

# *THE BEATITUDES*



An eight week study through the Beatitudes



# INTRODUCTION



The Beatitudes have been studied and written about for two thousand years. Christians and others have explored the richness and challenge they offer but also their meaning in differing social contexts and throughout history. Today, we have the privilege of considering how Jesus' words through the Beatitudes influence us here at Yale, and how they can transform us and the communities around us in a truly beautiful and life-changing way.

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## IS IT "BLESSED" OR "HAPPY" AND WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The word used at the beginning of each Beatitude is the Greek word **makarios** and some have taken this to mean 'happy' however the consensus of New Testament scholars is that 'blessed' is contextually and historically more accurate and appropriate. For example, there are multiple concerns with using 'happy' as this is a difficult and contentious word to pin down: how do you define happiness and isn't that contingent upon the individual and their context?

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## SO WHAT DOES "BLESSED" MEAN IF NOT HAPPY?

The connotation or meaning here is of biblical flourishing and of a soul that prospers. Note the distinction between what may be considered secular human flourishing and biblical flourishing – there may be areas of overlap however there are also areas of great difference. Biblical flourishing points to a soul that is at peace with God; has contentment in and because of God in their life; and has purpose and meaning because of God. What we will see through the beatitudes is a clear picture from Jesus as to what this soul looks like when they are biblically flourishing – some of these will be incredibly counter-cultural in their presentation.

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## WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR THE BEATITUDES?

New Testament scholars have debated the audience of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Clearly there were differing groups present as Jesus taught. There were his closest followers, his named disciples, who would have the most intimate knowledge and commune with him. Then there were his other followers, those who were beginning to believe his words and follow this itinerant rabbi. And finally there was the crowd, who maybe had heard of Jesus and now had the opportunity to hear him for the first time.

So, who is the primary audience? The agreement would be that Jesus is speaking to his disciples and to those who choose to follow him today. The Beatitudes are for those who choose to follow Jesus and have given their life over to his rule and reign. This becomes clear when we consider how to live out the Beatitudes in our lives.

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## WHO CAN ATTAIN THEM?

It becomes abundantly clear, even with a quick reading of the beatitudes, that they seem almost unattainable and unlivable. Who can live like this? We will see, as we go through them, that a serious engagement with them should lead us to a point where, if we're honest, we can't follow them in our own strength. We would reduce them to a form of moralism that would lead to guilt and shame when they're not achieved. If we were to then work through the Sermon on the Mount we would see that none of them are achievable in and of ourselves and this seems to be the point Jesus is driving home – realize we can't do it and come to him to allow him, and the Holy Spirit, to transform us from the inside out to live this way. In other words, only when we follow Jesus, and we surrender our lives to him, can we live the Beatitudes.





# A GUIDE ON HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

## PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT

You have been given an extensive preamble and context for each study. Take a moment to read through this as it will help guide your conversation and discussion. This is important as you will be discussing only one verse each study. The preamble unpacks the historical, cultural and theological significance of Jesus' words and help you have a fruitful discussion.

## QUESTIONS

You have been given a number of questions – the idea is not to make sure you answer each question. Before you begin your study please prayerfully consider which of the questions you will ask. Make sure you have a 'core' number of questions that will result in engaging conversation however have 2-3 others in case you need to continue your time.


## APPLICATION

Each study has both a 'spiritual practice' and some have a 'practical demonstration.' The spiritual practice will help you develop your spiritual disciplines, in other words, will help you find ways to connect with God, to hear his voice, and live out his words in your life and in your world. Some of us lean into some practices more easily than others so this gives a good opportunity to continue finding out the ways you most easily, and most effectively, meet with God. You may also have a 'practical demonstration.' There is something that will transform our soul as we follow Jesus but there will also be a way we can manifest, or demonstrate that change practically in our world. We want to encourage you to do both in the relevant weeks and take time to reflect on them within your next time together.

## REAL COMMUNITY - A REMINDER

Please remember that we have a strong conviction on what a real community looks like – make every endeavor to get together outside of your designated core group times. Begin to practice what you learn in the Beatitudes with those in your core group and those around you.





## *The Poor in Spirit*

*Matthew 5:3*

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

Matthew 5:3

“[God] cannot fill our cups with the Waters of Life until they have been drained  
of all others.”

- Sherwood Wirt

## **PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT**

This first Beatitude is considered the ‘gateway’ or the ‘door’ to all of the others. Through historical readings and up to many modern readers this opening beatitude ‘sets the scene’ for how we can live each of the beatitudes. The tension that is felt in this beatitude is the difference between Matthew and Luke’s presentation – Luke says ‘blessed are the poor’ yet Matthew says ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’ This has created much debate through time however the consensus of New Testament scholars would say that there is a clear creative tension that can be held between both – they are not to be read separately, or considered differently, but should be seen as the fullness together.

So, who are the poor in spirit? Historically, the overwhelming evidence would point to those who walk in humility before God. This is not the individual who has been humbled or is humiliated by others but chooses to see that they have nothing to offer God – they come ‘spiritually bankrupt’ or ‘empty.’ They realize they can’t earn God’s love or bring something that would warrant Him to love them or offer something that would make Him love them. This humility is considered the doorway to seeing and knowing God. When we acknowledge we have nothing to offer we can receive fully from God. But what could cause us to not live with humility before God? In other words, how would we not be poor in spirit? If we see that humility is the prerequisite in this beatitude it follows that pride is its antithesis. Pride is the ultimate sin, the root of so many other sins within us and prevalent in our world. And pride is the belief that we are ultimately all we need, we can do it on our own, that is, we are our own God. Thus, we must address issues of pride that manifest in our life that prevent us from relying on God, of humbly knowing we need him for everything.



Within the context of this beatitude, the manifestation of pride is in our material success and riches. This is a difficult one to consider living within a country in which we see the top 1% of income across the globe. So, what do we learn from this beatitude that helps us counter the reliance on riches and materialism that can prevent us, or put obstacles in our way, when we are called to be 'poor in spirit?' We learn that riches create self-reliance within us - we don't need God because we have the resources to do it on our own. This theme has been a thread through much of Christian history - riches and material wealth preclude humility and reliance on God - we take pride in our self-reliance and the fact that 'we made it on our own.'

Thus what is the answer to this? There are several ways we can realign our hearts to live before God as 'poor in Spirit.' Firstly, we can choose to detach ourselves from the wealth we have. This is not to repudiate it, there are examples through scripture of those who had great wealth but chose to not let it own them. The best way they manifest this? They gave it away. They were still economically rich but it didn't own them - they owned it.

Also, there can be the choice to live with voluntary poverty. There are examples throughout history of people who chose to live on very little of their income and give the rest away. They were still 'high earners' but they chose to live very frugally, instead investing and sowing what they had in those around them.

Finally, 'poor in spirit' can manifest because we choose to follow Jesus to the point that it economically costs us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of this through his choice to work against Nazism in his native Germany - there was an economic consequence of his decision to follow Jesus. There is an important point that we are also called to live and see through this beatitude. South American theologians and those from the developing world would remind us that poverty, in a sense, is an easy virtue to ascribe to when you are in a rich country but we should see that abject poverty is, in fact, an abhorrent evil that we are meant to fight against. In other words, one of the manifestations of living as one 'poor in spirit' is that we will use the resources we do have to help lift others out of poverty.

