



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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PRAYING THE BEATITUDES

The followers of Jesus vary in every possible way. Believers come from every type of racial and ethnic background. They have diverse personalities. Believers have different financial positions from rich to poor. They work at jobs of all kinds. Their intellectual abilities and education differs. They populate every nation on earth. Believers display diversity in every conceivable way.

Even though there great diversity exists among believers, all believers share eight particular characteristics. Jesus Christ reveals these eight characteristics in the Beatitudes of **Matthew 5:1-12**. In these verses, Jesus reveals what it means to be a member of the kingdom of God, a follower of Him. He teaches that eight traits will characterize everyone who knows Him and follows Him. Believers may have their differences, but these traits will shine in all who confess Christ as their Savior and Lord.

The Beatitudes provide a model for what you are to become as a follower of Jesus. When you gave your life to Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God who lives in you began producing these things in you. Because of His presence and work in you, these eight characteristics are manifested in your life. Now that you have come to Christ, you are responsible for cultivating

these traits in your life. Christ calls you to develop these characteristics in your life through His Spirit and Word.

The Beatitudes confront you with two crucial questions. The first question is, "*Am I a true follower of Jesus Christ?*" This is a solemn and worthy question. You must consider this question regardless of how long you have professed faith in Christ. The Beatitudes reveal what characterizes the true follower of Jesus. These words show the life of a true Christian. Does your life match the words of Jesus? Do you see these characteristics in your life? Do His words describe your life?

The second question that **Matthew 5:1-12** confronts you with is, "*Am I cultivating these traits in my life?*" The Beatitudes show the character that Christ desires in His followers. It reveals the life that Christ wants His people to exhibit. Are you striving to cultivate these traits in your life? Are you seeking God for these characteristics in your life?

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on praying the Beatitudes. We will look at each of these traits – what they mean and how to cultivate these in your life. We will also examine how to pray the Beatitudes for yourself and for others.

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The First Beatitude: The Poor In Spirit (5:3)

Jesus begins His description of His followers, the members of His kingdom, by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 5:3**). This does not refer to the financially poor. It does not refer to those who have a low opinion of themselves. This trait is the consciousness of what a person is before God – nothing more, nothing less. It is the recognition of one's spiritual bankruptcy before God.

A person who is poor in spirit understands that he has nothing to offer to God. He knows that he will never be good enough for God. He acknowledges that he cannot earn or merit God's salvation or His favor. He sees that he is a sinner and can do nothing to change his condition before God. All he can do is to cry out to the Lord for mercy and depend on Him.

Poverty in spirit is the opposite of pride, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. It is being completely broken before God, knowing that one has to depend on God for all things. It is the attitude, "I have nothing. I am nothing. I can do nothing. I seek You for Your mercy." It is coming to God empty-handed, emptied of ourselves, and ready to trust in and depend on the Lord.

Every true believer has this attitude. That is why the poor in spirit receive the kingdom of heaven. They receive genuine salvation. They experience the new life of Christ and His kingdom. True salvation comes to a person when they cast aside all hope in their works and merit and trust solely in God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How can you develop this trait in your life?

Ask the Spirit of God to produce greater brokenness in your life. Call on Him to cultivate poverty of spirit in your life. Ask Him to deepen your brokenness before Him.

Be diligent to confess pride, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. Growing in poverty of spirit requires confronting these evils. You cannot allow these things to go unchecked in your life.

Be on your guard against pride. Pride is a pernicious and tenacious sin. You must ever be

on the watch for it to rear its ugly head in your life.

*Meditate on God's attitude and response to pride and humility. God always makes a thorough and harsh response to pride. He hates pride. However, God is gracious to the humble. Read and meditate on verses like **Proverbs 8:13, John 3:30, Proverbs 22:4, James 4:6, Proverbs 11:2, 1 Peter 5:6-7, Proverbs 13:10, and Matthew 23:12.***

The Second Beatitude: Those Who Mourn (5:4)

Mourning is grief and sorrow caused by profound loss. We usually associate it with death. This is the most severe form of mourning. We also mourn through various painful experiences – the disappointment of a friend, the loss of a job, or failing an exam.

Is this the mourning that Jesus refers to in this Beatitude? Is Jesus giving general encouragement to all who mourn? Is Jesus saying, "Everything will be fine. Time heals all wounds. You will make it." To believe this would be a superficial reading of the Sermon on the Mount.

