

The Beatitudes

Being the followers Jesus longs for



Session 5

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."
Matthew 5:7*

A Few Notes for Understanding the Beatitudes

Audience:

The primary audience is the disciples. There are crowds listening, but Jesus directs his teaching to his committed followers.

Purpose:

Jesus is purposefully teaching his disciples the essentials they must know about being his followers and the blessings that result.

Message: The disciple Jesus longs for...

1. *is "poor in spirit."* They **RECOGNIZE** their desperate need for God and totally trust Him.
The Blessing: You belong to God and know that He is in control.
2. *"mourns."* They **GRIEVE** over sin and the damage it has caused in their lives and world.
The Blessing: Mourning leads to confession and repentance which brings God's new life.
3. *is "meek"* meaning they are **HUMBLE**, but **CONFIDENT** in their relationships with God and others and **SUBMIT** to God and God's ways.
The Blessing: In the end, the meek, will inherit the kingdom of God for eternity.
4. *'hungers and thirsts for righteousness'* They **COMMIT** themselves to doing what is right in their own life and towards others.
The Blessing: You'll be filled with God's presence bringing His righteousness, love and life!



BIBLE STUDY

Read Matthew 6:12-15.

1. How do you react to Jesus' teaching to be merciful? Are you shocked, puzzled, nervous, challenged, affirmed, or...? Why do you think forgiving others is so important to Jesus that He includes it in two major teachings (Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer) to His disciples?

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

2. How would you summarize the point of this parable? What insight does this give you as to why it is so important to Jesus that His followers forgive others?

3. If we hold back forgiveness, what does it tell us about our faith and about our commitment to following Jesus?

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

4. According to these verses, what rich blessings have we received?
5. Why do we receive these blessings? Is it because we deserve them?
6. What do we do to receive these blessings and when do we receive them?
7. Try to reason this out:
 - We receive the blessing of God's mercy as soon as we put our faith in Jesus.
 - This means that Jesus' disciples, who are His audience in both the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, would have already received God's mercy because of their faith.
 - If that is so, then why does Jesus seem to tell His disciples that they must be merciful in order to receive mercy? What point is Jesus is making?

APPLY

1. What do you find hard to forgive?
2. Does Jesus give any exceptions or exclusions to forgiving others? Are we instructed to only forgive those who first ask us for forgiveness?
3. What have you learned about the reasons and motivations for forgiving?
4. In Matthew 18:35 Jesus said, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." What do you think it means to forgive "from your heart?"

HOW TO FORGIVE FROM THE HEART

To be a follower of Christ means we will follow His ways. Forgiveness is God's way. When we choose to follow His way by forgiving those who have hurt us, the faith we show unleashes God's power. When God's power is unleashed something amazing happens in us. Our wound is healed by God's power, and the anger and bitterness that we have experienced in our lives is miraculously removed.

But it's not easy! We do not want to minimize the real pain and hurt you have experienced by suggesting that forgiving the person who caused the pain is an easy thing to do. Jesus went to the cross to forgive us. There is nothing easy about the cross. But the cross means that Jesus understands your pain. Jesus also knows the power and joy of the resurrection; which is a blessing you will also experience when you choose to forgive.

Authentic forgiveness needs to be specific. You can't forgive in general, because you have been hurt by specific people and specific actions. So, when you forgive identify:

- *WHO* you are forgiving
- *WHAT* specific action they did to hurt you (there may be several different actions for the same person)

Forgiveness from the heart means getting in touch with your feelings. It is the feelings created by the harmful actions done against you that created the wound in your heart. Therefore, after identifying specific actions it is important to also identify the feelings those actions caused. So, when you forgive identify:

- *HOW* the action made you *FEEL* (angry, hurt, depressed, embarrassed, worthless, etc.)

After you have identified these things you're ready to pray. Here is a simple prayer that has been proven effective by the countless number of people who have used it. For each item on your list (it may be a long list) pray:

"Lord, I forgive (person) for doing (specific action) and making me feel (feelings)."

Yes, it really is that simple. The difficulty is being willing to pray the prayer.

Remember, what you have learned thus far from the Beatitudes. As a disciple you...

1. Recognize your own desperate need for God's mercy
2. Mourn over your own sinfulness
3. Are humble and have submitted yourself to following God's ways
4. Desire to do what is right
5. So you forgive even if it doesn't seem right because you trust Jesus

Now it's your turn

- a. Pray and ask God to give you the strength to forgive others. Then ask God to reveal to you the people you need to forgive.
- b. Make a list of everything God brings to your mind writing down who, what, and how it made you feel.
- c. Pray the prayer of forgiveness above for each item.

What Forgiveness Means

Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a choice, a difficult choice, but one that can be made with the power of the Holy Spirit who is in you. If you wait until you feel like forgiving you will be trapped forever because you will never feel like it. You must make a decision to act in faith as a follower of Christ because you believe His way is by far the best way.

Forgiveness feels like you are letting the person who hurt you off the hook and that is an injustice. But remember, you are not to judge. God is the Judge. When you forgive, you take yourself off the hook. Until you forgive, the things done in the past will continue to haunt and hurt you in the present and future. Your unforgiveness is what continues to hurt you, not them.

When you forgive, you are releasing the other person. You are saying that you will no longer hold the past event against that person. You are letting them off your hook, but not God's. They are still accountable to Him.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. You still have a memory, but you'll discover that the "sting" of the memory is gone. When something triggers the memory, you will find that there is no longer any anger or shame associated with it. You're free and able to react to that memory trigger in healthy and positive ways.

Foremost, you are forgiving the person before God. It is done through prayer. You may or may not tell the person you've forgiven them. In fact, we recommend that you do not tell the person if you aren't sure if he or she is looking for forgiveness. That could possibly make things worse. However, if you sense someone wants forgiveness, or if they have asked for it, then definitely tell them that you forgive them. By taking that step, you may even see God's power do a miracle in their lives.