And what is the reward (or the reversal) of living with humility before God?

The reward is that we see the kingdom of God. In some ways this is what we might consider a 'reversal' - that which we expect when we choose to become humble is to miss out on things. Yet here we see Jesus say - when we come to him in all humility and rely on him we actually achieve and get everything - this is a reversal of what we expect - but also the reward.

But what is the kingdom and is it for here and now or for after? The kingdom is God, put simply, is the rule and reign of God in and through our lives. To put it another way, we begin to see heaven here and now. It is what we might call the 'already but not yet.' We see God begin to manifest his power in our lives and through us to those around us but it isn't fully realized until Jesus returns and heaven comes to earth. Things change, prayers are answered, hope, peace and joy are manifest and realized but when he comes they will come fully glorious and fully evident.

Thus, as we come to Jesus and live as one 'poor in spirit' there is a present tense promise that God will begin to change us and those around us. In other words, we begin to biblically flourish here and now though the full realization of it will be in the future when heaven comes fully to earth.





## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

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1. What do you understand by the phrase, 'poor in spirit'? Can you think of any other scriptures where this is used? Can you think how these might relate to this beatitude.
2. How do you think you can live humbly before God? What prevents you from being fully reliant on God? What prevents you from being humble before him? Can you think of specific examples?
3. How would you define pride? Can you think of why pride is a problem? Can you contrast pride with humility to understand the importance of humility in following Jesus?
4. Can you think of ways that your growing materialism would prevent you from relying on, and trusting God? What ways could you counter this at this moment in your life?
5. Do you think you could lead a life of 'voluntary poverty'? What do you think that would cost you? Would you be willing to pay that cost?
6. What is the reward or reversal in living as one 'poor in spirit'?
7. What do you think that could or should look like in your life? Do you think this is an honest reflection of who you are or is it more aspirational? How could it go from aspirational or realized?

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

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This week, spend a moment at the end of each day to ask God how you relied on yourself more than him in your day.

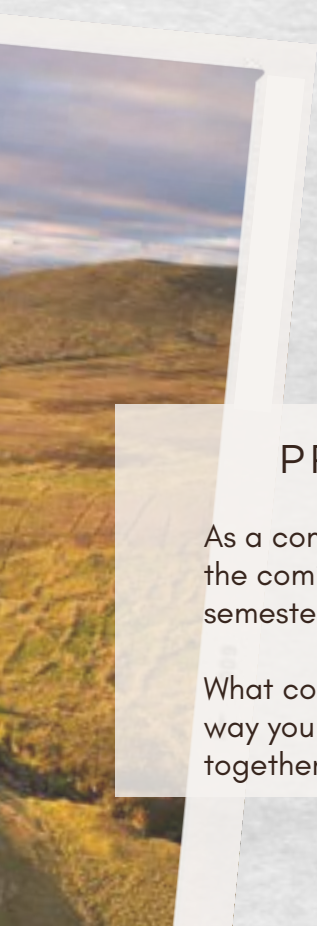
For example you had an exam and you didn't take a moment to invite God into your preparation for it or your actual taking of the test. What does that say about who you rely on? Or possibly you had to make a decision on something that day but you didn't take time to pray about it.

Finally, did you spend some time with God today in prayer and reading scripture? What does it say about being 'poor in spirit' in each of these moments? Note them down and be ready to share them at your next core group.

## PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION FOR THE WEEK

As a community, take a moment to discuss ways you could live with 'voluntary poverty' in the coming week or a way you could serve the poor around you in the coming week or semester.

What could you do? What would that look like? What would it cost you? Think about a small way you could individually do this for others in your core group but also what you could do together.







## *Those Who Mourn*

*Matthew 5:4*

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

Matthew 5:4

### **PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT**

In a similar vein to our first study, it's important for us to see that there is both a spiritual and a practical implication to this Beatitude. Once more we must affirm that the one leads to the other – when we mourn over our sin (and various other forms of mourning) they should lead us to act. It's important for us to realize the order is crucial otherwise we are acting in and of our own strength once more and have no real need for Christ.

Our first Beatitude framed all others by introducing what we could call Jesus' 'thesis statement:' You can only live out these virtues, these Beatitudes if you begin here – knowing that you are poor in spirit – you have a humbling revelation that you need Jesus for everything. He needs to be the one who forms our words, our thoughts, our hearts and our actions. When we accept this, believe this and live from this, then we can live the remaining Beatitudes too.

So we must ask the question: what does it mean to mourn? Matthew uses the Greek word **pentheo (to mourn)** but Luke uses the word **klaio (to weep)**. Are they to be considered synonymous in this situation? Good biblical scholarship would propose yes they are. And as we go through this study we will see how this is outworked – those who mourn are also those who weep. And the form of this mourning and weeping is multitudinous.

For your own personal study consider: **Isaiah 61:2, Jeremiah 31:15** and the reversals found in **Isaiah 65:13-16**.

We begin our mourning by looking at ourselves and our own sin. For the majority of Christian history this has been considered the primary focus of this Beatitude. From the likes of Clement of Alexandria through the Reformation the predominant concern was to mourn over our sin.



What are we mourning over? This is where this Beatitude flows from the first – we mourn over our pride and self-reliance. We mourn over the belief in our own ability and independence, that we are all we need. We mourn over our actions that have wounded others through our words or deeds, either by attacking them or withdrawing. The list goes on. Through all of this we mourn.

But where does our mourning end? The early church writers were quick to say it must end somewhere or we will become lost in despair and sadness. Thus it should lead to the point of repentance. Our repentance is completely turning around and choosing to walk the other way. Our mourning must end with surrender, surrender of our actions, our words, our thoughts that we know to dishonor God and hurt both ourselves and those around us. We can look to the following scriptures as demonstrating both the need for our mourning but also our turning away from the life that causes us to mourn:

**“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death”.**

**2 Cor 7:10**

**“Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you”.**

**James 4:8-10**

Yet we must acknowledge that it doesn't end here – we are to move on from ourselves and mourning over our own sin to look upwards and mourn for so much more. The Reformation guides of Luther and Calvin expanded this notion of mourning to include the mourning we feel walking through a broken world. That everyday, to a greater or lesser extent we are faced with the brokenness of our world and we mourn over it. It doesn't take long if we look at our newsfeeds to see the longing for power, the corruption and the result of sin in our world. And so our Beatitude also calls us to mourn over this. That we are actually blessed when we mourn.

We can unpack some more specific ways we are called to mourn as we look at the world around us. We begin with mourning over the structural sin and injustice in our world. Whether this is a consideration of systemic racism, or of greed before the goodness of being stewards of our planet or the impact of inequalities in health and wealth we are called to mourn. In all of this we see the work of death in our lives and we yearn and long for Jesus to bring justice and freedom and life.

We also mourn over loss in our lives. All of us can think of loved ones who have died or even the sense of estrangement that can happen in life. Friendships that are broken or strained or acrimonious. Relationships that have been dissolved due to abuse of any kind.

