

# THE BEATITUDES



**Enter in to poverty, mourning, meekness, hunger,  
mercy, purity, peacemaking, & persecution.  
There-in you will find life for your soul.**

By  
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## CONTENTMENT

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

*Matthew 5:3*

The poor in spirit describes those who are able to have a lot and enjoy it, yet also have little and be content because God is the object of their worship. Sounds simple, doesn't it? I can easily trick myself into thinking I've arrived. If I live in plenty, I think, *"I don't need all this. I would do just fine with less."* But, it's safe to make such a statement when it isn't tested. Conversely, if I'm poor, I can turn up my nose at those with money and declare, *"What waste! Who needs all that?"* My pride is self-protective. Carnality is rampant.

Jesus asks me to confront my fragile self-esteem. I must peel away the pride, the fear, until all I have left is the naked woman who stands before God with empty hands. When there's complete transparency and the refusal to play any mind games, can I say like Job...*"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away----"* without any trace of bitterness? Not without considerable spiritual work.

How does a person get to that point? How can it really be okay to have nothing? And, perhaps even more difficult, how could I be wealthy without wrapping my arms too tightly around all the 'stuff'? Perhaps it boils down to the greatest commandment, according to Jesus. Perhaps it is the cure-all for all our spiritual diseases. *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind."* Love is a heart thing. I can't feel affection for something or someone unless my heart is engaged. That won't happen without spending time with the object of my love.

I've heard it said that my greatest need is not to *be* loved, but *to* love God. As I love God I am healed in every way. I am cured of my worldly appetites, including the cravings for self-satisfaction. I come to understand that I live in want of God's grace, mercy, and favor. It becomes clear to me that if I am to stretch out my arms to receive anything, let it be from His hands. I'll never be disappointed.

*I've been tricked before. I gave up on life and thought I was 'poor in spirit.' I wasn't. My hope wasn't in You for I had no hope! Today, You are everything to me and I sigh with contentment. Amen.*

## **MOURNING IS OUR FRIEND**

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

***Matthew 5: 4***

The word 'blessed' means 'exalted'. Mourners will not only be comforted, but exalted too, according to Jesus. How can it be that He offers such a great reward to those who mourn? Exaltation is such an unexpected return. If man had written the beatitudes, a sampling might have offered this advice, "*If you approach life with a good attitude, it will yield you years of happiness.*" Leave it to Jesus to marry the words 'mourn' and 'exalt'. It leaves me searching for His wisdom, for I have no insight without it.

Mourning, left unfinished, either turns a heart to stone or makes a spirit angry. Do you live life as though holding your breath, not daring to feel the pains of life? Others say you are stoic, seemingly unfeeling. Chances are you are also missing out on the pleasures of feeling joy!

Or, perhaps you are one who has turned cynical, whose every commentary on life spills out as criticism or judgment. Most likely there is unfinished grief. When hard times hit, grief was too frightening to face. Perhaps there were no safe arms to turn to, no one with whom you could share your tears. A steely resolve was put firmly in place. Now, significant time has passed and it has become harder to resurrect the painful issues.

If your grief is a past one, ask God to gently pierce the wound so that the tears may flow. Mourning is to our spirit like the current in a stream. It keeps it from stagnating. We empty ourselves of the pain, the stuff that poisons us if left unexpressed. If we need a roadmap for how to grieve, we need only turn to the Psalms. David, and others, provides a roadmap for the journey. There we find declarations of despair, anger, cries for justice, but always culminations in varied expressions of faith.

***Show me, Holy Spirit, if I need to re-visit some painful places. Amen.***

## **STAYING COOL IN THE HEAT OF THINGS**

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

***Matthew 5: 5***

Meekness is the achievement of staying calm no matter what. If being attacked, I keep my head, avoid becoming inflamed, and either stay silent or respond with a soft answer. It is to be cool when others are hot. This does not mean becoming spineless. Jesus didn't die to make me nice, necessarily. He drew me to Him so I could become like Him; gracious, yet a passionate champion of the Truth. One that stays calm in the midst of intense situations.

Does that mean I won't experience pain at the hand of others? No. But what it *does* mean is that I won't be inflamed to sin with my response. Only as I learn to live within the embrace of God's Spirit can I achieve this. What is the reward for cultivating this kind of relationship with God, one where meekness is a natural outcome? I'm given an early inheritance, true enjoyment of God's gifts on earth.