The mourning that Jesus speaks of is when a person grieves over his sin. He mourns because he has sinned against God. Realizing that he is bankrupt before God, he grieves that he has rebelled against the God on whom he depends for everything. He is weighed down by the agonizing realization his sins nailed the Lord Jesus Christ to the Cross.

This Beatitude shows us that the believer does not belittle, ignore, or make excuses for his sin. He does not focus on the sin of others. He does not exalt his own good deeds and services to the exclusion of his own evil. He knows that he has sinned against God and cries out to God for His forgiveness.

The believer has much to mourn over. He is broken by his past rebellion toward God. He mourns over his sins – sins of omission and commission. He grieves over the ever-deepening discovery of his own sinfulness as he walks with Christ. The closer a Christian lives to God, the more he will grieve over that which offends and dishonors God. The Christian's life

is characterized by grief over his own sin and sinfulness.

You may be thinking, "This is a gloomy picture of what it means to be a Christian." Admittedly, it cuts against the grain of the contemporary notions of a believer. For many, being a Christian means staying on an emotional high – joy all the time. But the Christian lives constantly with a grieving heart, always crying out, "What a wretched man I am" (**Romans 7:24**).

Yet, Jesus promises that those who mourn will be "comforted." The Christian does not have to live in a state of despair over his sinfulness. Those who grieve over their sin will cry out to God for cleansing and forgiveness. God, who is full of mercy and ready to forgive, responds to their confession and repentance with cleansing and renewal (**1 John 1:9**). The Christian's life then is characterized by mourning, confession, repentance, cleansing, and joy. This cycle will continue throughout our lives until we enter heaven.

How do you cultivate this trait in your life?

Call on the Holy Spirit to cultivate sensitivity to sin in your life. Pray that He will help you to grow in your awareness of your personal sin.

Confess your sins specifically. Don't gloss over your sin. When you confess sin, honestly declare your sin. Don't hold back or make excuses. Don't rationalize; take responsibility.

Avoid comparing yourselves to others. Don't make the mistake of believing that your sin is not as evil or wicked as others. God hates the sin in your life. He despises your willfulness. He sees all your sin and is grieved by it.

Be quick to hear and respond to God's Word. When God convicts you of sin through His Word, deal with it then. Whether in your quiet time, a class, or a worship service, don't let the moment of conviction pass; respond with confession and repentance.

Ask the Spirit to search you and show you your sin. This can be painful. Yet, it is the path to cleansing and true change.

The Third Beatitude: The Meek (5:5)

The Beatitudes cannot be understood in

isolation from one another. These characteristics hang together. Each one leads to the other. Poverty in spirit and mourning over sin leads to meekness.

What is meekness? Meekness is the humble strength that has learned to submit to God. It is the opposite of self-will toward God and ill will toward others. A meek person has surrendered all his supposed "rights" to the sovereign God. He quietly submits to God's Word, will, and rod. He is willing to accept what God gives and to obey what God commands. He has learned to submit to God and to be gentle toward others.

The meek person submits to God. He is quick to hear and obey His Word. He accepts and bows to God's will for His life. He surrenders to God in adversity, trusting His wisdom and goodness. Meekness is the powerful yielding of one's life to God.

The meek person is also gentle toward others. He bears patiently the insults and injuries of others. He thinks more highly of others than he does of himself. He is ready to hear and accept correction from others. He remains cool when others get heated.

However, meekness is not weakness. It is the powerful yielding of oneself to God, knowing that God is in control of your life. When you are insulted, you know that God can defend you. When done wrong, you know that God can work through it. When others speak harshly to you, you can receive it and grow through it. Rather than seeking revenge, you commit yourself to God and trust that He will help you, defend you, and protect you. Anyone can explode and seek revenge. Yet, it takes the strength of true meekness to make the right and godly response to others.

Christ promises that the meek will inherit the earth. I believe that this has a two-fold meaning. First, it means that the believer will truly enjoy all the blessings that God has given to him in the world. He will receive and be satisfied with all that God gives him on this earth. Rather than spending his whole life seeking to gain increasingly more, the meek person enjoys and is satisfied with the blessings God has provided. Covetousness robs a person of true enjoyment of life. Meekness enables you to get the most out of life. In this sense, he

inherits the earth – the portion that God has provided for him.

Second, I believe this refers to the eternal state. This phrase can be translated, “inherit the land.” The meek are those who inherit heaven. Heaven is the land of the meek – the home of those who are submissive to God. The meek person will receive heaven and all of its blessings.

