

## Study Guide for August 12, 2018

**Readings:** Matthew 5:1-12; Luke 6:20-23

**Theme:** The Beatitudes

This week we're going to do things a little differently. It's always good to change perspectives as we dive to the unexpectedness of God's love and grace. A good place to start is the Beatitudes, or blessings of Jesus that are found in two of the gospels.

In Matthew's Gospel, these eight proverb-like proclamations kick off Jesus' ministry. You'll notice Luke only uses four of them but follows them up with four "woes" that mirror the blessings. This week's message focuses on Matthew's account, from The Message translation because I love how the author brings these blessings into our life today. I've added the New Revised Standard Version to compare.

The Beatitudes are set up in an interesting way. Each consists of two phrases: the condition and the result. In almost every case the condition is from familiar Old Testament context, but Jesus teaches a new interpretation. Together, the Beatitudes present a new set of Christian ideals that focus on a spirit of love and humility different in orientation than the usual force and exaction taken. They echo the ideals of the teachings of Jesus on mercy, spirituality, and compassion.

It could be argued that in these statements we get the theme of Jesus' earthly ministry. That is to say Jesus is concerned with restoring humans so that things are made right again in God's righteousness.

In his book *The Jesus Creed*, Scott McKnight speaks of the beatitudes and what they still apply to us today. McKnight reminds us that, "What distinguishes a follower of Jesus is someone who is living out a love that upholds the value of justice for the hungry, the thirsty, the estranged, the unclothed, the sick, and imprisoned. From the beginning of his ministry to his resurrection and ascension, Jesus never stopped caring for those who the system seemed to always overlook."

**Prayer:** I commit myself to you again today, Lord Christ, so that I might not merely receive your blessings but become a blessing for others to find you. Amen.

**1. Read:** Matthew 5:3; Proverbs 13:7, 19:1

**NRSV:** "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

**MSG:** "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

**Q:** Luke and Matthew speak of poverty differently. One suggests an inward state of poverty or lacking, while the other is an outward poverty like that of a beggar on the street. Where are you the most poor and can you find hope in Jesus' words?

**2. Read:** Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:11

**NRSV:** “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

**MSG:** *“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.*

**Q:** From Mother Theresa to Mahatma Gandhi being meek has been praised by all kind of people both inside and outside the church. How do you identify with the “meek” and in what ways has Jesus guided you?

**3. Read:** Matthew 5:7; Isaiah 58; Psalm 145:9; Hebrews 4:6; Matthew 25:31-46

**NRSV:** “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

**MSG:** *“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.*

**Q:** Mercy is a key theme throughout the bible; caring to the material needs of others as well as the spiritual. In the two readings above what stands out as different and as the same? How might Jesus help you to be more “care-full”?

**4. Read:** Matthew 5:9; Romans 14:19; Genesis 13:8-9; Isaiah 53

**NRSV:** “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

**MSG:** *“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.*

**Q:** Jesus taught that peacemaking is key to doing God’s will. It is a direct by-product of the greatest commandments to love God and others. Where do you still make war? And how might Jesus influence you to seek peace with others?

**5. Read:** Matthew 5: 8; Psalm 24:3-5

**NRSV:** “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

**MSG:** *“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

**Q:** Purity is another big theme in the Bible. Jesus will clash with the religious leaders and question their idea of inward and outward cleanliness. What does it mean to you to be pure in heart? How did Jesus show it in his words and deeds?

**6. SLOW READ: Psalm 24** Try to picture all the ways God has blessed you in life.

**Prayer:** I commit myself to you again today, Lord Christ, so that I might not merely receive your blessings but become a blessing for others to find you. Amen.

## **Matthew 5:1-12 from the Message translation.**

When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

“Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.