

THE BEATITUDES

by Gail Keffer

A series of devotionals devoted to the beatitudes

These are written as a devotional with a few questions for each beatitude. The questions are given to help develop questioning in their minds and lead to a further understanding of the way that particular scripture applies to their everyday life. They may also be printed out and passed out to the church members who do not have computer access or used in a group study with the questions leading to discussions.

There is a devotional dedicated to each of the beatitudes. The cover page could also be used as a devotional or study guide or be eliminated depending on the preference of the one using this series. There are actually nine devotionals here plus the cover page. The first page is an overview type of introduction and then the individual devotionals are in depth on each of the Beatitudes. Many references are made to THE MESSAGE. THE MESSAGE is written by Eugene H. Peterson (Copyright 2002) from the original language and crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events, and ideas in everyday language of today for better understanding.

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The Beatitudes

“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 dearest 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.’”
Matthew 5:3 – 12 The Message

1. We know that these were part of a message Christ gave to the multitudes which is often referred to as The Sermon on the Mount”. How did these words help the people who were there that day? What significance do they have for us today?
2. What are beatitudes? The version above is from The Message and is intended to put the beatitudes into modern day language for easier understanding. Does this help you to understand, or is it offensive?
3. Why did Jesus use these to tell of the blessings when so many other things around him in nature and also in the miracles he was performing were more evident as a blessing?
4. Are these blessings that we can give where as the miracles and nature are not in our power as they were at that time?

Prayer: Lord, we hear your words, but we don’t always understand or want to listen. Help us to understand and know that you have given these to us for our own good, and that with your love, we can heed their significance in our lives today. Amen.

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A Beatitude, Matthew 5:3

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.” Matthew 5:3 RSV

How often we think we can handle something, and then, as they say “The bottom falls out.” According to this beatitude that is what has to happen often before we realize that we can handle it with God’s help, and we let Him take over. Then things are fine. But we must get to that point when we let Him rule. At these times when our spirit is low we are depending on ourselves too much. A fairly new translation of the Bible called The Message put the beatitude this way. “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.”*

There have been many times in our lives when this happens. I remember one night when our son was very young and we could not get his temperature down. As young parents, we had tried everything we knew to do. We had given him the medicine the doctor prescribed, and we had put cool compresses on him. We were at the end of our rope! We had done everything we knew to do as young parents. Only then, we decided to pray. An hour later the temperature broke.

Many times after that I have realized that I can’t do it. I don’t have that capability whether as a parent, a teacher, or just an individual. But, when we give our problems to God, He provides. I remember a calligraphy I read once. It said “I’ll put it in God’s hands tonight, and tomorrow I’ll take it back and settle it.” I think that is true of us so many times, and many we don’t even realize. We are so proud. Yet, we are poor in spirit until we get to the end of the rope, and realize that God has been there all the time.

A poem called “Footprints” written by a young woman, named Mary Stevenson also exemplifies this. So often, we don’t realize that God is carrying us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us keep our spirits high with You at the helm, and help us to show others that Spirit of You that You have given us as we face daily life, and then realize that with You all things are possible, but without You we are helpless and flounder trying to do it all ourselves. Please, dear Lord, be with us this day and every day. Amen.

1. How far do we need to go before we realize we can’t handle it along?
2. How can God become more important in our life when we have trials?
3. Why does God carry us?
4. How can we show our appreciation?

A Beatitude, Matthew 5:4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4 RSV

Regardless of how much we care, or how much money we have, or how much we love someone on this earth, we all know in our heads that this life will end, and we will mourn the loss of a loved one. But if we believe in Christ as our personal Savior, we also know that there is a better life ahead. However, we don't know it. We are here, and this we know. We haven't seen it. We can't control it; we can't touch it, and therefore we sometimes fear the unknown.

How often when a loved one has died, we mourn their loss. Yet, we know in our heart and soul that they are in a better world if they knew Christ as their personal Savior. If we know this also, we can take comfort in that knowledge. It isn't easy. Eugene H. Peterson put it this way in his translation of this beatitude "You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One dearest to you."*

I have heard people say that they will never forget the loved one they lost. I believe that. We don't want to forget that one. They are and were precious to us. We shared a love that we could understand whether it be a parent, a mate, a child, or a friend. I can remember a friend's telling me that it would take five years to get over my mother's death. I hasten to add, that it has been many years, and yes, I have accepted it, and I have been comforted because I know where she is, but I still miss her. I miss many things about her and am thankful for those memories, the caring, the discipline, the teaching, and the love.