How can you develop this trait in your life?

Plead for the Holy Spirit to cultivate meekness in your life (Zephaniah 2:3). Meekness is not our natural disposition. It is a grace or work of the Spirit in us. Call on God to deepen this trait in your life.

Commit yourself to determined obedience. Determine in your heart that you will hear and obey God. Cry out to God to enable you to obey His Word and His will.

In adversity, remember God's goodness and wisdom. By doing this, you can submit to God in the most difficult of circumstances. When you find yourself in adversity, meditate on and praise God for His goodness and wisdom.

Develop the discipline of committing people to the Lord. Instead of seeking revenge, we must learn to commit people and their actions to the Lord our Defender. God is able to repay those who insult us. He is able to help us with those who are difficult. His repayment for their evil is more thorough and exact than anything we could ever devise and carry out.

The Fourth Beatitude: Hungering And Thirsting (5:6)

Hunger and thirst are fundamental physical needs. This was especially true in Palestine in Jesus' day. Food was at a premium and water was often scarce. For these reasons, he uses these words to describe the intensity of the believer's desire for righteousness.

The believer has an intense longing for righteousness. What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? First, it means a longing to be in a right relationship with God. It is the desire to know God and to be accepted through Christ. We come to know God and

have acceptance with Him when we turn from our sin to trust solely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, this is only the beginning of our hungering and thirsting for righteousness. The believer not only wants to be right with God, he also longs to be right before God. He yearns to live a life that pleases God. He wants to live in the way that is acceptable to God. He wants to see others do what is right in the sight of God. He passionately desires that God's Word be obeyed and carried out in this world.

The believer longs for right living – in his life and all around him. We cannot take Christ's gift of forgiveness if we neglect His demand for right living – conformity to God's will. We cannot welcome Christ as our Savior without being willing for Him to be exactly that – a Savior. Jesus Christ is the “**Savior**” of sinners. He delivers people from sin. He deals with sin in sinners. Accepting Christ as your Savior means that He will save you from sin and lead you into righteousness. The one who is saved by Christ yearns to be changed by Him.

This trait characterizes every follower of Jesus. The believer has a continual longing for right living before God. Jesus says, “Blessed are they **which do** hunger and thirst for righteousness.” It is not “blessed are they which have,” but “blessed are they **which do** hunger and thirst.” This is the continual experience of God's people.

Christ gives a wonderful promise to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. He says that they will be filled. God will help you and enable you to do what is right in His sight. He will empower you to be an agent of righteousness where you are. God will respond to your craving for a life that pleases Him.

How can you develop this characteristic in our your life?

Ask the Holy Spirit to create a greater hunger and thirsting for righteousness in your life. Call on the Spirit to create a craving in your life for doing what is right in the sight of God. Pray that you will desire this more than anything else in the world.

Don't let discouragement overwhelm you. Some believers grow weary because of their lack of growth. They get discouraged because they can't see much fruit in the lives. Remember

Christ's promise. If you long to live a life that is pleasing to God, He will help you. He will bless you. He will change you. Keep seeking him with all your being. You will be filled!

Ask God to enable you to be salt and light where you are. Living a righteous life has great power to influence and make a difference in people and circumstances. Call on God to help you exhibit a changed life that is conformed to God's will.

Remember that prayer is a powerful tool for righteousness. Pray for genuine change in people and circumstances. Intercede for your leaders and your society. You can be a force for righteousness on your knees.

The Fifth Beatitude: The Merciful (5:7)

Jesus now reveals that showing mercy characterizes His people. What is the "mercy" that Jesus speaks of? Mercy is holy compassion. It is having compassion on others and seeking to help them and minister to them.

The person who shows mercy sees the needs of others. He is burdened over the needs of others. He feels them as if they were his own burdens. He is willing to sacrifice his own comfort to help another.

The mercy that Jesus speaks of is more than a feeling. This mercy not only stirs the heart but it also moves the hand. The believer not only sees the need but also does something about it (**1 John 4:18**). Mercy is getting out of your comfort zone and doing what you can to help relieve the suffering and burdens of others.

The Good Samaritan is an excellent example of what it means to show mercy (**Luke 10:30-37**). The Samaritan took responsibility for the injured man. He ministered to his bruised and broken body. He did everything he could to provide healing and restoration for this man. He did not selfishly pass by this man but labored to help him and minister to Him.

