pollutant that poisons

our hearts and separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2). Ask God to show you anything that stands between yourself and Him. Ask Him to help you get rid of that sin from your life, so that you will experience the joy of His presence every moment of every day!

CHAPTER 7: **THE PEACEMAKERS**

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."
Matthew 5:9

Sometimes we hear the phrase, "keeping the peace." Often, this has been used to mean a superficial truce while genuine problems are ignored or denied. However, this kind of "peace" often leads to greater conflict later on, when tempers erupt and emotions flare.

The Bible acknowledges this type of false peace (see, for instance, Jeremiah

6:14; 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:3). This is not the type of peace Jesus was talking about when he said "Blessed are the peacemakers". Notice that Jesus said "peacemakers", not "peacelovers". A peacemaker is someone who works actively to create peace.

The horrors of war illustrate vividly just how essential peace is. The Crimean War (1853-1856) made such an impact on one young Russian soldier, Leo Tolstoy, that his own life, and the lives of millions of others, were changed forever as a result.

Leo Tolstoy is best known as a novelist. However, for the last three decades of his life, Tolstoy was an ardent pacifist. His writings influenced other leaders like Martin Luther-King, Jr, and Mahatma Ghandi.

Tolstoy's pacifism was the direct result of his study of the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. ⁵ By studying

those teachings, you too can become a peacemaker.

The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom.” Shalom means complete well-being at its very best and highest. We can conclude from this, that the happiest people are those who do all they can to increase the well-being and welfare of others in the world. And research has shown this to be true. ⁶

Shalom includes right relationships: with oneself, with others and with God. When you are in a right relationship with God, then His peace will flow into your life. God’s peace can bring help and healing to relationships that have become damaged and strained.

Life application: The peace that God gives is eternal, internal peace, that

⁵ For more on this, see, for instance, <https://pacifism21.org/leo-tolstoy>

⁶ See, for instance, Post, S. G. (2005). Altruism, happiness and health: It’s good to be good. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 12(2), pp. 66-77.

does not depend on circumstances (John 16:33). Ask God for His peace today. Ask Him to show you how you can share His peace with others.

CHAPTER 8: THE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

When Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness", the word for "witness" and the word for "martyr" was the same. This tells us that those who seek to live by the principles that we find in the Beatitudes, the principles of righteousness, will not have an easy life. In one way or another, they will be persecuted.

According to the not-for-profit

organisation Open Doors, every year in our world today there are approximately a quarter of a million Christians experiencing high levels of persecution. Among these, many thousands are killed for no other reason than because they choose to follow Jesus Christ.

One example of a twentieth-century martyr is Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Bonhoeffer was a young theologian in Germany at the time when Adolf Hitler came to power. Hitler was welcomed into his new role enthusiastically by many sectors of German society, including many of those in the dominant Lutheran church.

Bonhoeffer opposed Adolf Hitler from the very beginning. His was one of the first religious voices to call for Christian resistance to Hitler's persecution of the Jews. As a result, from 1936, Bonhoeffer was forbidden to teach and his books were officially banned. He had the

opportunity to flee to England or to the United States of America; however he chose to remain in Germany and suffer with his people.

In July 1944, an assassination plot on Hitler codenamed "Operation Valkyrie" was carried out: a bomb in a briefcase was detonated in a conference room in the dictator's field headquarters. However, Hitler survived, with only relatively minor injuries, and he came out looking for blood.

In the aftermath of the failed assassination attempt, the Gestapo arrested more than 7,000 people. Bonhoeffer's efforts in trying to save as many Jewish people from extermination as possible made him a prime suspect; thus, he was amongst them. A year later he was executed.

Today, Bonhoeffer is considered a modern martyr. He chose to suffer with his people and to actively oppose evil.

He did it because of his Christian faith, and he paid for it with his life.

Persecution is actually an opportunity. It is an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to Jesus Christ, who Himself died on the cross for the wrongs of every person on Earth.

Life application: Jesus Himself understands by experience what it is like to be persecuted. If you are struggling under persecution, pray and ask God for the strength to be loyal to Him. Pray that your character will be polished and refined by the experience (1 Peter 4:12-16).

HEAVEN'S JOY ON EARTH

It is a sad fact that the world we live in is filled with sorrow. This is the result of sin; of choosing principles that are not in harmony with those of God's kingdom. The Beatitudes show us the

true plan of God's government. And by living out those principles, we can experience peace and joy, even in the darkest moments of life here on Earth.

But ultimately, God's kingdom is not just a set of principles to live by. God's peace and joy is not something that He gives us in isolation. God Himself longs to have a close, personal relationship with each one of us. God longs to have a deep relationship with you.

The Bible tells us about a man named Enoch who "walked with God" (Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5). Enoch had such a close relationship with God, that one day he just walked right into heaven—literally! Would you like to have a relationship with God like that? The wonderful truth is, you can! The Bible tells us that Jesus will soon return to take all those who love Him to a wonderful home in Heaven. By putting God first in your life every day, you can begin your walk with God right this