In all of these mourning's what is that we hope for? For Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine and others it was for the end – the consummation – when Jesus would return and everything would change. It is the prayer for heaven to come to earth now that all the reasons for mourning would wash away.

Why would Jesus say that all of this is a blessing? Why is our soul flourishing in the midst of mourning? Jesus tells us in this Beatitude that through our mourning we will be comforted. This is not the modern image we have of someone patting us on the back. The comfort we will receive is not a band-aid on the knee but is apocalyptic in origin – we will see God's victory – the old age will be remade into the new. The word comfort may be better translated 'to see consolation' to the point of inner strengthening, broken faith will be deepened, enlarged, elevated and fortified. In other words, through our mourning over our own sin and the work of sin in our world we will hold fast to the fact that Jesus will make it all new – there is hope – that it will not always be this way. A change is coming, can come now, and will ultimately change everything.



## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

1. What would you say you have 'mourned over' (if anything)?
2. On reflection, would you say you've ever mourned over your own 'sin'? To answer this question, take some time to unpack what you understand by 'sin' and its place within a Christian theology. How does sin relate to God the Father, the 'fall' of Genesis, the promises of God for us, the work of Jesus.
3. If you can be honest, what personally do you mourn over in your life with respect to sin? What aspects of your life do you think 'grieve' God?
4. What do you think it looks like to 'mourn' over your sin? What does that journey look like? How does it begin and how does it end?
5. Do you think there's a difference between 'self pity' and grieving over your sin?

### Read **Romans 7:21-25**

1. Paul is mourning over his own sin in this passage - what evidence is there within this passage of this?
  2. How could Paul consider himself a 'wretch'?
  3. What was the only answer for Paul to this?
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1. When we expand our mourning beyond our own self, in what ways do we mourn for the world?
  2. Of the list found in this study, which one do you think you mourn the most for? Can you explain why?
  3. What do you understand by the 'reward' or 'reversal' we see in this Beatitude. What does it mean to be comforted? What will that look like?

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Take a moment each morning to ask the Holy Spirit to show you what to mourn over in the day. It may be something you say that is hurtful, a news story that is upsetting, an action by another that reflects their brokenness.

At the end of the day ask the Holy Spirit once more to bring these mourning events to your mind and take some time to pray for each one.

## PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION FOR THE WEEK

As you go through your week ask the Holy Spirit to show you a practical way to help someone around you who may be going through a hard time and you are mourning for them. It could be a difficult paper or p-set; a strained relationship; or a personal loss they are walking through. Take a moment to think of something tangible and practical you can do for them (either meeting them for lunch, having a good conversation with them, writing them a note of encouragement or comfort).



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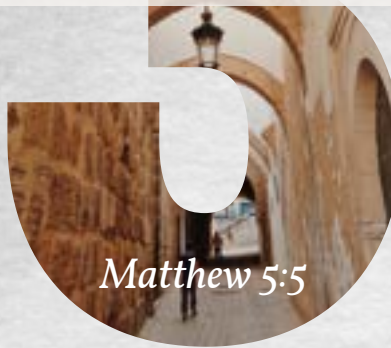
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## *The Meek*



*Matthew 5:5*

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”

Matthew 5:5

### PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT

Christian sociologists describe this Beatitude as one of the most perplexing and counter-cultural we can find today. It seems (and we will confirm that it does) to contradict the way our world functions – those who willingly yield their power to others are rewarded by God. Yet we live in a culture and society where we are given a different message – make sure you get what you want and do what you need to do to be who you were meant to be.

This cultural message stands in stark contrast to this beatitude: be willing to yield your power and emotions to others and what you receive from God will come to pass in the age to come. But what can result is a wrong idea of meekness that has bled into Christianity: Jesus is viewed as ‘meek and mild,’ in other words, he has no power or is seen as ‘spineless’ and lacking either emotion or anger and that’s how we’re meant to be too.

We will come to see in this Beatitude that this is not what Jesus is teaching us at all. Neither our current worldview that is negative towards ‘meekness’ nor the view that is often given of Christianity being ‘meek’ are correct. So what does it mean? The Greek word Jesus uses, and Matthew records, for meek, **praeus**, may best be translated as the ability to be in control of oneself. This is more than self-control – it is multi-faceted. It is the idea that you can use your power for good, that you have control over your emotions, especially anger, and how you use them. It incorporates the idea of loving restraint and significantly also the idea of resisting certain pressures you may feel when you have power in a situation. Finally, it also includes the idea of yielding to others with your power, resources and emotions. Through all of these related, but nuanced meanings, we can see the idea of power is a common thread to all. ‘Meekness’ willingly yields to others and to God not out of weakness, as is commonly applied, but as a voluntary renunciation. There are some key scriptures to consider when thinking about the power of meekness, or strength under control such as **Psalms 37**.



A key idea that Christian writers developed about how we understand the word meekness in this Beatitude is taken from Greek philosophy and the work of Aristotle and is in relation to anger and what 'righteous anger' means for Christians.. Aristotle developed the idea of the middle ground, or tension between two extremes, being the best way to understand many ideas. Early Christian writers applied this to the meekness found here. At one extreme there is anger at everything and everyone. It is uncontrolled, constant, and illogical. At the other extreme is someone who we could describe as almost spineless and without any emotion. For the understanding we have of meekness, one way it can be described is as a middle ground or tension: being angry over the right things, at the right time, for the right amount of time. The problem with this understanding is how do we define 'right things,' 'right time, etc? However it is a helpful aid when we think about this facet of meekness we are called to live before others...

One of the key ideas that developed through history is that meekness in this context can, fundamentally mean, do not return evil for evil. There is amply biblical evidence to support this position. The writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer during World War II or some of the work coming out of Latin and African theological contexts have affirmed and attested to this interpretation. The idea espoused is that we as Christians demonstrate our meekness when we choose to 'yield our ground' to another. We can see that this is anathema to much of the message of our modern world. Yet the yielding is not passive but active - it's a choice that's made - with the view of honoring Christ through all of this. We could easily apply this today to either our attitude towards driving or our interactions on social media.

Finally, this form of yielding must also apply to God himself - we are called to yield our power to Him. We can see once more how this Beatitude builds on what has gone before it. We began this journey through the Beatitudes by realizing we were poor in spirit, we brought nothing into our relationship with God that would merit us worthy or deserving of it. Our revelation is that, in fact, we are utterly humbled by this and we rely fully on Him. From this we can come to a place of mourning: mourning over our own sin, the sin of others, the brokenness of the word and through it all we shed tears of lament and repentance. This then leads to our current Beatitude, we realize that through all of this we have power. Our power can be our ethnicity, our socio-economic status, or intellect, our privilege and so on. And if we are to see ourselves and our world changed we must yield all of this to God too. How can we allow God to use our power to help others?