Meekness opens the door to that joy. A bitter heart or an anxious spirit fails to have the capacity to enjoy even the most pristine vacation spot. That's because joy is an exclusive experience. Once crowded upon with fear, anger, or anxiety, it is put out of reach.

Heaven will be a place of joy, but abundant life is also available here. I don't want to miss out on any part of it. I trust Jesus when He tells me that meekness unlocks the door to earthly delights.

***The injustices of today will be insignificant shadows in eternity. Give me divine composure for all I will experience today. As I let go of all offenses, open my heart to experience joy. Amen.***

## NECESSARY FOR LIFE

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*Matthew 5:6*

There are two physical realities that I can count on everyday. I will be hungry, therefore I'll eat. I'll be thirsty, and I will drink. Food and water are as necessary for life as breathing. If I'm hungry, food is all I can think about. It is all consuming.

Does 'hunger and thirst' describe my spiritual appetite? Life in this world can numb their aching sensations. Instead of hungering for more of Jesus, I am often a curiosity seeker, a woman mildly interested in knowing Him better. I browse bookstores, inquisitive to see what's new on the shelves. I go to worship celebrations, more to enjoy the musicianship of the band than the chance to worship. Jesus promises that my soul will be filled only if I hunger and thirst. I must long for spiritual realities so deeply that I feel I won't survive without them.

These days, my hunger is alive and well. My heart is alive to God; the stresses in my life numerous. I don't dare start the day without seeking for a filling of my soul. Curling up in my favorite chair, spending time being still in my Father's embrace is the only way I will be able to live out of the overflow of His love. Without that time, I will am an actress; playing the part of a well-adjusted Christian woman, but one whose soul is parched.

Jeremiah captured God's intentions another way. *"I satisfy the weary ones and refresh everyone who languishes." Jeremiah 31:25*

If you are living your life under the strain of weariness, and if you languish for a sense of well-being, there is good news. There's food. Plenty of it. A banquet table of exquisite delights awaits, laden with food prepared by the Master of the house. No one who dines there ever leaves hungry.

*I praise You for every disappointment and failure, for they have awakened my hunger for You. They are gifts in disguise., leading me to love and truth. Amen.*

## COMPASSION ON WHOM

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

*Matthew 5: 7*

If we are merciful to those around us, mercy will be returned to us when we need it. The opposite is also true. Be unmerciful, and you will be alone in your time of need.

I have seen this sad story played out many times. Consider this common scenario. A parent who raised their child without mercy reached the end of their life. And when they are old, fragile in health and mind, their child fails to reach out to them as a way of subconsciously exacting revenge. I recall an old mother saying to her estranged son, "Who taught you to treat others this cruelly?" Her son replied without emotion, "You did, Mama. You did!"

Jesus promises that we will be happy if we are generous with our compassion. Though I have the spiritual gift of mercy, I need the Holy Spirit's empowering everyday to correctly use it. Without Him, I will only reach out to those I feel deserve it. I will only be moved toward those who suffered at the hands of others, or who lived a good life yet fell on hard times. I won't have mercy for someone who has reaped a lifetime of sin. "They are getting what they deserve," I'll rationalize. And for another who commits a heinous crime, I'll have no desire to see them come to Jesus for their own healing. Especially if that person sinned against me or someone I love. Without the Holy Spirit's work in my life, my mercy for others fails to be supernatural and noteworthy.

In God's Kingdom, mercy is given to those who need it. Mercy hears another's story. Mercy validates their pain and allows them to grieve. It wipes their tears. It has pity on those who are ignorant and live void of wisdom. Mercy gives instruction instead of judgment.

As with every kingdom principle, I am impotent to manufacture it on my own. Jesus knows that and is pleased to see us throw up their hands and say, "I can't do this!" That's where the journey of divine mercy begins.

***I can't do this, Jesus. But You can. Work in me today to see others as You see them. I'll be Your hands of mercy. Amen***

## PURE

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

*Matthew 5: 8*

I have often lived my life as if Jesus said, "*Blessed is the perfect performer, for she shall see God.*" I have thought that if I acted pure, I must be pure. How naive.