As I can see it, we have two choices in this. We can love these people dear to us each day and tell them that we love them, knowing that one of us may not be on this earth tomorrow, but we also, perhaps more - if not just as important - need to make sure that we tell them, and all people about this wonderful life that is ahead of us if we have accepted Christ as our personal Savior. We need to contact that relative or friend that we have not taken time to visit or call. We mourn not only the loss of a loved one but the loss of a business, a neighborhood, a way of life, etc. . We can't change it back to the way it was. But, through Christ we can find comfort.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have instructed us to love you with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. Sometimes this is hard to do, but with your help we can do it. Help us to show that love to others every day, not just on Sunday or when they are ill or needy. And, dear Lord, help us to live each day to its fullest because we don't know what tomorrow will bring. In your name, we pray. Amen.

1. How can mourning be a blessing to the one losing a loved one or a job?
2. How can we be a blessing to someone mourning?
3. How can we receive blessing from others during rough times in our lives?
4. How can we be the spark that helps just one person at a time through a daily crisis or troubled time?

A Beatitude, Matthew 5:5

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5 RSV

Eugene Peterson, in *THE MESSAGE*, translates the above parable this way: "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." *

Let's think about that for a few minutes. Sometimes we try to make everyone like us. Then we realize this would be a terrible world if that were so!!! Are you content with the way you have been made? Or with what you have made of the gifts you were given? We have been given many gifts, some we have never used! If we aren't content with ourselves, why? Only after we realize how much we have been given can we be truly thankful and content. Then we realize that we can't buy anything to make us truly happy. We have already been given more than we can comprehend. Many times we think: If I could only be like . . . If I could only have . . . Then I would be happy." But would we?

I am sure that all of you, just like me have at times wanted more than you had – whether in money, material, job security, friends, etc. Sometimes the more we have, the more we want. And, sometimes when we get things, we realize that we really don't want what goes with those "things!" Are the people who have those "things" any happier than you are? Yes, we all need friends. We need a certain amount of goods – "Things." But will more make us happier? We are told in Phil 4:11 "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. And again in Hebrews 13:5 "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Regardless of what we have or what we lose, we will never be forsaken by God. That cannot be bought. So do we have everything?

Prayer: Dear Lord, many times we want and we pray for things we don't understand. In your wisdom you have given us everything we need, and more. Help us to realize that we need to pray for your will and know that you know best for us today, tomorrow, and always. Amen.

1. Are we supposed to be content with what we are today?
2. How can we go about becoming content with where we are today?
3. How can we understand the unimportance of not having all the earthly things?
4. How can we help others to be content with where they are?

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A Beatitude, Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”
Matthew 5:6

What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? Does it mean that we are never satisfied until we have “righteousness”? What is “righteousness? Is it Virtue? Morality? Justice? Honesty? Is being good enough? Does it mean that we have to behave according to a certain religious or moral code?

Do we really want to be that good that we want to hunger and thirst for those virtues, or are we content with what we know? Do we want to be confused with the facts? Sometimes I want to search for the truth in my life. Sometimes, I want to do my own thing and not have God interfering.

I think that beatitude means that I will never be perfectly happy until I have found God and put Him in control of my life. It is when I know He is in control and I can relax. However, I must constantly seek His truth because there is another very powerful source that also wants our attention and wants to rule our lives.

Eugene Peterson, in *THE MESSAGE*, translates the above parable this way: “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.” I like that. If only we could constantly be on that “high” and let Him rule without our humanness wanting to take over!!! Then we can be honest, virtuous, and morally right, and seek justice for ourselves.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father., you have given us so much. Every day you are there with the best food and drink we can want. You have provided it all both physically and spiritually. Help us to drink and eat of it fully so that we can better serve You and Your Kingdom here on this earth. Let us give You the glory until we meet one day and inherit that Eternal Life with You. Amen.

1. What is “an appetite for God?”
2. How do we work up an appetite for God? What is on our desired menu?
3. How can we progress through the steps of being earthy, inspired, to spiritual?
4. How do we know when we have put Christ in control of our life?