But what is our 'reward' through living out this Beatitude? This may be a difficult one for us to grasp when we are conditioned to live in the present, and the idea of any delay in life is seen as detrimental. Yet, Jesus teaches us in this beatitude that we may not see the 'reward' for living a life of meekness until the new heavens and the new earth arrive. That is, when we yield our power to God, to others, and in the situations and circumstances of life; when we choose to lay our anger down or our mean words and actions; we may not see an immediate 'reward' from God. And so the question becomes: can we live with that? Can we live a life where we may not see the reward until heaven comes to earth? Most biblical scholars would propose that the idea of 'inheriting the earth' in this beatitude isn't for the here and now but is the hope that ultimately Jesus will make everything right. Even though we choose to yield our power now for the benefit of others we may not see the full reward of this for a long time.





## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

1. Do you think we are 'angry' as a culture? How is this played out on social media, in the news?
2. What about yourself? Would you consider yourself an 'angry' person? What does that mean and what does that look like? What does it look like in those around you?
3. Do you think people believe their anger is righteous and virtuous? If so, what are they angry over? What is the result of this anger?
4. From this Beatitude – what do you think 'meekness' means? What is your understanding of it? What would this look like in your life?
5. Do you think this is a difficult, or hard, beatitude for you to live out on a daily basis? If it is, thinking of the previous two Beatitudes, what would you need to do to make it a reality in your life?
6. What power do you think you would need to yield?
7. From your understanding of scripture, and this Beatitude, what do you think is worthy of righteous anger? What would this look like? What would be its purpose and what would the end result be?
8. Do you think you can live with knowing that the reward for yielding your power won't be seen this side of heaven? If you struggle with that idea can you unpack why? What would you need to do, or let go of, to embrace this?

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

At the end of each day, spend a few minutes in silence and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any way in which you lived in a manner that is contrary to the words of Jesus in this beatitude. Were you angry today at someone? Even if the anger was only in your heart? Did you act passive aggressively towards someone today? Did you use your power for your advantage?

If the Holy Spirit brings any moment to your remembrance ask for forgiveness but also ask Jesus to guide you into a new way of living that embraces this Beatitude.

## PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION FOR THE WEEK

Take a moment as a core group to think of ways you can use your collective power and give it away so that someone else can flourish or be pointed towards Jesus.

There are many ways this can occur. You may collectively decide to clean another dorms bathrooms or common area. You may decide to help with a soup kitchen or help in the community in some way.





# *Who Hunger and Thirst*

*Matthew 5:6*

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

Matthew 5:6

## **PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT**

It is impossible to read this beatitude without also considering the same one in Luke. Without pairing the two together we are in danger of applying this Beatitude only to ourselves and not realizing it also has a very clear application of how we are to ‘love our neighbor.’ It seems like there’s a clear drumbeat underneath all of the Beatitudes – these are ways in which we demonstrate our love both for God and those around us.

So what do we see in this beatitude? We are told that there will be a biblical flourishing of our soul, that is, we will become fully alive, when we hunger and thirst for being right with God. Thus, we can initially see the personal aspect of this beatitude – we must choose to run hard after God to allow him to do what he wants to do in us that we may be right before him. There is always a problem when we hear this kind of proposal – we think it’s something that we can and should do in our own strength, that is, as I choose to be ‘hungry’ and ‘thirsty’ for God then he will reward me with being right before Him. However, this is not true. We must look to the work of the Reformers to understand this is impossible. We also need to lean on the work of Augustine to understand what this truly means but we also need to realize it will humble us to hear it: it is God who draws us, who gives us this appetite of hungering and thirsting after him. It is God himself who places in us a desire, a longing, to go hard after Him. He gives this to everyone – our part is to respond, to yield to this longing, and to pursue God. And as we do we are made right in Him.

This idea of ‘righteousness’ is something that is both something that is placed upon us but also grows within us as we seek and follow God. In coming to God in the first place, as we saw in the first beatitude, we are made right before him. In other words, we have the righteousness of Christ placed upon us. Clearly, this isn’t something we could earn or work for, it is God’s gracious and generous gift towards us: we are immediately ‘made right’ with God when we come to Jesus and surrender our life to Him. However, from this beatitude it’s clear that it goes beyond this. There is a sense of action, of movement on our part, to pursue and long for God.



Here are some scriptures to consider:

**Psalms 41:1-2**

**Psalms 63:1,5**

**John 4:14, 6:35, 38**

We now know this longing is placed within us by God for he wants us to pursue Him. However it is our choice as to whether we act on this but when we do and we seek him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength we are changed and transformed. And the outcome of this is the continual 'right-living' we will have with God. Some have ascribed the word 'sanctification' to best describe the continual process of both standing rightly before God but also of becoming more like Jesus and reflecting Him more gloriously to the world around us. Thus, when we submit to the longing within us to run hard to and after God we find Him and we have the peace that we are known by Him and we are right by Him. And this continual process changes us and those around us see this more and more.

So it begs the question? How do people see that we are standing right with God? This comes to the second part of this beatitude: this longing for righteousness isn't just for ourselves, in fact, the more we become right with God the more we long to see those who aren't made right with God come into a similar position too. And the particular focus of this beatitude is upon those who have injustice thrust upon them. We will pursue injustice as we pursue God. We will run hard after those who need God's justice in their lives as we continue to run hard after God.

Consider these scriptures:

**Isaiah 58:6-7**

**Isaiah 49:8-10**

Throughout the history of Christianity observers have made a clear point regarding this scripture: it clearly teaches us to go and feed the poor. The hunger here is not simply spiritual it is also very much physical. We most accurately reflect this beatitude when we are not only hungering after God in our heart but that we are making things right for those who are physically hungry.

Through church history the 'form' of this act of justice has been a myriad of expressions. There are those who have chosen to live very simple lives and to take the money that they aren't living by and giving it to the poor and charities that feed the hungry. There are those who choose to fast at certain points and reflect the teaching of scripture to give either the food they would have eaten, or the monetary equivalent, to those who are hungry. There are also those who choose to volunteer, or even devote their life, to helping the hungry through working at food banks, or soup kitchens, or setting up non-profits to do this very thing.

And once more we must consider the reward or reversal within this Beatitude and that it is both. The reward for those who choose to live like this is, like those before, not something that will be fully seen in this world. There will be a sense of joy when those who are fed physically are grateful and thankful for what has been done. This will tie into the spiritual 'fullness' that someone will feel when they know they are doing the will and work of God by feeding the poor around them. However, as we've noted before, this, to a degree, will only be in part this side of eternity. Yet they will wait for that day to come.

However, this is not only a reward but also a reversal in action. The very act of outliving this beatitude will result in the reversal of poverty and injustice in the lives of those around us. Though it may be small it should not be scoffed at, these acts of reversing injustice will have a great impact in the lives of those touched by this.



## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

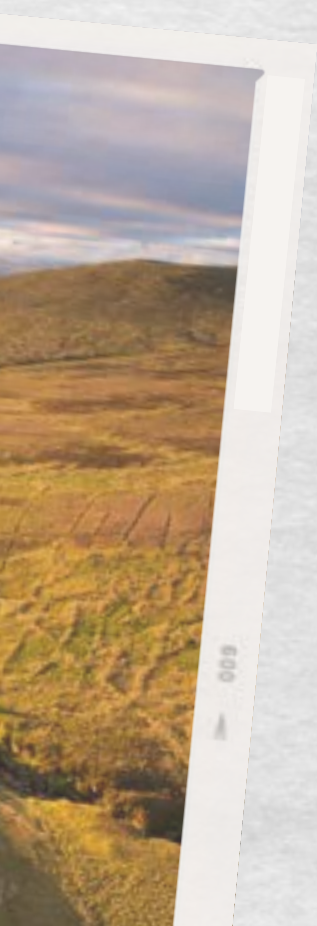
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1. If someone asked you what 'the gospel' is, how would you answer them?  
How would you talk about being 'hungry and thirsty for righteousness'?  
How would you help someone understand that at the heart of the Gospel is the idea that new life, or salvation, isn't something we can do for ourselves by our efforts or something we can earn but is the gift of a loving Father towards us?

