



# 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