

Turning Your Heart Toward God



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WATERBROOK MULTNOMAH PUBLISHING GROUP

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TURNING YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD
PUBLISHED BY WATERBROOK PRESS
12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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ISBN 978-0-307-45872-8
ISBN 978-0-307-45873-5 (electronic)

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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Printed in the United States of America
2010—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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TURNING YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD

Certain events and moments in time have changed the course of history. A few, a precious few, have even changed the course of eternity. Take for example the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His life changed not only history but even eternity.

Jesus' delivery of the Sermon on the Mount is one of those pivotal events. In what is now undoubtedly the most famous sermon in the world Jesus took righteousness to a whole new level, all in one fell swoop. He defined religion in a way that was then, and is still today, countercultural, radical, and even revolutionary.

The sermon itself can be preached word-for-word in eighteen minutes, but you could spend a lifetime studying it and never completely search out its depths. The introduction alone—the subject of numerous

books, essays, and discussions—is so powerful, so inspiring that it carries its own name exclusive of the Sermon on the Mount: *The Beatitudes*. In these few verses Jesus introduces the core belief system that changed the world.

As you study what it means to be blessed of God and how those blessings are manifest in our lives, you will see that this is the practical side of living in a real world. As we live out the blessings, we become a light shining in the darkness, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We become ambassadors for the Son of God.

We then have the opportunity to impact world—all because we studied the introduction to a two-thousand-year-old sermon.

WEEK ONE

Do you want to be blessed by God? Well, of course. We all do. We want His blessing in our lives. This week we will define, from Scripture, the word *blessed* and we will study the first beatitude to see who it is that receives the blessing of God. Start with prayer. Before we get into the study, let's spend some time in prayer, asking God to help us see these familiar verses with a heart open to His truth.

OBSERVE

Matthew 5–7 is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began His sermon with the Beatitudes.

Leader: *Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud. Have the group say aloud and mark...*

- every reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross: †
- draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**:

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

MATTHEW 5:1–12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

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

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *Jesus*?

- Who was Jesus teaching?

- What did He start each statement with?

you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

OBSERVE

Let's look at what the word *blessed* means.

Leader: Read *1 Timothy 1:11; 6:13–15; and Titus 2:11–13* aloud.

- *Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**.*

DISCUSS

- Who is the word *blessed* associated with in each of these passages?

1 TIMOTHY 1:11; 6:13–15

¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted....

¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without

stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

TITUS 2:11–13

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

- Who is *blessed* characteristic of?

- *Blessed* or *blessedness* is first and foremost a characteristic of God. It is part of who He is, His state of being. What difference does this make to your understanding of us as believers being blessed?

OBSERVE

The Greek word for *blessed*—*makarios*—is also used in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament completed approximately 100 BC. By looking at passages where the ancient translators used *makarios*, we gain insight regarding what they understood the word to mean.

Leader: Read aloud the verses on pages 7 and 8.

- Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word *blessed*.

INSIGHT

The Greek word translated *blessed* is *makarios*. It is sometimes translated as happy, but it carries a much deeper meaning. In English the idea of being happy is based on favorable circumstances. But to be blessed is to possess the favor of God. It is a state of being defined by fullness and satisfaction from God. To be blessed is to be walking in the fullness of God regardless of circumstances.

PSALM 1:1–2

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

PSALM 32:1–2

1 How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

2 How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

PSALM 34:8

Taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

PSALM 65:4


How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple.

DISCUSS

- Looking at each place you marked *blessed*, what do you notice about the person who is blessed?
- What difference do these descriptions make in your understanding of Jesus' use of the word in the Beatitudes?
- Are you, by these definitions, *blessed*? If not, why not?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Matthew 5:3 aloud. Have the group say and...

- draw a box around the word *blessed*.
- draw a cloud shape like this  around the phrase *kingdom of heaven*.

WRAP IT UP

It seems to be ingrained in our human nature to think that we are better than perhaps we really are. This is especially true when it comes to standing before the Righteous Judge of the universe. All too often, when it comes to sin, we justify our actions by comparing ourselves to someone we believe is worse than we are. It's as if we believe God grades us on a curve. *Sure, we tell ourselves, I'm not perfect, but I look pretty good compared to that other person.*

The Pharisee from Jesus' parable in Luke 18 saw himself that way. Compared to others, he judged himself to be a pretty good guy, far more righteous than the average, ordinary sinner.

But that's not the way God judges. His standard is perfection, not goodness. Romans 3:10 tells us, "There is none righteous, not even one." No one measures up to the standard known as righteousness. Paul goes on to say in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We all have come short of the standard.

As you saw this week, our only hope for blessing is to admit our utter dependence on God. "God is opposed the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Those who are walking in the fullness of God, those whose inheritance is heaven are those who are poor in spirit. Only the ones who realize that they have no righteousness of their own to offer God will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Put yourself in the parable of Luke 18. Who are you? Deep down in your heart, deep in your soul, which man do you resemble?

God be merciful to us, the sinners!

Ask God to show you your poverty of spirit so that you can find fullness in Him.