



The Beatitudes Matthew 5:3-12

NOTE: The study leader should read aloud or should ask someone else to read aloud the scripture text, Matthew 5:3-12.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered by Jesus near the beginning of his ministry. Matthew pictured Jesus sitting on a hill with his disciples seated around him. Others were also there listening, but primarily Jesus was teaching his disciples. This sermon is Jesus' own description of what his followers were to be and to do.

As we see throughout the Bible, it is God's purpose to call out people who are set apart for God's cause. The Sermon on the Mount describes what human life and human community look like when they submit to the rule of God. The citizens of God's kingdom are to be very different from others. Their characteristics are to be totally different from those characteristics that are honored by the world. Jesus said that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:20) Only in the scripture will we find how we are to live as Jesus calls his followers to live.

The Beatitudes are Jesus' description of Christian character and conduct and the divine blessing which is promised to those who exhibit these characteristics. Some have said that the standards taught in the beatitudes are not attainable. They are attainable, but only by people who have experienced God's forgiveness and saving grace. Jesus was setting these high standards for those who were already his disciples. We may never be perfect in our pursuit of these characteristics but we must desire to be a reflection of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who was perfect.

Each beatitude is not directed to a separate group of people. But all these qualities are to be possessed by the same group of people. Christians are to be meek, merciful, poor in spirit, pure in heart, mourning, hungry, peacemakers and will be persecuted. These qualities are not to be considered as the gifts of the spirit which he distributes to different members of the church in order to equip them for service. But through his grace Christ's followers can have all these Christian graces working in themselves.

The Beatitudes are not meant to contain ideals which we can only dream of attaining nor are they only promises of a futuristic existence. They point out a form of living in the present that gives Christ's followers triumph over the world and a way of life which produces a joy that is permanent. The rewards Christ described are not rewards of merit but are gifts of grace.

Neither can the characteristics which Christ desires in his disciples be attained once and for all time. They are disciplines which must be cultivated in the daily living of our lives. The early disciples learned Jesus' teachings and way of life by being with Jesus every day as they listened to Him, talked to Him, walked with Him and observed His lifestyle; living Heart-to-Heart with

Jesus. Jesus' disciples had doubts and made mistakes at times. But Jesus forgave them for their weaknesses and they continued to grow in his love.

Jesus calls us to walk with Him daily just as His disciples walked with Him. If we have already declared our faith in Him, then He calls us to equip ourselves to live out that faith by reading God's Word daily, talking with God daily in prayer, and putting what we learn into action in our daily lives. As we do this, the characteristics of a true disciple of Christ will begin to emerge in our lives and we will become "Women of the Word."

Heart-to-Heart Activities:

1. The study leader should prepare ahead paper hearts (made from construction paper or other suitable material) which have listed on one side the Christian characteristics: joyful, courageous, sanctified, trusting, merciful, pure, peaceful, wise, fruitful. On each of the backs of the hearts place the name of one of the members of your group. Place the hearts in a box and have each member draw a heart out of the box. Then ask each member to commit to pray for the person whose name she draws throughout the year. The prayer should be for this person to shine forth with the Christian characteristics which we will be studying as well as any other needs this person might have. You may choose to reveal the name of the prayer partner each has drawn immediately or you may choose to wait until the end of the year to reveal the name.
2. Supply each member with a pencil, paper and an envelope. Ask each one to read through the scripture text silently and then list those characteristics which they do not think they possess or which they feel they need to work on. Also, ask them to write a brief description of what they feel those characteristics mean. Each one should seal her paper in an envelope and write her name on the front. The leader should collect the envelopes and hold them for use at the end of this year's Bible studies. In the leadership changes, then simply tell the women to put their envelopes in a safe place and be prepared to bring them back for the final Bible study.

Reflection Questions:

- ♥ Place yourself in the sandals of one of the disciples on the hillside listening to Jesus. What did he say that perplexed you the most? What did you understand right away? Share your thoughts with a neighbor or with the whole group.
- ♥ Discuss with a neighbor the idea that as disciples or "Women of the Word" we possess all the beatitudes. Share the beatitude(s) that you feel you possess. Now share the one(s) that you would like to grow or nurture in your life.
- ♥ Name some ways that as women, we can develop or nurture the beatitudes or characteristics taught by Jesus.
- ♥ Why is it important to be in daily communion with God? Use Proverbs 8:30, Luke 9:23, Acts 17:11 to inform your comments.

- ♥ With a partner, name some activities you do daily (or would like to do) in order to gain the strength to live your faith daily.

Prayer:

Our Righteous God,

We have listened to your word and now we wish to quiet our minds and hearts and enter the sanctuary of your peace. Sometimes when we look into our hearts we find we are holding on to our pride and unwillingness to admit wrong. We may become impatient and insensitive toward people who irritate us. Sometimes we have secret joy when another person fails. Righteous God, at this moment, we fix our heart's eyes upon you. Place in our hearts your compassion, kindness, and humility so that others may feel even a small breath of your spirit as we pass through their lives. As Jesus' followers and in his name we pray, Amen