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A Beatitude, Matthew 5:7

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Matthew 5:7 RSV

The Bible tells how a man lame from birth went daily to the temple and begged for alms. One day as he was at the gate, the people he asked included Peter and John. Peter told him "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Peter took the hand of the lame man, and the Bible says he was "walking, and leaping, and praising God." That day many followed Peter and John to hear more after seeing the man lame from birth walk. Acts 3:1-9 KJV

Yes, the man was blessed that day; he was able to walk. But Peter and John were also blessed because they cared. And, because they cared, God sent them the healing power to help the lame man and God further helped them in their ministry. It was a win, win, win situation!

When we help someone, we often feel blessed. Maybe that is why we are told we get more blessing by giving than receiving. Oh, it is nice to get. But sometimes a person needs a little help or a hug or a greeting, or just someone who cares enough to ask "How are you doing?" and then listens. Kids need to be noticed and told they have done well. Older folks need to be appreciated for the knowledge they have accumulated over the years. All need to be thanked for taking time to help someone else, and not always thinking of self. Then the one giving and showing mercy receives more. It is sort of a paradox. The more we give, the more we receive.

Eugene Peterson, in *THE MESSAGE*, translates the above parable this way: "You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for." But, it takes time. It takes time away from thinking about self and thinking about others and how we can help them. When we realize this, we think more of others and quit dwelling on ourselves and what we can do to help ourselves. There is nothing we can do in that arena, but we can help ourselves immensely by helping others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to be merciful to those around us. Help us to show we care in everyday situations for we know that we will receive blessings untold. As we go through today, help us to find someone to give a positive greeting. Even if it is just that they are wearing a nice blouse, or shirt. If we need to send a card or give someone a telephone call, help us to do it for Your sake because you have given us so much. Amen.

1. Is asking a blessing? For the one asking? For the one being asked?
2. How can giving a part of us to someone else be a blessing for us?
3. How can we dare to believe, act, and realize God is in control?

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A Beatitude, Matthew 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8 RSV

Stephen was the first Christian martyr. As he stood before the High Priest, he was asked to give up his God. Because he would not relent, they led him outside the city and stoned him to death. We are not called to do that. At times we are called to stand up for what we believe. Sometimes we do, and sometimes, it is easier just to tell a little white lie, or to avoid the situation. I am afraid that far too often, we “run around” the situation rather than face it head on!!!

Our mind wanders, we do not “take the bull by the horns” and say what we knew we should. We can say that we don’t want to offend the other people. But, is that correct? Do you know of times that you should have done something a little different knowing in your heart that the action or reaction you were taking was not what God would will? We are all guilty of that at times. Do we think the message kids have on a bracelet - “What Would Jesus Do?”

Eugene Peterson, in THE MESSAGE, translates the above parable this way: “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.”

We are blessed when our “inside world” is put right. Why? Because we know we are doing right, and so our heart and mind are satisfied that we are doing what is proper. But, that is fine until we get into the “real world” when others are looking at us and expecting us to be like them, or expecting us to be different. We have these choices to make every day.

Whatever we choose, we have a Savior that loves us as we are. He knows our frailties, our sins, and through his amazing grace He is willing to forgive us and help us to be stronger the next time. And we know that one day, we will be with Him, and then we won’t have these worldly temptations to worry about. But, we will only achieve that through His love and grace when we asked.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, each day you give us many things for which we can be thankful. Each day, you call on us to make some decisions. Do we have time to do them? Do we have the strength to do them? Do we have the resources to do them? Help us to realize that through all these things you will never ask us to do more than what you know we are capable of doing, and then help us to do it to Your glory, today, tomorrow, and always until we see you face to face. Amen.

1. Why do we have a problem standing up for what we believe?
2. What reward do we get for standing up for what we believe is right?
3. What is our inside world?
4. How do we get “right” with our inside world? Where can we find the strength to do it?

A Beatitude, Matthew 5:9

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9

Can we ever want to change God's mind about being nice to people that are "unlovely." In today's world, we wonder why we should be nice to people who are killing each other whether it is on the "battlefields" or on the streets of our towns and cities. We never kill! Or do we? Do we kill the spirit to be kind by shunning people in our everyday life if they are not like us? Do we ever walk around with a head down so we don't have to speak to "certain" people? Do we "forget" to compliment people, when we know it would make them happy to be recognized?

In Acts 10:1-35, we Cornelius, meet a good man. An angel told him to go to Joppa and get a man named Peter who would tell him the truth. Before his people get to ask Peter, the Lord puts Peter into a trance and shows him a vision of a sheet descending to him containing four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. A voice tells Peter to kill and eat. He tells the Lord that he does not want to do this because he considers some of these unclean. The Lord says, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." However, this is not just a story about animals; it is also a story about being a peace maker and judging.