Jesus underscores, in this comprehensive beatitude, that knowing God is achieved by way of the heart. Always has been, but many of us keep changing it as though it were about all about behavior instead. We'd much rather learn God's truths through studying the Bible as if it were a textbook, then modify our actions, and call ourselves holy. It doesn't work that way. Good deeds don't equal purity of heart.

Furthermore, being pure of heart doesn't mean having a *perfect* heart. That's good news because about the time I read the verse, I feel a hopeless sense of inadequacy. I know that I'll never be pure, (as in *perfect*), on this earth. I want to throw up my hands and quit. I must understand that Jesus is talking about being committed; sincerely wanting to be like Him and being disappointed when my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors fall short. It means embracing Him as more valuable than any other treasure. It means reaching a point where He defines my passion and nothing or no one else will do.

So why am I often driven to make it about performance rather than relationship? Because I can usually generate goodness, even with a corrupted heart. Concentrating on outward behavior is easier than the rigorous work of introspection, directed by the Holy Spirit. I cringe when I have to face my own depravity. I should know better. When I raise unholy arms to Jesus, His perfect love envelopes me. True redemption happens from the inside out.

*Help me understand that as You change my heart, my behavior will change. I will be authentic. Free me from the treadmill of trying to be good. Amen*

## A THANKLESS JOB

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

*Matthew 5: 9*

I used to think I was a peacemaker. It was a shock when I realized I wasn't. I hid behind the title because I was afraid to take a stand for righteousness. I feared anger, despised conflict, and because of that, tried to mend the stress around me anyway I could. This is not what Jesus meant when he blessed those who preserve peace.

Actually, becoming a peacemaker often puts me in the center of the stress, not removes me from it. When others are delighting in making disparaging comments about another, I am called to advocate for the person being maligned. Perhaps I'll be nudged to bring up their sterling qualities and even express displeasure that such a lynching is taking place at their expense. I know this that playing the part of a peacemaker in a situation like I've just described is not easy. I'll never win a popularity contest for recovering peace when peace was broken.

Deciding to follow Jesus and become someone who restores the unity between offending parties can be a thankless office. There will be attacks from both sides, as each claim that I appear to be against them. But God's Spirit whispers to me, in the midst of the scuffle and says, "Ah yes, you're My child! You're just like Jesus."

Jesus, who came to bring an end to enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles, to make all one under the sacrifice of His own blood, asks me to walk in His footsteps. He ate with sinners, He stood up for the outcast, He defended a woman at a dinner table who was the brunt of everyone else's comments, and He applauds me when I dare take a stand for righteousness. Today, I may see others throw stones at another. I may discern the unseen bruises from the blows. While others around me consider it a sport, Jesus aches for the wounded one's pain. He's asking me to notice, and even more, do something. I understand that to bring peace, I must first bring a sword and cut righteousness asunder.

*I am afraid. I don't like to stand-alone. It's not in my nature, but it is in Yours, Jesus. Live Your life through me. Amen*

## **YOU'VE GOTTA BE KIDDING!**

***Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

### ***Matthew 5: 11***

Jesus attended an event, one where I wasn't present, which allowed Him to make such a shocking statement. He was in heaven with His Father when the prophets died. He was there when they arrived and were introduced to the rewards that awaited them. He probably threw the party.

Because Jesus saw, firsthand, the joy that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others experienced, He can predict the same for us if we are mistreated. He tells us to rejoice when we face the hardships the prophets faced because He knows that we'll reap a future identical to theirs if we persevere through malignment, false rumors, and gross mis-judgment.

But excuse me for asking. What's the point of it all? Why is it necessary for us to endure these in the first place? Time wrestling with this text has led me to understand that it's about the cost of speaking on Jesus' behalf. Truth, pared down to its simplest form shakes up the arrogance of self-made religion. It shatters self-righteousness. It confronts pride. It smashes idols. It defies reasonable thinking. Whenever truth is presented, humility and faith are required. Anger is usually the initial response. People are indignant when the light of truth exposes their humanness. Retaliation is taken against the one who bore the message.

Is Jesus familiar with the repercussions of those who strike back? Yes, He personally lived through acts of treachery. Who could be a more perfect companion when rumors swirl around our heads? He is the only anchor in the fury of such a storm.

***You ask me to bear Your message. But oh, the cost. Help me. Amen***