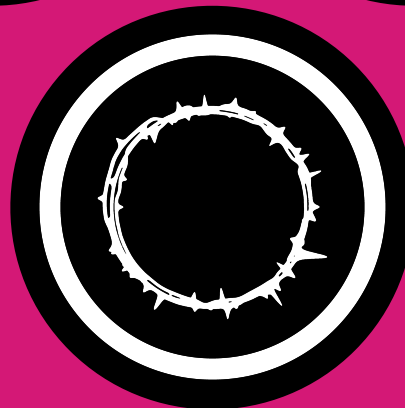


# WHAT TO BELIEVE

A Student's Guide to the Beatitudes



by  
**Taylor Drake**



## **SESSIONS**

- God's Morality
- Blessed: What's in a Word
  - Beatitude 1
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# GOD'S MORALITY

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What is God like?*

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## God's Character in Story

The Bible begins by describing God's activity in creating everything. God's existence is never argued or debated. Rather, He is always in the story since He is the main figure. There are three primary ways in Scripture we see God's character in action: 1) His Covenants, 2) His Laws, and 3) His Incarnation. The first way focuses on God's desire to have humanity partner with Him in his redemptive plan for Creation and everything in it. The second way focuses on establishing that no one is holy or good as God is and all are in need of salvation from sin and its consequences. The third way focusses on God (the Son) becoming Man as he shows us what He is like and how Humanity should/will be.

In all of these ways, culminating with Jesus Christ, God is revealed to be true, good, loving, patience, just, merciful, righteous, and faithful just to name a few. These characteristics are repeatedly emphasized throughout every book of Scripture, though not all receive the same attention in each book.

In fact, most of the critiques of God within and outside of Scripture from non-believers have more to do with "what God is like" and less to do with "does God exist." Consider what the serpent asked Eve in Genesis 3:1-7. Take a moment and read what the serpent is actually suggesting about God to Eve, and Adam who was there the whole time.

## God's Character in Law

Most of us think about how laws tell us what **NOT** to do. So, here's a question: what is the purpose of not letting us do certain things? Most times think of laws as restrictions and nothing more. However, when we think about what laws protect us from, it changes how we look at them. With God's laws, He is protecting us from death by providing us life. Obedience is a kind of safety.

God's laws can be summarized in two basic commands: love God with your entire being (body, soul, mind, etc.) and to love your neighbor as yourself. We love God through our obedience and we love our neighbor through our service to and for them. Since sin (rebellion and breaking from our relationship with God) leads to death, God's laws lead to life. Does this mean someone could obey God enough to earn forgiveness for their sins? No. Such a person is not loving God through obedience but is being obedient as a way to make God love them... which God already does! Again, they are obeying God their way rather than His way. Love for God leads to obedience of his commands without becoming legalistic and dogmatic about it.

So, God wants life for you and your neighbor, not death. What does that say about God's character?

## God's Character in Jesus' Teachings

Matthew focuses on Jesus as King through the line of David, Israel's most well known and loved king. Kings were responsible for establishing law and order while carrying out their systems of morality, or the distinctions between right and wrong or good and evil.

As the one-true King, Jesus re-establishes God's morality through his teachings...and it turned the world upside down. Even today, Jesus' teachings are counterintuitive...but that's the point. God's Kingdom doesn't work or look like any earthly kingdom ruled by man

## Before Moving On

Read the Beatitudes found in the Gospel According to Matthew 5:1-12 to prepare for the rest of this Study Guide's sessions.

# BLESSED: WHAT'S IN A WORD

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “bless” mean?*

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## “Bless” in Hebrew & Greek

if there is a list of “Most Used Christian Words,” *bless* would be one of them. We say “Bless you” when they sneeze or “Bless your heart” when we want to sound like we care and don’t know what to say. However, the Bible presents a very different understanding of this special word.

In Hebrew, there are two words we translate as “bless.” The first is *barak*, which has four primary meanings: 1) to kneel, 2) to congratulate, 3) to praise, or 4) to curse. This is the word used most often, and illustrates man’s adoration of God through submission via the symbolism of kneeling. The second is *esher*, which indicates a “state of happiness.” In other words, *esher* means that we “*will be happy*” if we follow God’s way of life.