The men come to Peter and ask him to go with them to the home of Cornelius. When Peter gets there he realizes that this man is of another nation, and it is not right that a Jew should be seen with him. He also noticed that a large number had gathered to hear the Word of the Lord that day. Then Peter realized that the vision of the animals was to let him know that God is no respecter of persons. The message is for all. God had made him realize that every nation that fears God is accepted. We are to make peace with all people and all nations, not war. Only through the truth from God will this happen.

We are the vessels appointed by God to carry His truth. Are we able and prepared to be His peacemakers? Eugene Peterson, in *THE MESSAGE*, translates the above parable this way: "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."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the lesson you gave to us through Peter. We are often confused as to what we should do. Help us to compliment people and not be judgmental. Help us to help the unlovely and those who don't know our Lord and Savior. Amen.

1. We know that God created nature. Why do we try to change it rather than obey it when we truly believe?
2. Can we take Christ at his word and then seek to bring that "Word" to life?
3. How can we love the unlovely?
4. Can we dare to believe what Christ said and then act accordingly?

A Beatitude, Matthew 5:10

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10 RSV

At first reading, this beatitude doesn't sound like it comes from a loving God that is protecting us daily! He wants us to be happy when someone is harassing us because someday we will know that we were right and then we will be blessed? Are we supposed to accept criticism and not reply? I don't think so, although I must admit that the initial glance causes one to wonder. Even Christ got upset with the actions of people, but he didn't hurt the people. He may have stopped their actions and disrupted their practices, but he did nothing to physically hurt them. He disliked the sin, but he always loved the sinner.

I believe Christ is telling us that if we react in an aggressive or forceful way, we not going to accomplish anything. If we react in love, we can do much more.

Peterson translates it as "You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom." When we show love, we need to dig deeper and look at the person and not the sin. We need to make sure that we know the reason for the action of the other person, and then react in love to help correct that attitude against us and our beliefs. Only then can we really feel the love of God working through us, and we will be blessed.

There is a song that we often sing in our church that says "They'll know we are Christians by our love." I often dislike that song because I don't think we always show the love we have been given. We have to show it not only to those people who are "nice" to us, but to the unlovely, the down and out, the one who mistreats us, and all mankind.

Prayer: Amazing God, You can see so much more than we can see. Sometimes, we want to do things our way. We want to retaliate for the person that disagrees with us. Help us to be like you as much as possible, to seek to do your will to the lovely and the unlovely alike, and then give us the courage and strength to act in a way that you would have us act each day. Amen.

1. How can our commitment to God provoke persecution?
2. What can help us re-act in a positive way to criticism from others?
3. How can we let them know we are Christians just by our love?
4. Is your God an amazing God? How?

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A Beatitude, Matthew 5:11-12

“Blessed are you when men 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 so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 11-12 RSV

The Message puts this beatitude this way - “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.”

What does he mean by “What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable?” Have you ever been in the company of someone and wanted to call them “Goody Two Shoes?” Why? Were they able to look at something in a light that made you feel uncomfortable? Or, did they want you to do something that wasn’t correct because then they felt better about doing it? I feel this is a problem that confronts our children and youth everyday just as much as it affects us in the workplace. If you do it too, then the other person can always say “Everybody else is doing it, so I just went along with the crowd.”

These are real temptations. The disciples and prophets, and many of those who have gone before us were willing to take a stand, to say and act in the proper way that they knew was right in their hearts even though it caused them personal grief for a while on this earth.

Peterson continues in his translation: “And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.” Yes, they did. Many were killed for their beliefs. We are not asked to go near being a martyr for Christ. But, we are asked to stand for what we know is right even if we are tempted by others to do wrong. We aren’t called to do anything to anyone else with this beatitude. This is a very private matter. It is solely our responsibility to do what we know is right. Then, we will feel the blessings of God, and His strength will increase in us each time we do His will.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to see beyond the minute we are involved in today and tomorrow. Help us to seek to love all people, not just some, and to love them as we find them or as they may become. Amen

1. When did people tell lies about the disciples or put them down?
2. Why are we tempted to go along with the crowd?
3. Can prayer be a great help at these times in our life?
4. How are we strengthened each time we do what is right?

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