Tim Keller says the following:

**"The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."**

1. How would you describe this to someone who isn't a Christian? Can you unpack this idea in two ways: what we cognitively understand by this phrase but also what it would look like in someone's life?
1. What do you understand about the Christian concept of 'righteousness'?
2. Can you be righteous in your own strength?
3. When you reflect on your life, do you feel like you 'hunger and thirst' after God? If not, why do you think this is the case? What do you think this looks like?
4. What are 'hungering and thirsting' after?
5. What is the reward or reversal of living this beatitude?
6. What has the church through history understood by the practical implications of this beatitude?
7. What is the injustice that this beatitude looks to right, or correct?
8. Can you think of ways you can practically bring justice to those who are hungry?
9. Of the various ways you could bring justice to the hungry, which one (or ones) have you already practiced? Can you describe them?
10. Which of them would be harder for you to practice and why?





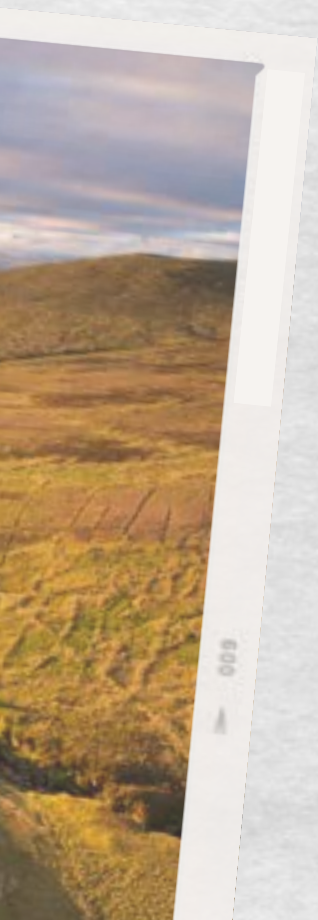
## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

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Sometimes, when we understand that we don't live in a way that God calls us to live we can struggle with guilt or a feeling of inadequacy as a Christian. Yet, in these moments there is a simple prayer that can be lifted before God: "I want to want..." In this situation, you can pray, "I want to want to be hungry and thirsty for you God." Every morning this week take a moment to pray this prayer.

## PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION FOR THE WEEK

As a core group, discuss one clear way you could help fight the injustice of poverty around you and make a commitment to doing that before the end of the semester. Keep yourselves accountable to do this.







## *The Merciful*

*Matthew 5:7*

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

Matthew 5:7

### **PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT**

There is a pivot in the Beatitudes now. This began in the last beatitude and is now firmly entrenched in the remaining four – our clear focus is now on how we can ‘love our neighbor.’ We must put a note of caution in however, we can’t believe that the remaining Beatitudes are things we can do in our own strength. If this is the case then there’s no need for Christ nor to call them Christian, they are simply good works done by people with a moral compass. Yet it was Christ who spoke these words and it’s been clear from the first four that to live them out requires surrender and obedience to Jesus. Thus as we move to number five we can see that in all actuality it flows out of number four. When we hunger and thirst to stand rightly before God in our own lives it then results in us looking for others to also be free from injustice so that they too may stand rightly before God. And what is one way we do this? We act with mercy to those around us.

A distinction can be made at the start between grace and mercy however we need to understand that within our faith they are to live together. Mercy, as we will see, is both the heart and action to reach out to those around us, and those around the world, to right that which is wrong. This may be through financial means or physically helping in some way or extending mercy where it isn’t deserved (for example, through forgiveness etc.). In all of these forms we are extending mercy to our neighbor, both local and global. So what is grace? Mercy extends relief, grace grants the pardon. Mercy cures, cleans and helps, grace forgives and restores.

Some have argued that mercy is the necessary balance to a world that fights only for justice. There is a clear need for justice in the world though sometimes our justice is exclusive and rational. Yet mercy goes beyond this – it can seem irrational when it extends beyond those we deem worthy of it and we give mercy to all.



At the root of mercy in this Beatitude is a key question: Is mercy a feeling or an action? Am I simply moved with emotion when I see those in great need or am I a dispassionate philanthropist giving away millions but without engaging in the need? Theologians would remind us, once more, that it must be both and. Mercy is something we feel. We need to cultivate a heart that "mourns with those who mourn." We need to feel the tears of the pain around us. This can only take place when we are actively engaged in the world. When we hear the story of those who have no power or agency or live in poverty that we are moved to tears or compassion wells up within our heart – this is the beginning of mercy. Yet the feeling must translate into action. This was of great concern for the Reformers because of their fear that it would result in a belief that we can 'save ourselves and others' simply by what we do. However, this can be avoided when we realize that the compassion we feel is the compassion of Jesus. And the anger we may feel at injustice and poverty is the anger the Lord feels over the brokenness of the world. And we know that we must act in response to this. This is the mercy of this Beatitude.

So how can we live a life of mercy to those around us? For all of Christian history there has been broad agreement that mercy is rooted in financially helping those around us. Through the last two thousand years Christian thinkers, theologians and apologists have considered financially helping the poor as the heart of this beatitude: we show mercy when we relieve the suffering of others.

But what if we are actually the poor? How do we give mercy if its main expression is financial? We need to appreciate that mercy is actually a much broader umbrella than simply financially giving, as important as this is.

Additionally, within this Beatitude is the mercy we extend when we forgive those who have, or continue to wound us with their words or action. We are merciful when we forgive them. We see this Beatitude be unpacked later in this Sermon on the Mount when Jesus talks about forgiving our enemies. We can think of many examples of Christians who lived this out. When the 'rational' thing to do would be to not forgive them they have chosen to be merciful and forgive. An action that our culture would see as weak and further demonstrating their powerlessness yet it is, in fact, the opposite. The 'upside-down' nature of God's rule and reign in our lives is when we choose to be merciful by forgiving the other we are set free from the prison we have been living in when we have held on to our bitterness, anger-fantasies, shame and brokenness because of our unforgiveness. The merciful set the merciless free.

One final way we are merciful is in inviting the outsider into our friendships and community. When we choose to 'leave an empty seat' at core group for someone to fill; or invite that person sitting by themselves in the dining hall; or walk past the room of someone in your suite and there by themselves and you invite them to Chi Alpha live, in all of these ways you are extending mercy.

Through these three, clear, explicit examples (financially, with forgiveness, inviting the outsider in) of mercy we are doing something greater than we can imagine: we are showing others who Jesus is and we are imitating God with our actions. How? We are reflecting what God has done for us. He has extended us mercy when we were undeserving, he has invited us into his divine community, and he has provided for us over and over again. Thus, our acts of mercy point people towards God.