In Greek, the word that is used in the Beatitudes sermon is *makarios*, pronounced “mak-ar’-ee-os.” It is translated as 1) happy, 2) blessed, or 3) to be envied, however, the literal meaning of *makarios* is “to be envied because of position” and suggests “the state of one who has become a partaker of God.”

## Happy in Salvation

It’s important to remember that the Christian is blessed, happy, fortunate, and to be envied because of our relationship with Christ. While we were once God’s enemies, alienated because of our rebellion, we were offered salvation through Christ’s death and resurrection. Now, our broken relationship has been restored. A Christian is loyal to and has trust in who Jesus is and what he has accomplished on our behalf.

However, this doesn’t mean we won’t have doubts, worries, concerns, or frustrations. We will all experience these and other emotions in our faith walk. Yet, all of these emotions are just that: emotions, and emotions are dangerous things to build anything upon. While happiness is an emotion, its origin isn’t based on our experiences but on Jesus’ death and resurrection. In other words, while doubts, worries, concerns and frustrations come from us, our happiness comes from Christ.

## Questions for Reflection:

1. What makes you happy?
2. Do “bad things” make you happy? If so, why?
3. Why is it important to know where our happiness comes from?



Cosimo Rosselli 1439 – 1507 “The Sermon on the Mount”

A fresco on the northern wall of the Sistine Chapel. It is part of the series on the life of Jesus.



# BEATITUDE 1

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “poor” mean?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*  
- **The Gospel According to Matthew 5:3, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*"Happy are those who humbly recognize their need for God,  
for they will enter into his kingdom."*

## What does this mean?

“Poor in spirit” has nothing to do with money. Instead, the poverty this beatitude is speaking of is spiritual. In other words, anyone who wants to be “poor of spirit” must recognize that they contribute nothing to their salvation. They have humbled themselves and strive to rid themselves of arrogance, self-righteousness, and self-dependence in their relationship with God. Everyone who wants to be a part of the “Kingdom of Heaven” must be spiritually poor since salvation is a gift from God.

However, this implies that neither the poor person nor the rich person will be excluded from heaven if they are “spiritually poor.” Money, wealth, fame, status, none of that matters since none of it can be used to gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Application

We must daily recognize our dependence on God for our salvation. This does not mean we can do whatever we want once we are “admitted” into the kingdom. Instead, we continue to repent (admit our sins and ask for forgiveness from God and our Neighbor) whenever we sin. We don’t become self-sufficient once we are saved from our sins. We are only empowered to live a life pleasing to God through the presence of the Holy Spirit as we imitate Christ.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why is thinking either “I’m good enough” or “I’m not good enough” the wrong questions about salvation?
2. How do we humble ourselves?
3. What can we do to practice “spiritual poverty?”



**Cecco del Caravaggio (1589–1620) “Christ Driving the Money-Changers from the Temple”**

This painting depicts men wearing “modern clothes” from the time of its creation to emphasize the message.



# BEATITUDE 2

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does "mourn" mean?*

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## Scripture

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

**- The Gospel According to Matthew 5:4, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*"Happy are those who mourn for their sins,  
for they shall receive forgiveness and life eternal."*

## What does this mean?

*Easy question:* Has **anyone** ever hurt **you**? What did **they** do?

*Harder question:* Have **you** ever hurt **anyone**? What did **you** do?

*Hardest question:* How do you respond to all the hurt?

As Christians, our hearts should be heavy with repentance because we recognize the consequences of our sins and the sins of others. Mourning, which is an expression of grief, is also a response to just how messed up the world is. We should be saddened because of the state of things and recognize that it is everyone's fault.

However, the issue is not "do you mourn" but "who do you mourn to?" For the Christian, we know that mourning is only for a while and that one day there will be no more hurt, pain, or tears. Until then, we mourn to God because He comforts us either through His presence, His Word, or His people. This means we do not mourn alone: as Christians, we mourn together, comforting one another as best as we can while recognizing that our role is not to "make things better" but to "love our neighbor."

Mourning is good and God is our comforter.

## Application

We must daily confess (tell the truth about) our sins. However, as Christians, we must also remind our selves that because of Christ's death and resurrection, we have forgiveness for our disobedience against God. We should mourn when we do sin and be quick to repent, not only to God but to those we have wronged. By doing so, God's comfort will be more than a hopeful wish: it will be our reality.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why do we struggle to *mourn* for our sins?
2. How and why is *mourning* good for Christians?
3. What is God's response to *mourning*?
4. How should we respond when other people are *mourning*?



**Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337) "The Raising of Lazarus"**

Artists have attempted to illustrate Jesus' humanity, most apparent in the story of Lazarus' resurrection.



# BEATITUDE 3

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “meek” mean?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”*  
- **The Gospel According to Matthew 5:5, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who submit to Jesus as Lord,  
for they will receive what is God’s.”*

## What does this mean?

*Meekness* is often thought to mean weakness. However, this is far from what the word actually means. Instead, *meek* means “strength under control.” The idea is that everyone has power somehow in some way. So, rather than asking “Am I strong?” the real question is “How do I use my strength?” or the more difficult question “On whom do I use my strength?” The differences between these questions are important.

At its most basic understanding, Jesus is painting a picture of strong people practicing and perfecting self-control. We should all know our strengths...and our weaknesses. For the Christian, when we submit our strengths under God’s direction and guidance through the Holy Spirit, only then will we be truly Christ-like. Only then will our *meekness* be our strength. The beauty of this beatitude is what it promises: if we become like Christ, we will receive what is Christ’s. And just what is Christ’s? An obedient love for the Father and a servant love for our neighbor.

## Application

We are who we imitate. There are many “idols” and “celebrities” and “artists” that we look up to and want to be like. Yet, as Christians, we are expected to be like Christ, and we should want to be like Christ. However, we cannot be like Christ without knowing who he is and what He is like. The good news is that the Holy Spirit helps us be Christ-like by changing from who we were to who we should be.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In what areas are you strong?
2. Why is meekness often considered a weakness?
3. Who are some people you idolize or imitate?
4. In what ways can you be meek?
5. Why is the Holy Spirit important in our meekness?



**Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1794–1874) “Jesus Drives Out the Devil”**  
From: *The Bible in Pictures – A series of wood engravings*, 1860.





# BEATITUDE 4

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What do we desire?*

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## Scripture

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

**- The Gospel According to Matthew 5:6, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*"Happy are those who passionately desire Christ,  
for he will satisfy them."*

## What does this mean?

What do you want? What do you long for? What do think will make you happy? What do you think will give your life meaning and purpose? These questions and others like them are universal: everyone has asked or will ask them in one way or another. However, there are two underlying assumptions that all of these questions are built upon.

First, that there is something that can satisfy us.

Second, that we can be satisfied, or even more direct, we were made to be satisfied by something.

For the Christian, we must consider what the answers are to the above questions. Hopefully, we can honestly answer them and those answers point to Christ. However, it is more likely that we will have to daily exchange our sinful desires of self-preservation, self-satisfaction, and self-elevation for Christ-preservation, Christ-satisfaction, and Christ-elevation. Sometimes, what makes us happy shouldn't. Sometimes, what we are filled with is disgusting and we need to be emptied and refilled with what is good. That goodness can only come from Christ.

## Application

We become what we desire. As Christians, we must daily submit our desires to God knowing that He gives us the desires of His heart. One day, God's desires and our desires will be the same, not because God has changed his tastes and preferences, but because our's have conformed to His. This will take time, but by the Holy Spirit's empowering presence, it is possible.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What makes you happy?
2. Why and how can our desires be wrong or sinful?
3. What were you made for?
4. How does Christ satisfy our desires?



Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) "The Last Supper (Il Cenacolo)"

Perhaps the most famous depictions of Jesus and the disciples, shown dining the Passover meals.



# BEATITUDE 5

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What is “mercy”?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”*  
- **The Gospel According to Matthew 5:7, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who show mercy God’s way,  
for that is what they get in return.”*

## What does this mean?

We’ve all heard the phrase “what goes around comes around.” This idea is found all throughout Scripture: what you do to others they’ll likely do to you, i.e. sowing and reaping.

Then, something amazing happens. God tells us to treat others better than how we’ve been treated. God changes our idea of *mercy* by showing us what his *mercy* is like. He does this through the Cross, where Jesus saves us from the powers of sin, death, Hell, and the Devil by taking our rightly earned punishment for our disobedience against God. God’s *mercy* looks like forgiveness, compassion, kindness, meekness, and defending the weak. God’s *mercy* reminds us of what we cannot do and what God will and won’t do.