The promise to the merciful is that they will receive mercy. Our showing mercy is not the *cause* of God showing us mercy. Being merciful to others is the natural result of accepting Christ and receiving His mercy. If we are not merciful, we cannot have received Christ's mercy, and therefore we cannot look forward to receiving His mercy in the last

judgment. When a person comes to Christ, he will experience God's mercy. He is then willing to show that mercy to others. Without mercy, we are not Christ's.

How can you develop this characteristic in your life?

Pray for God to deliver you from a self-seeking lifestyle of convenience. This type of lifestyle is exalted and practiced by our culture. We face the danger of being ensnared by this same lifestyle. Ask God to help you resist this type of lifestyle.

Plead with God to open your eyes. Call on God to help you see the needs around you. Pray for His empowering to bless and minister to those in need.

Confess any indifference toward the hurts and needs of others. This indifference is the opposite of showing mercy. Diligently confess and seek cleansing from this.

Seek intentional opportunities for showing mercy. Each day look for people and situations in which you can bless and minister to others.

The Sixth Beatitude: The Pure In Heart (5:8)

The words of Jesus in **verse 8** are based on **Ezekiel 36:25-26**, "Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." The promise is to cleanse and give a new heart. When the person gets this new heart, he will be cleansed from his idols – he will be wholly committed to the Lord.

The same thought is expressed in **Psalms 24:4**. The psalmist declares these words, "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up soul to vanity, nor sworn deceitfully." The Word of God says that those who have a "pure heart" do not lift up their souls to vanity – they do not worship idols. They are wholeheartedly committed to God.

This is Jesus' meaning in this Beatitude. The pure in heart are those who are unreservedly committed to Him. To be pure in heart is to be uncompromisingly committed to

the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that He is your first love, your first priority, and your primary commitment.

Being pure in heart means letting nothing stand between you and the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our great Savior and Lord. However great things can be completely obscured by small things if small things are brought near enough to our eyes. When we hold this world and its contents too near, it obscures our view of Christ. We can no longer "see" God and His mighty and powerful works in our lives.

Purity of heart means having a heart that seeks Christ and His kingdom above all things. It is resisting the temptation to allow people or possessions to take the throne of our hearts and lives. It is the commitment to worship, seek, and serve Christ as the priority of our lives.

How can you cultivate this characteristic in your life?

Ask God to reveal anything in your life that you have put before Christ and His kingdom. Pray for the Spirit to search you and reveal any person, position, or possession that has taken Christ's rightful place in your life.

Pray for the grace and power to love God and seek Him above all other things. This is a work of the Spirit in our lives. Cry out to Him continually for this work in your life.

Plead that you will not love the world or the things in the world. Worldliness exists as one of the greatest enemies of our faith. Ask for deliverance from this.

Pray for the removal of any idols in your life. 1

John 5:21 reveals the danger of this for Christians. Constantly guard your heart in this matter.

The Seventh Beatitude: The Peacemakers (5:9)

God reveals Himself in Scripture as the God of all peace. As such, He has made peace for us through Jesus Christ. He has reconciled us to Himself (**2 Corinthians 5:19-21**). Making peace is part of His gracious character. Those who have become members of His family will bear the family resemblance. His sons will work for peace.

Believers seek to peace in three ways. First, they seek to bring people to Jesus Christ and lead them to peace with God. A lost person is hostile toward and opposed to God, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (**Romans 8:7**). Believers share the gospel of peace with them (**Romans 5:1**). When a person hears the gospel and believes, they have peace with God; they are reconciled to God. Believers seek to lead the lost to peace with God through Christ.

Second, believers strive for peace in the church. The sons of God will seek peace in the church, in the fellowship of the saints. They will labor to deal with anything that hinders or threatens the peace of the church. They will subordinate other considerations (their will, their position, their desires) to protect and strengthen the peace of the church.

Finally, they seek peace in all their relationships. In every sphere of their lives, they strive to have healthy and harmonious lives. They work to have right relationships free of bitterness, envy, jealousy, and pride.

How can you cultivate this trait in your life?

Commit yourself to sharing the gospel of peace with the lost. Lost people are separated from God; they are estranged from God. There is no peace between God and the wicked. The only hope for peace with God comes through the good news of His Son. Ask God to help you share this message.

Strive to enhance and maintain the peace of the church. Pray for God's help to encourage and fortify the harmony and unity of your church. Ask Him to give you practical ways that you can do this.