Finally, what is the 'reward' or reversal we see in this Beatitude? This one is like no other, it seems to show a clear connection: when we are merciful we are shown mercy.

If we're not careful in how we interpret this, the problem can become that we believe that this is a simple linear equation: we are merciful because we have been shown it and we can begin to live expecting the reward. I will be merciful just so that I can receive mercy. This is an unhealthy logic and needs to be put to the side. It is more appropriate to see it in a circular manner as it has at its heart that it begins with Jesus being merciful to us when we didn't deserve it. When we grasp this reality we are more likely to realize that with the mercy we have been shown we choose to show others – not to get mercy but because living mercifully before others is how Jesus calls us to live. The reward is that we will receive mercy but we don't live mercifully just to win something for ourselves.



## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

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1. How would you define the word 'mercy'?
2. Can you think of someone who has shown you mercy? What did that look like?
3. Do you consider yourself a merciful kind of person?
4. Do you think our world is merciful towards others? Take some time to unpack this idea with concrete examples?
5. How would you distinguish between mercy and grace?
6. Do you think mercy is a feeling or an action or both? Can you think of times when you have been 'moved by mercy' but not acted upon it? Can you think of times where you've done the opposite?

### Read **Luke 10: 25-37 (the story of the Good Samaritan)**

1. In what ways did the Samaritan show mercy? How would you distinguish this between mercy and grace?
  2. What can you learn from this story? How would you apply this in and through your own life?
- 
1. What are the three main expressions of mercy from this Beatitude? Which one do you resonate most clearly with and why? Which one would you find most challenging?
  2. Do you find it hard to forgive people? Do you find it difficult to extend mercy to them? What prevents you from doing this? How could you do this?
  3. Do you invite others into Chi Alpha? Are you merciful to them? What prevents you from doing this? In what ways is this preventing them from finding mercy? What kind of mercy may they find if they were invited in?
  4. What is the reward of living mercifully according to Jesus' word in this Beatitude? Do you sometimes feel like you live for the reward more than the act of living mercifully? How can you confront this?



## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

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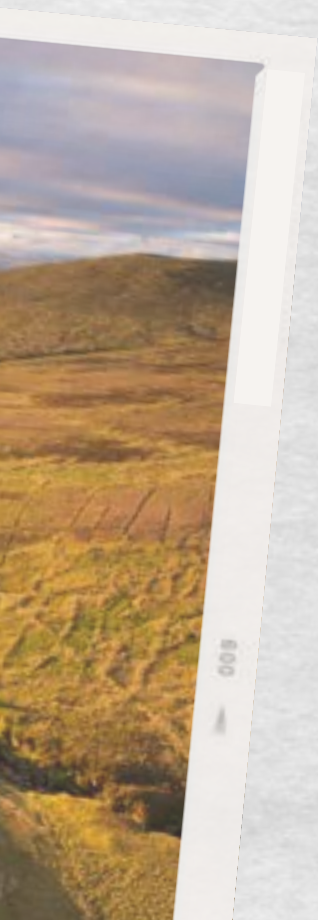
This week, take time to think about your relationships. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to any where you hold unforgiveness toward that person. Ask the Holy Spirit to show the effect, or impact of that unforgiveness on your life. How is it affecting your thoughts, emotions and actions? Ask the Lord to forgive you (you may not feel it and that's ok) and audibly forgive the individual (again you may have negative or no feelings attached to this and that's ok). Find someone you trust within Chi Alpha and begin to walk a life of freedom through forgiveness of them - give them the mercy they don't deserve but they need.





## PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION FOR THE WEEK

As a core group, think about the three examples of mercy tied to this beatitude (financially helping the poor/forgiving others/inviting the outside into this community) and develop a clear and simple plan as to how you will live out these three together. Decide how you can help someone or a group of people financially; each of you consider how to forgive someone and to hold one another accountable for this; and finally put a clear plan in place as to how to invite someone into your core group.







## *The Pure in Heart*

*Matthew 5:8*

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

Matthew 5:8

### PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT

This is one of the more obscure and ambiguous of the Beatitudes when we first read it. However, careful study opens up the depth and richness of what Jesus is saying to us through this one. What does it mean by ‘pure in heart?’ And how can we ‘see God?’

Who is pure in heart? We can confer with **Psalm 24:3-4** and **Psalm 51:10** to begin to guide us in this. The heart here is the word **kardia** in Greek. It is important to state the significance of the use of the word heart here. In the ancient culture of Jesus the place of our deep emotions was not our heart but in fact the bowels. Thus, the use of the word heart here distinguishes it from our seat of deepest emotions. So what is being referred to? It is not their emotions, per se, but their inner self, their place of desires and longings. If we take a moment to pause we can see there is a clear distinction between both.

We will see that the pure in heart has three parts: the pure in heart continually surrender their inner world to God (especially their thoughts about sex); the pure in heart single-mindedly seek God; and the pure in heart walk with integrity before those around them.

Thus, we can begin by realizing that the pure in heart are those whose longings and desires align with God. In other words, they are those who have surrendered, have died to, their disordered loves and disordered desires. Often we are thinking about the idols in our life. What are our idols? They are the things we think about a lot! They are what we give our thought, our emotions, our time towards. They can often be good things but the problem is they go from being a good thing to being the ultimate thing.



We can consider our academics as a good example. We all would agree that they are a good thing and we work hard at them. However, when we begin to live a life of comparing how we did against others and have a sense of jealousy or envy then it is becoming an idol. Or when we devote a disproportionate amount of our time to a paper or an exam at the expense of reading scripture, or praying, and being in community then it is becoming an idol. Or if we are devastated when we do badly in an exam, instead of feeling a sense of disappointment, then these are the signs that a good thing has now become the ultimate thing. In other words, our loves are now disordered and our desires are misaligned. The pure in heart are those who can see this and re-order their love, their life and their desires to first center on God and then everything else comes behind this.

We can further unpack the notion of 'pure in heart' outlined by Jesus in this Beatitude. We have already seen that the pure in heart are constantly surrendering their lives to Jesus, to listen to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit, to recenter their lives around Jesus. However, this notion of pure in heart has an additional focus on our thoughts towards sex and sexual purity. The connotation of this beatitude is that, for each of us, in the midst of putting Jesus first, we will have a special focus on surrendering our sexual thoughts and desires to God.

At the heart of this first component of being pure in heart is the idea that through reordering our desires and longings around Jesus (and all that this encompasses) we will continuously be sanctified and made right before God. The notion of sanctification is one we have already raised, however we need to revisit it here: it is the idea that when we began following Jesus a puncti-linear event took place. We were immediately made right by God and in a mystical and heavenly sense we are clean and pure, that is, we are sanctified, yet because we continue to walk through a broken and sin-full world we must be progressively sanctified. That is, as we continue to pursue God and allow Him to re-order our longings and desires we continue to become more like Jesus in our thoughts and words and deeds, in other words, we are progressively sanctified. This process will never be fully completed until Jesus returns.