As Christians, we are not commanded to have *mercy* on others “our way” but God’s way, and this is hard. *Mercy* is not the opposite of justice; *mercy* interrupts justice. In other words, God’s good *mercy* interrupts His good justice to reveal His compassion. There are times for mercy and times for justice, and, as Christians, we need to listen to God on when to do which and why.

## Application

We show people what our God is like. So, the question is “Do people know the real Jesus from what I say and do?” If we have to tell people we’re Christians so they know we are Christians, we may not truly be loving God and our neighbor. *Mercy* does not excuse evil or wrongdoings, but it does provide a graceful moment of potential repentance and reconciliation.

## Questions for Reflection

1. How is God *merciful*?
2. Why is *mercy* so difficult for us?
3. When is the right time for *mercy* and when is the right time for justice?



Artist Unknown “Jesus Christ Heals the Blind Man”



# BEATITUDE 6

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “pure of heart” mean?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*  
- **The Gospel According to Matthew 5:8, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who have been cleaned from the inside out,  
for they will see God.”*

## What does this mean?

In the Bible, the *heart* represented a person’s will, or the place of their being where they make choices. Non-Christians do not have *pure hearts* because they have not repented of their sins and their *hearts* are still set against God. Only repentance of sins and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord will produce a *pure heart*. Even then, we don’t purify our own *hearts*: God the Holy Spirit does this for us. Rather than *pure heart*, perhaps *purified heart* better grasps this divine and Biblical truth.

With a *purified heart*, we see God in two ways. First, in our everyday lives, where we meet God in Scripture, in prayer, with His people (The Church), and in the various circumstances of our lives where He gives us peace, when He strengthens us, or when He brings us conviction and discipline. Second, we are promised we will see Him after our deaths. At once, we are both seeing God now and will see Him then.

A *pure heart* desires to see God and to love God through obedience and service.

## Application

We live in an “already/not yet” tension as Christians. After our conversion, we already have *purified hearts*, but our hearts are not yet fully *pure*, as we will have to learn how to live out the Christian life. Our desires reveal the state of our *heart*, and as we continue to grow in our faith, we will discover just how deeply sin has infected our being. When our sins are revealed to us, this doesn’t mean we aren’t Christians, rather it means God is continuing to *purify* our “already/not yet” *purified hearts*.

## Questions for Reflection

1. What does it mean to *purify* something?
2. How does God *purify* our *heart*?
3. Are there things you desire that God doesn’t desire? What will you do?



Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) “Jesus Washing Peter’s Feet”



# BEATITUDE 7

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “peace” mean?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”*  
- **The Gospel According to Matthew 5:9, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who have peace with God,  
for they are like their Father.”*

## What does this mean?

For most of us, *peace* is the “absence of war.” While this is not a bad definition, *peace* is better defined as “to be unified” or “whole, as opposed to apart.” The absence of *peace* means there is conflict or a disconnection between individuals or groups for whatever reason. There is conflict everywhere and it seems that it is impossible to live without conflict of some kind.

However, God is the god of *Peace*. God desires *peace* between himself and Humanity. All throughout Scripture, we read how God actively seeks to bring *peace* to Creation. This is most clearly seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, where God provides the means by which we can have true *peace* with God. Sin has disconnected us from God, but, in His love, God has offered us forgiveness and reconciliation because we were the ones who broke the *peace* with God and we are unable to restore that *peace* on our own. True *peace* comes from living in “wholeness” with God, just how He originally intended us to be.

## Application

We live in a world that longs for *peace* as long as it doesn’t include God. Even in their sinful state, people want to end of national, military, and even local conflict, but this is impossible apart from God and his *peace*. As Christians, we have *peace* with God and are no longer under His wrath. So, we are to live out the *peaceful* life of the Christian faith with our neighbor. We are to be *peacemakers*, which means we will promote the Kingdom of God, reconcile adversaries, uniting those who are divided, promote understanding, and God’s true love between us and our neighbors.

## Questions for Reflection

1. In what areas of your life do you want *peace*?
2. Why is only God able to offer and provide true lasting *peace*?
3. What does *peace* look like with your neighbor?
4. Is *peace* possible between you and your enemies?