Plead with God to help you rebuild any broken relationships in your life. Call on God to give you the wisdom, discernment, power, and love to restore peace to any broken relationships.

The Eighth Beatitude: The Persecuted (5:10-12)

Those who follow Jesus will exhibit these characteristics. This lifestyle will challenge the sin, the unbelief, and the moral indifference of

the world. It will irritate, agitate, and anger the world. Because of this, they will persecute us. They will seek to oppose us. They will ridicule and curse us. They may try to harm us.

At the beginning of the Christian life, we need to grasp the reality of persecution. This awareness will protect us from disillusionment and discouragement. We follow a "crucified" Savior. We should not be surprised if we encounter fiery trials for Christ (1 Peter 4:12). We must learn to rejoice that God has counted us worthy to suffer for the name of Christ (Acts 5:41). Even though we are persecuted, all of heaven's blessings are ours!

How do we prepare ourselves to handle persecution?

Turn to God in the midst of your persecution. Strive to commit your persecution to God. Tell him what is happening and who is doing it. Call on Him for strength and power to endure and to bear powerful witness in the midst of this.

Make sure that you are being persecuted for Christ's sake. The suffering that Jesus speaks of in these verses is for His sake. Don't equate suffering because of your sin as suffering for Him.

Fellowship with other believers, sharing your struggles with them. Persecution is one of the reasons that we need each other.

Read and study the examples in the Word. The Word abounds with examples of believers who experienced persecution. These examples can give you insight on how to respond and can encourage you in the midst of persecution.

Praying The Beatitudes For Yourself

The following prayers are based on the Beatitudes. Seek God with all your heart with these truths. Plead for His deeper work in your life.

Father, I ask You to deepen my brokenness before You. Deliver me from all my self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and pride (5:3).

Father, I plead with You to teach me to mourn over my sin. Create a hatred of sin in my life. Deliver me from complacency in this (5:4).

Father, cultivate meekness in my life. Grant me a submissive heart. I ask that I will submit to You and will obey You in all things. Set me free from self-will before You and others (5:5).

Father, I ask that I will hunger and thirst for righteousness. Grant me a craving for You and Your kingdom. Deliver me from craving the world and its things (5:6).

Father, empower me to show mercy. Enable me to minister to the hurts and needs of those around me. Deliver me from a self-seeking lifestyle of convenience (5:7).

Father, grant me a pure heart. I want to be unreservedly committed to You. Help me to root out the idols of my life (5:8).

Father, deepen my ability to be a peacemaker. Help me to share the gospel of peace. I pray that I will have healthy, harmonious relationships (5:9).

Father, grant me the strength to endure persecution for Christ's sake. I pray that I will bear a powerful witness for Christ in the midst of this. Deliver me from fear and compromise in the light of persecution (5:10).

The Beatitudes And Revival

The Beatitudes provide a powerful prayer tool in seeking God for revival. Revival will renew and deepen each characteristic given in **Matthew 5:1-12**. For this reason, you can plead its truths for revival in your church. The following prayer guide can help you plead these truths for genuine revival in your church.

Father, I pray that my church will confess and repent of its pride. Create within this body a humble and broken spirit that You will revive (5:3).

Father, I plead that my church will hate its sin. Create within us a greater hatred of evil and a mourning over sin. I pray that we will diligently confess our sins and experience cleansing and restoration (5:4).

Father, I ask that my church will have a submissive spirit to You, Your Word, and Your will. I pray that we will hear and do the Word. Set us free from self-will (5:5).

Father, I plead that my church will hunger and thirst for righteousness. I pray that we will desire and pursue conformity to Your Word and will. I ask You to revive us and make us salt and light in this area (5:6).

Father, I pray that You will give us a heart for the hurting and the needy. Grant us opportunities to show mercy. Set us free from being selfish and being concerned only with ourselves (5:7).

Father, I pray that we will return to Christ as our first love and priority. Grant us pure hearts solely devoted to Christ. Help us to root out anything that has come before You (5:8).

Father, I plead that peace will reign in this church. Help us to deal with anything that hinders or damages the peace of the church. Stir us to share the gospel of peace with the world that they might be reconciled to God (5:9).

Father, give us the courage to stand for You in this world. I pray that we will bear powerful witness for You in the midst of persecution. I ask that we will continue to be faithful to Christ regardless of what the world says or does to us (5:10).



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