There is a second component to the pure in heart: they single mindedly seek God. This idea has already been touched on however it is the desire of each follower of Jesus to choose to pursue God and to allow him to change their inner life by his word and his Spirit. The desire to come to God regularly, daily, and allow him to speak to our lives through scripture and through the power of the Holy Spirit should become our single minded pursuit. This doesn't mean it's easy or that we are somehow not a Christian if we don't but the pure in heart are those who desire this.

Within this desire to seek God is the desire to seek the things of God in this world: compassion, justice and kindness. Once more we see that Jesus is unpacking for us what it means to 'love God, love our neighbor.' When we seek God and we find Him he changes our desires to align with His thus we begin to pursue compassion, justice and kindness as they are the heart of God.

The final component of the pure of heart is that they are people of integrity. In other words, their inner and outer worlds align. By this point we should be noticing a thread in this Beatitude - Jesus is looking for our inner world of desires and longings to reflect his desires and longings and that through this we will live completely, wholly, in other words with integrity, before those who meet every day. That is, our neighbors whether they are local or global.

What would this look like? It is when our yes is yes and our no is no. It is when we are compassionate, kind, honest and loving. When there is no duplicity or hypocrisy in who we are. When there are no 'masks worn' before people depend upon who they are. This is, the pure in heart.



And what is the reward or reversal of this Beatitude? This time there is a clear reward, it is difficult to manipulate this into a reversal of what is happening in the world. The reward, Jesus says, is that we will see God. But how can this be? Scripture teaches us that no one has ever seen God's face. Yet this is confusing because other places imply that God has been seen. The consensus is that God has never been fully seen so what are we to make of the promise given by Jesus in this Beatitude?

Scholars suggest there are two clear ways we 'see God' as the result of this Beatitude. Firstly, when we single mindedly seek God our times of intimacy and communion with Him reveal him to us. That is, we are more certain of his voice, of his leading. We have a clearer revelation of who he is in scripture. Or, we can say that we see him more clearly - we see God. Secondly, the more we are transformed by God as we are progressively sanctified and we walk with integrity then we will actually see God in those around us. We have a fuller comprehension of the fact that everyone is made in the image of God and when attributes are manifest in those around us that reflect or mirror who God is then we see God.

This Beatitude isn't for the faint of heart, it requires a whole life pursuit of God yet the reward is that we will see God more clearly than we could ever imagine

## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

1. Before this study, what would you have understood by the idea 'pure in heart?'
2. Do you think we live in a culture that believes people could be 'pure in heart?' Take some time to unpack this and think of movies, books, and media that would speak to this (either for or against).
3. The first component of being pure in heart is to have our loves, our longings and our desires reordered around God.
4. In all honesty, what consumes your thoughts the most? What do you devote your time and attention to? Why are you doing this and what are you hoping for?
5. What do you think may be the idols in your life and why? What evidence is there that they may be an idol?
6. Do you think Yale's culture reinforces idols in your life? How can you counter this?
7. How do you think you would go about realigning your desires around God? What would this cost you? Would you be willing to pay this cost?
8. What do you think it means to 'single-mindedly seek God?' Do you think that's attainable or achievable? Does it sound fantastical? What are two small steps you could take to begin to see this come to pass in your own life?
9. Would you say you're a person of integrity? Do you sometimes wear a mask in public? What makes you do this? Who is it for?
10. How could you become a person of integrity?



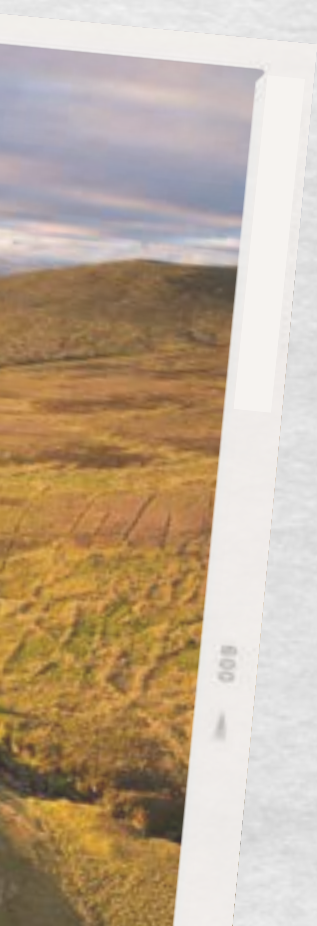


## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

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Which of the three components of the pure in heart do you think you struggle with the most (disordered longings and desires/single-mindedly pursuing God/lacking integrity between your inner (private) and outer (public) world)?

Choose one of these and pray for God to begin to change this. Share your prayer need with someone in your core group so that they can pray with you and walk with you.







Matthew 5:9

## *The Peacemakers*

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

Matthew 5:9

### PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT

We come to the second to last Beatitude and we see that this too is focused on how we love our neighbor. As we unpack this one we'll also understand that this has, at the heart of it, the need to love God too. We can only truly flourish as peacemakers when we are being transformed by God and know his peace within our own soul.

Take a moment to remember that these Beatitudes all begin with **'Blessed are,'** that is, you will find fulfillment, your soul will prosper and you will fully flourish when you live this way. Therefore, in this Beatitude we can say it as follows: **I am fully alive when I know peace both within my soul and then concomitantly work for peace with those around me.**

We must begin by considering the word used for peace in this Beatitude. It is the Greek word **eirene** which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word, **shalom**. Note that shalom isn't the absence of conflict but in fact the presence of wholeness and harmony. We have already noted that this has a twofold application: it begins with peace within ourselves married with working for peace with those around us.

So what is peace within ourselves? Premodern writers proposed that this begins with God making us right by Him. They referenced scriptures that speak of Jesus, 'breaking down the wall between God and us and becoming our peace.' It is clear from the New Testament writings that Jesus won for us peace with God and that he also is our peace. Therefore we can see that peace is at the heart of the Gospel. We now know that this peace is more than simply a sense of contentment but is the full appropriation of shalom - we are whole and have harmony because of what God has done in rescuing us.



Christian writers through history have noted that we cannot become the peacemakers we are called to be until we have tasted and known the peace that God gives us both through our salvation but also through his continuing work in our lives. As he progressively brings peace to every aspect of our soul we are no longer at war with ourselves and can flourish as peacemakers.

We see however that the word is not 'peacetakers' but 'peacemakers.' In other words, we are called not just to declare peace to others but to actively work for this peace.

The first form of peace we should work for is for others to know peace with God. When we have been given such a beautiful gift of having peace with God and knowing the freedom, joy and hope that it brings, this should compel us to do the same for those around us. Thus, our first role as peacemakers is to invite others into knowing God that they may know this peace too.

We can see that the circle then extends beyond this to our neighbors. We can all think of situations or relationships we are in where there is no peace. This may have been caused by ourselves or by others and wounds and hurt have ensued. As difficult as it is, we are called to pursue peace with them. This peace is not at the cost of truth: hurts and pains must be brought into the light and resolution must take place, but we are called to make peace. This can be a difficult process and requires the community of God to walk us through it.

Implicit within the idea of making peace is the idea of bringing God's justice into these moments too. We are called to make peace in situations that may not be directly relevant or related to our own lives but we can see injustice that God cares about redeeming. As peacemakers there will be moments where we will need to step in and see redemption through our peace making.

