

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

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

Blessed are **those who are persecuted** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others **revile you and persecute you** and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Matt. 5:3–11)

It is significant that these declarations come at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7). Jesus was using them to prepare his listeners to understand and apply the longest continuous discourse we have from Christ—one rich with teaching on the emotional and relational life of his followers.

Notice the subjects that follow the Beatitudes. The commentary afterward tries to capture the fears or cynicism that would emerge as a response to the rest of the Sermon on the Mount if we had an errant or incomplete view of vulnerability. Not all the struggles may fit you, but mark the ones that do. It will help you with the reflective sections in the devotional portions of this booklet.

- *Willingness to exert influence in relationships* (Matt. 5:13–16): If I speak up about who I am, what I believe, or what I like, then people could reject me or use those things against me.
- *Relating to rules and expectations* (5:17–20): I wish Christ had come to follow the Law instead of to fulfill it. Learning to love God completely and loving others is much more risky than following protocols.
- *Anger* (5:21–26): Jesus took my defense. It is safer to be angry than hurt. Now when I lash out, I am not protecting my heart—I am jeopardizing my soul.
- *Lust or counterfeit intimacy* (5:27–30): Relationships are safer in my imagination. I can get what I want without risking rejection.

- *Divorce or broken relationships* (5:31–32): I want to reserve the right to end a relationship on my terms. If I am not happy, then I should be free to end a relationship.
- *Broken promises* (5:33–37): I do not like it when other people have expectations of me. It creates pressure. I feel measured. I wish everyone said what they meant.
- *Desire for revenge* (5:38–42): But they hurt me first. Am I supposed to keep letting myself be hurt? When do I get to have a say?
- *Longing for equity and love* (5:43–48): It's not enough that I cannot get even; now I have to love my enemy. I want to make justice happen in order to be safe.
- *Responding to the needs of others* (6:1–4): I do not mind helping others so much, but it always becomes unhealthy. I am always the one in the role of helper and never the one seen to be in need, even when I am in need.
- *Doing things for the approval of others* (6:5–18): How else am I supposed to get the approval of others? I thought doing good things so that people would like you was a good thing. That is another “safe” way of relating to people that Jesus is taking away from me.
- *Finances and priorities* (6:19–24): Money is something else that allows me not to be vulnerable. As long as I have enough money, I do not have to depend on anyone else. It means that people come to me, instead of my going to them.
- *Anxiety* (6:25–34): Great—I feel anxious frequently, and that is wrong, too. I am supposed to be real with people, rely on people, and enjoy it.
- *Conflict resolution* (7:1–6): I hate conflict. I hate being judge. I do not trust people to take the speck out of their eye when I take the log out of mine.
- *Expectations of a father* (7:7–11): What if my father did give me a stone and a serpent? Where do you think I learned that trust was a bad idea?

- *Treatment of others* (7:12–14): The hard part is often letting others do for me as I am willing to do for them. When I let others do for me, they could disappoint or hurt me.
- *Discerning liars* (7:15–20): By the time I see their fruit, it is too late to prevent being hurt. If the point is to avoid being hurt, Jesus’ test does not help me very much.
- *The ineffective effort of “earning” acceptance* (7:21–23): I could do lots of stuff for God and he might still turn his back on me? What is it that God wants if it is not for me to serve him?
- *The necessity of putting what you learn into practice* (7:24–27): Allow me to encourage you. In light of whatever doubt or fear you feel, building on the “rock” of Jesus’ teaching is the place to start and worth the effort.

Until we see the “blessedness” of the Beatitudes, we will wrestle with these questions and doubts, distort or miss the application of these passages, and still be unable to receive the love of God and others. Once we see the blessedness and begin to grow in the courageous application of the Beatitudes, the wisdom and joy of Jesus’ teaching will begin to shine in and through our lives by yielding the fruits of hope and peace, attractive witness to and love for others.

From this point forward, we will begin to examine each of the Beatitudes. I recommend initially reading straight through the material as you would an article. Then I advise coming back and studying each beatitude devotionally, taking time to consider the personal reflection and prayer sections.

Each beatitude will have five points of examination:

1. *Description*: Definition of the disposition, role, or activity that Jesus says is “blessed.”
2. *Benefit for Vulnerability*: The connection between that beatitude and a healthy sense or acceptance of vulnerability.
3. *Implementation*: Possible ways that you could begin the process of growing in this facet of vulnerability.

4. *Personal Reflection*: Questions to assist you in examining your life in light of the particular beatitude. When you go back through and read these materials devotionally, you may want to record your reflections in a notebook or journal.
5. *Prayer*: A sample guided prayer to help you to bring this area of growth before the Lord regularly. Remember, we never grow apart from the grace of God empowering us, and prayer is the initial and primary way in which we demonstrate our dependence on and vulnerability toward God. These sample prayers are intended to be made your own.

Under each beatitude you will see “ Yes No ___ /10 Intensity ___ /8 Rank.” The “Yes” and “No” boxes are a place for you to mark whether you understood the material under that beatitude. Chances are, if vulnerability is a significant struggle for you, then certain sections will be counterintuitive enough for you that they may be hard to understand or accept. Be patient, knowing that you may need to spend extra time on that beatitude when you go back through the material devotionally.

The 1-to-10 scale is a place for you to rank the intensity of your struggle with that aspect of vulnerability. Ideally, you will be encouraged to find several aspects of vulnerability that come more naturally to you. Identifying the various degrees of struggle should help you to develop a plan of application at the end of the booklet.

The 1-to-8 scale is a place for you to rank the Beatitudes from the personally hardest to easiest, to express aspects of vulnerability. This scale is to be filled in only after you have completed the entire booklet. The goal of these rankings is to help you to see that *vulnerability* is not one giant, monolithic term. It can be broken down into related, bite-size pieces that you can strategically work on (by God’s grace) in the ways that seem wisest and best fit your life.