

# Lesson 1 | December 3, 2023

## The God-Blessed Life

### Study Text

Matthew 5:1–48

### Central Truth

God blesses those who hear, believe, and obey Him.

### Key Verse

#### Matthew 5:6

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (kju).

“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied” (nlt).

### Learning Objectives:

Students will identify the path to a blessed life.

Students will learn how to apply the principles of the Law to their personal lives.

Students will seek to be people of character.

### Introducing the Study

**Say:** We are beginning a study of the teachings of Jesus as recorded by Matthew, a Jewish tax collector who wrote primarily for a Jewish audience. Although his readers were anxiously looking for the Messiah, many did not recognize Him, because He did not fit their preconceived ideas. The teachings of Jesus were indeed revolutionary (especially to the religious leaders), but they focused on radical repentance and Kingdom living rather than rebellion against Rome.

### Opening Activity—Blessings

*Ask: How do you define blessing? After a few responses, follow up by asking, What have been the greatest blessings in your life so far? Examples may include salvation, a spouse or child, a job, etc. Then ask, Did you do anything to earn these blessings? Explain blessings are gifts from God and His ultimate desire is to bless His children.*

**Say:** For the next three lessons, we will be looking at Jesus’ most famous series of teachings, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew describes Jesus delivering the message atop a hill in northern Israel, while Luke records many of the same teachings being delivered on a plain or level area (Luke 6:17). These were such important Kingdom principles for Jesus’ followers that He likely taught them repeatedly in different settings. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The first portion of Jesus’ sermon, commonly known as the Beatitudes, describes how we experience God’s blessings. Believers who continue to grow more like Jesus gradually develop attitudes and spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22–23) that allow them to enjoy the blessings God freely gives.

### Part 1—Live with God’s Favor

#### Obedient and Blessed Matthew 5:1–12

**Say:** The Old Testament declares curses and blessings based on obedience to God, promising, “You will experience all these blessings if you obey the Lord your God”

(Deuteronomy 28:2, nlt). As the New Testament opens and Jesus' ministry begins, He explains how His followers can receive God's blessings by obeying His teachings and developing a Kingdom perspective. (Share your highlights from the following text.) The Sermon on the Mount holds the same significance in the new covenant as the Law did in the old covenant. Specifically, the Beatitudes parallel the Ten Commandments—down to the detail of being delivered on a mountaintop. In Matthew 5:3–12, Jesus identified eight Kingdom principles that result in the blessings of God. Many of these principles run counter to the world's philosophy, but God wants His people to be different—inside and out!

**1. God blesses the “poor in spirit”** (verse 3, kjv; “those who are poor and realize their need for him,” nlt). Poor does not refer to socioeconomic status here, but the realization we are utterly destitute with no righteousness of our own. We can inherit the kingdom of heaven only because of God's grace.

**2. “God blesses those who mourn”** (verse 4, nlt). While it is true God comforts us in our emotional grief, the kind of mourning Jesus describes comes from grief over sin in our own lives and in the fallen world.

**3. God blesses the “meek”** (verse 5, kjv; “humble,” nlt). Jesus quoted Psalm 37:11 here. Indeed, the entire psalm provides a commentary on the concept of meekness. The only individuals in Scripture described as meek are Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus himself (Matthew 11:29; 21:5, kjv), indicating meekness in no way implies weakness, but rather, strength under control.

**4. “God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice”** (5:6, nlt; “righteousness,” kjv). The Greek word for “righteousness” implies a divine justness that comes from God alone. Recognizing His holiness causes a deep longing in our souls for the kind of righteousness only available through Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21).

**5. “God blesses those who are merciful”** (Matthew 5:7, nlt). When we recognize the mercy God has lavished on us, we, in turn, are to grant mercy to those who have wronged us and continue to receive God's mercy ourselves. Jesus will expand on this cycle of forgiveness later in His sermon (6:14–15).

**6. “God blesses those whose hearts are pure”** (5:8, nlt). The religious leaders of Jesus' time placed heavy emphasis on outward purity and cleanliness, but Jesus wants our outward behavior to reflect the purity deep within us that results from His work in our lives. Following Him with that kind of integrity means we will one day enjoy the blessing of seeing God face-to-face.