And what is the reward or reversal of this? Jesus says that will be called the children of God. What does this mean? Culturally to be called the son or daughter of someone meant that you reflected and embodied their attributes and characteristics and this is the meaning here. When we live as peacemakers and as this flows from all of the previous Beatitudes, it is clear that we reflect God. We are the embodiment of God before those around us thus we are called his children.





## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

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1. Before this study, how would you have defined 'peace' or the idea of being a 'peacemaker'?
2. Do you think our culture values peacemakers? Are there any conditions or boundaries to how our world defines peacemaking?
3. Would you say you're a 'peaceful' person? How would you describe what that means in your life?
4. Having now read the description of a peacemaker here, are you more likely to describe yourself as someone who likes to 'keep the peace' more than being a peacemaker? Are there limits to your peace making?
5. On reflection, do you think you have the peace of God in your life? What does that mean and what does it look like?
6. Are you willing to invite others to have that peace too? How would you describe it to them? How might they resist the invitation?
7. Can you think of any situations at this moment where you need to be a peacemaker? Is that with someone in your own life (family, friends, classmates etc) or do you need to act as peacemaker on behalf of another at this time? What help do you need?

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

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Take some time to invite God into areas of your life where there is no peace. Practice moments of silence where you ask the Holy Spirit to speak to these areas and submit to what you feel the Lord is leading you to do. Share this next week in your core group but keep submitting and confessing until you sense the peace of God.

Secondly, take time to ask God if there are any relationships in your life that need peace and you need to be the peacemaker. This can be difficult to think about and to do. Make sure you invite people in to walk with you and pray with you who can be of great benefit in this moment.







## *Those Who are Persecuted*

*Matthew 5:10-11*

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you...”

Matthew 5:10-11

### **PREAMBLE AND CONTEXT**

We come to the final Beatitude and there are some important preliminary notes we need to make. Firstly, it may be argued that this is in fact two separate Beatitudes. The consensus of Christian thinkers through history is that it is one, they are tied together. Secondly we note that the reward of this Beatitude is that of the first – the Kingdom of Heaven. It is as if Jesus is tying it all together – the beginning and end of living like this is to see and know God’s rule and reign in our lives both now and forevermore – but not only in us but in the world around us.

It shouldn’t be a surprise for us that this final beatitude follows on from the previous one yet at a superficial level it may seem contradictory. Why is it that when we pursue peace and make peace with those around us, and seek the justice of God in our communities and in our world that we should be persecuted? Shouldn’t it be the other way around? Shouldn’t we see peace?

We must appreciate that though we pursue peace, not everyone is going to receive it. We can think of circumstances or situations in our own lives, or those we have observed, where reconciliation hasn’t taken place even when it was fought for. Sometimes people will continue to be unforgiving, or unwilling to reconcile. This should never stop us from pursuing it however knowing that it may not happen helps shatter any illusion we have that it will automatically be a ‘happy ending.’



But what is the persecution that is spoken of in this Beatitude? There are several things we should note and take into consideration. Firstly, it is clear that Jesus says persecution will come because we pursue righteousness. But what is the righteousness he is referring to? It is believed to be more than one thing. It is the most commonly held belief of ancient Christian writers and apologists that righteousness refers to the fact that we will choose to live all seven of the preceding Beatitudes. And by living them out in our lives we will be persecuted. Pause for a moment to consider how that may come to pass. As we choose to mourn over the sin in the world we will rise up to speak against it and others may push back on us. As we seek to bring peace that we spoke of above it may not be universally accepted. Or as we live counter-culturally and choose to be self-controlled (meek) and not always win an argument or 'have the last word' we will be taken advantage of or have power wielded against us. In other words, when we look at each of the first seven beatitudes and take our time to think through the implications of choosing to live them then we are most likely going to be persecuted.

At the root of this is the fundamental idea that living as a Christian in this world means our words and deeds may jar those around us. When we react in ways that we're not expected to, or that the world would applaud or value, then the contrast between how we choose to speak and act should make us stand out. Many of the early Christian theologians considered the fact that if someone's life wasn't under a degree of persecution it led to the question: are you living any differently from those around you?

Throughout the history of the church, however, there was a careful emphasis on what is meant by persecution and this is still true for us today. Here in America many would argue that there is arduous or perpetual persecution for the church. There are hindrances and obstacles but when compared to the persecution of Christians in countries around the world it is markedly easier here. Thus, there should be a note of caution in using the word 'persecution' here. However, that doesn't mean our lives should look the same as those around us who aren't Christian. It is abundantly clear from this Beatitude that our lives should look different from those around us. This doesn't mean that we don't have to loudly proclaim we are Christian but that, if we're living the Beatitudes on a daily basis, our lives would proclaim we are Christian. That is, our words, deeds and actions would be going in a very different direction from our suitemates and peers that they would turn their heads to see where we're going.

And we come to the final reward - yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. We considered this notion in our first Beatitude - what is the Kingdom of Heaven? And we learned that it is the rule and reign of God in our lives and through our lives. As we live these Beatitudes God forms his rule and reign in us but that then spills out from us to those around us. It is a both/and concept. We are truly loving God and loving our neighbor.

And when does this Kingdom come? Again, we learned in the first week that it is both now and then. As we walk through this world we will see the rule and reign of God work in us and through us today? What does that look like? It is when prayers are answered and situations change. Or when our prayers result in people being physically or mentally healed. Or when we see God manifest peace, hope, joy and forgiveness in our lives. And on it goes. We see the glimpses of that which is to come here and now. We realize that it's only glimpses, it's like the sun rising in the morning. We can see parts but not the whole. Not every prayer is answered the way we expect it to. Not everyone is healed, not everyone is delivered, forgiveness is not always received. But we hold on to the hope that God's ultimate rule and reign will come in its fullness when he returns. Then the sun will fully rise and we'll see clearly like we've never seen before. Our call at this time is to live out these Beatitudes now so that others can begin to see God's rule and reign in them today.



## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS AND CONSIDER

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1. What do you understand by the word, 'persecuted'?
2. Do you think Christians are 'persecuted' for their faith in America?
3. What does this Beatitude teach us about why Christians would be persecuted?
4. Take some time to unpack in detail why living out the Beatitudes may result in you being persecuted?
5. Have you ever had a situation where someone hasn't reciprocated forgiveness when you've asked for it. Have you ever been the one that's withheld forgiveness? Are you willing to share this situation and what happened?
6. As Christians, how can we walk with integrity when someone doesn't forgive us or continues to be mean towards us? Have you experienced that or are you experiencing it now? How can your core group walk with you through this moment?
7. Do you think you live differently from those around you? Does your lifestyle contrast theirs? If they do, can you explain what that looks like? If they don't, do you think you're living the Beatitudes on a daily basis?
8. Take some time to discuss how you can live out the Beatitudes without having to say, "I'm a Christian."
9. What do you understand about the concept, 'the Kingdom of Heaven'?
10. Can you think of ways that you see the 'Kingdom of Heaven' in your life? What does that look like?







*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

**Romans 12:2**