James He Qi (1951-Present) “Peace, Be Still”



# BEATITUDE 8

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “persecution” look like?*

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## Scripture

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”*

**- The Gospel According to Matthew 5:10, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who live out their faith regardless of the consequences,  
for they will receive what God has promised them.”*

## What does this mean?

It is easy to be faithful when our faith is accepted by our family, community, or nation. But when actual *persecution*, or hostility and ill-treatment, happens, that is when “faith meets reality” at its most organic state.

The Christian faith is not an easy faith. It is a faith that is counter-cultural, counter-intellectual, and counter-preservative: it calls for obedience, sacrifice, humility, vulnerability, community, and loyalty towards God, and the world hates this because it hates God.

However, God’s goodness is better than the world’s fun; His love is more powerful than the world’s hate. To be a Christian means to be hated by those who hate God. The Christian life will be full of hardships, but they are momentary. God demands we find our meaning, value, and purpose in God and nothing and no one else. Because the world screams at us to go against and from God, we should not be surprised when we are treated how Christ was treated during His earthly ministry.

Yet, if we are faithful throughout our life, no matter what happens, no matter the consequences, no matter what is done to us, we will receive what God has promised us as His Children: hope, peace, love, mercy, reconciliation, joy - to name a few. To be sure, we do not earn any of these by suffering *persecution*. No, we merely receive what God has promised us, trusting Him to be a “God” of his word.

## Application

If we follow the Beatitudes, as good as they sound, the world will expect or even demand that we separate them from God, which we cannot do. These are the “good works” that God calls us to do as followers of Christ; and they will be met with resistance and opposition. However, in these confrontations, something wonderful happens: the Gospel is made known. It is a fact that Christianity thrives and expands under *persecution*, though it is often one of the last things we want to have happen to ourselves or to others. So, when you are *persecuted* for your faith, what will you do?

## Questions for Reflection

1. Why do many American Christians claim to be *persecuted*?
2. What is *persecution* and what is it not?
3. Why do many claim they are being *persecuted* when they are not?
4. How is God glorified when we are *persecuted*?
5. How is our strength strengthened when we are *persecuted*?

# POST BEATITUDE

## Before you read

Ask yourself this question: *What does “bless” mean?*

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## Scripture

*“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.”*

**- The Gospel According to Matthew 5:11-12, NRSV**

## Modern Language

*“Happy are those who are rejected, ignored, belittled, harmed and lied about because they follow Jesus. Decide to be happy, for you will be given what you were promised, just like everyone else who has believed and followed God before you.”*

## What does this mean?

It seems weird to be told by Jesus that we should expect people to hate us for our good works. However, throughout His teachings, Jesus was constantly doing “God’s work” in a community that was anticipating God to work. Yet, the response to Jesus’ teachings ultimately led to His illegitimate trial and murder, all because He taught people what God was really like. Since Jesus is God the Son, by rejecting Jesus’ teachings and divinity, the people were rejecting God’s teachings and divinity; they wanted their god to be god their way.

So, Jesus was hated, defamed, slandered, despised, rejected, and ultimately murdered because He was doing God’s good work for his people. We should expect the same. Again, it’s a weird thing to anticipate, but the world hates God while wanting everything God has to offer as long as He isn’t included.

## Application

As Christians, we have a choice. Will we place our happiness in Jesus Christ or in something else? If our happiness is built up on Jesus, not matter what happens to us, we will not lose our joy, even in the worst moments and experiences.

## Questions for Reflection

1. Where will your happiness come from?



Wayne Pascall (Unknown) “Come Unto Me”

# AFTERWARD, OR NOW WHAT?

I hope this has been helpful. The point of the “**What to Believe**” publication series is to provide answers to students about their faith from a distinctly Pentecostal perspective.

My hope is that you will return to this Guide as you talk about Jesus with your neighbor and as you engage in those wonderful conversations.

So, now what?

Go & Tell, and do so in the confidence that God loves you enough to save you from what you could not save yourself from. Now, you get to tell your story, your distinct part in the great narrative of salvation and the Great Commission.

For more upcoming publications like this, visit [nhmiphc.com](http://nhmiphc.com).

*Dosvedanya and Blessings,*

Taylor Drake, *Series Author*

*4:12 Ministries Director for New Horizons Ministries*



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