

**Reflect:**

- Consider the teaching of Jesus. How does it lead us towards true happiness?
- In what ways do we find our present approach to life seriously challenged by what Jesus teaches?

**Blessed...**

The word “Beatitudes” comes from the Latin Vulgate where each of them opens with the word *beati*...

By one of those twists of language, the word “blessed” seems to have taken on the opposite meaning for many folk. In a way, this may symbolise human reaction to this divine plan for happiness – we “curse” God’s plan, but haven’t come up with anything better!

Our English word “happy” is rather too weak for translating these sayings of Jesus. It comes from the same root as “happen” and “perhaps” – the flavour is “chance, luck, good fortune”. “Blessed” speaks of the active grace of God in our lives. Floyd V. Filson puts it, “The blessedness, approval and well-being is God’s gift and working”.

Those who come under God’s rule by faith in Christ are truly blessed! In humble trust, let’s take our place there.

**Reflect:**

- In what new directions has the Lord been speaking to us through this study? What are we going to do about it?

**Study 2 – ... the Poor in Spirit.** Reading: Luke 18.9-14

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Ten Studies on the Beatitudes

by Peter J Blackburn

## 1. *Blessed are...*

**Reading: Matthew 5.3-12**

Much of our lives seems to be spent looking for happiness in one form or another. Some time ago, a French philosopher said, “The whole world is on a mad quest for security and happiness”. Much of modern life, with all its complexities and contradictions, is a direct expression of this universal human quest.

Yet modern life is also a vast illustration of human failure to obtain happiness. The news is constantly reminding us that this universally-sought quality continues to elude so many people.

One major problem is that we see happiness as an end in itself. In reality, happiness comes as a byproduct of a life that is focused somewhere else. While these ten studies are focusing “on” happiness, we will be looking at the “somewhere else” that is the focus of the truly happy life.

One of the critical mistakes of modern times has been the denial that there is any master plan for human living. Everybody seeks fulfilment in “doing their own thing”. In fact, happiness is the result of a life fulfilling its true purpose. Specifically, happiness results from a restored relationship with our Maker so that our life becomes an expression of his purpose and plan. That’s why Jesus told us to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Mt. 6.33).

The form of this denial may be new, though throughout history many have tried to live out their own life. Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD) wrote in his *Confessions*, “Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you”.

**Reflect:**

- “Much of modern life... is a direct expression of this universal human quest [for happiness]”. Is this a true assessment? Give some examples.
- “Yet modern life is also a vast illustration of human failure to obtain happiness”. What are some examples of this?

## The Beatitudes

### Read Matthew 5.1-12.

The Beatitudes are at the very beginning of what we call the Sermon on the Mount. Near the present-day Church of the Beatitudes in Galilee is a natural grassy amphitheatre. It is believed this is where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. Tests in recent times have shown that a person would have had no difficulty speaking to the number of people described as being present to hear Jesus.



When we have a new car, refrigerator, washing machine... we usually pay attention to any special manufacturer's instructions. We expect service personnel to know them well too – to ensure the proper functioning of the unit concerned.

Yet, when it comes to life itself, we fail because we please ourselves what we do – ignoring that the Maker has given us a plan for living. True happiness can only be achieved as we live by that plan!

### Most people think...

In the Beatitudes, Jesus was giving this divine plan for human happiness, but it stands in sharp contrast to what most of us think. Fifty years ago J.B. Phillips suggested the way most think the beatitudes should be written. Here is a more modern version of what most people think –

- Happy are those who have high self-esteem – they have got it made!
- Happy are those who gloss over their mistakes – they will have inner peace!
- Happy are the domineering and assertive – they will get their own way!
- Happy are those with strong personal ambition – they will achieve their goals!
- Happy are the unforgiving – they will get ahead!
- Happy are those who know the latest ideas – others will think highly of them!
- Happy are those who eliminate all opposition – they will make their mark in the world!
- Happy are those who fulfil the expectations of the present age – the world is at their feet!

#### Reflect:

- In what ways does this description fit what is commonly accepted – even taught – in our society?
- Thinking about these eight statements, perhaps some of them express good necessary qualities. What do you think?

## Jesus said...

Our view of happiness seems so dependent on our environment and circumstances. However, as we read the life of Jesus, we see that he was calm and serene – even when circumstances were unexpected or hostile.

He had no fixed address (Lk. 9.58). He was calm even in a storm-tossed boat (Mk 4.35-41) – and before Pilate (Mt. 27.14). Under the physical and emotional pain of rejection and crucifixion, he expressed his concern for others and not himself (Jn 19.25-27; Lk. 23.39-43). What is his secret?

Jesus had come to bring in God's Kingdom (note Mt. 4.17). The Beatitudes, as we call them, set out the qualities to be found in the lives of those who have come into the Kingdom, whom the King accepts as his subjects (5.3,10), who alone can see the one who is invisible (v. 8 – compare Heb. 11.27; 1 Jn 3.2), who alone are worthy to be his children (Mt. 5.9).

These are the worthwhile qualities that represent true happiness. Yet they don't come as spiritual presumption and pride, but through a recognised need of God and of his mercy and help.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pinpointed the anxiety that constantly robs us of this happiness – we pursue it in things that can only, at best, bring passing satisfaction. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” (6.19-20). “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?” (v. 25).

In fact – and here we see the centrality of God's Kingdom and what he expects of us – “your heavenly Father knows that you need [all these things]. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (vv. 32-33).

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (7.13,14).

The Sermon concludes with the parable of the wise and foolish builders. The message is quite clear – “hear these words of mine and put them into practice” (vv. 24-17).

What God wants... the small gate and narrow road... the words of Christ... these are in strong contrast to most people's approach to happiness.