**7. “God blesses those who work for peace”** (verse 9, nlt; “peacemakers,” kjv). As believers, we are called to help others find the peace with God that we have found: “God has given us the task of reconciling people to him” (2 Corinthians 5:18, nlt). When we fulfill this role, the world will recognize we are God's children.

**8. “God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right”** (Matthew 5:10, nlt). Persecution and blessing may seem incompatible. However, living according to God's principles puts us in direct conflict with those who live according to the standards of the world. Being persecuted for Jesus' sake should not cause depression or anxiety. Instead, we should rejoice when we remember God's promised blessings here on earth and in heaven. Not only were the Old Testament prophets persecuted for righteous living, but so were the apostles. After being interrogated, flogged, and threatened, Peter

and “the apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus” (Acts 5:41, nlt).

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- **Resource Packet Item 1: Beatitudes in Action**
  - Divide the class into pairs or small groups to discuss the questions about the fulfillment of Jesus’ Beatitude blessings both now and in eternity. Then allow students to share their reflections.

Jesus ended this section of the Beatitudes by warning His followers that they would be mocked, persecuted, and lied about because they chose to follow Him (Matthew 5:11). He added, “Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven” (verse 12, nlt). He reminded the audience that they would be in good company, as the ancient prophets were treated similarly.

- **Discuss**

How have you observed the principles of the Beatitudes played out in your life or someone else’s life?

How should we prepare for persecution as Christians?

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### **Salt and Light      Matthew 5:13–16**

Say: People have historically turned to the Church for guidance when major catastrophes occurred, realizing Christians have special access to God. To fulfill our role as the body of Christ and reach the world, we must remain relevant to society without compromising biblical truth for the sake of culture. Jesus used two metaphors—salt and light—to help His listeners understand the importance of believers remaining relevant. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Jesus declared His followers to be “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). In the first century, salt was a vital commodity used to flavor and preserve food. Salt was so important, in fact, that it was used as currency. Likewise, those who faithfully serve God are extremely valuable to society. Jesus contrasts the worth of salt when used correctly with its total worthlessness when it is not fulfilling its purpose. Depending on how we live our lives, we can be valuable or worthless—both to our society and God’s kingdom. The choice is ours.

Jesus then declared His followers to be “the light of the world” (verse 14). Not only can light be clearly seen, but it illuminates other things as well. When believers’ “good deeds shine out for all to see” (verse 16, nlt), those living in darkness notice the contrast between their lives and the God-blessed lives of those who follow Him. Jesus says when people see His followers shine, they will praise God. We must never attempt to hide our light, but hold it high for everyone to see.

- **Discuss**

In what practical ways can your church be both salt and light in your community?

How can you personally be a light that glorifies God?

### **Part 2—Practice God-Pleasing Righteousness**

#### **The Law’s Relevance      Matthew 5:17–20**

Say: Some people have relegated Old Testament Law to the past, arguing the Ten Commandments are no longer meaningful. But Jesus said, “Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets.

No, I came to accomplish their purpose” (Matthew 5:17, nlt). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a new perspective on the Ten Commandments, explaining obedience is a matter of the heart, not just outward behavior. When we follow His example, we can properly interpret and live out the Law. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

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- **Resource Packet Item 2: Motives for Obedience**
  - Distribute the worksheet and divide the class into small groups. Assign one or two of the commandments to each group, depending on the size of your class. After a few minutes, ask the groups to share their thoughts.

We could easily mistake Jesus’ disdain for the Pharisees’ behavior for a dismissal of the Law itself. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Jesus carefully distinguished between the law of Moses and the self-righteous practices of the Pharisees, valuing the Law so highly that He said if we “ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same” (verse 19, nlt), we would be the least in the kingdom of heaven. He was not saying that following the Law was the means by which we enter the kingdom of heaven, but that the Law reflects the kind of life we should live when we are part of His kingdom. The heart of the Law goes far beyond the outward behavior of rule-following.

Jesus’ goal was to bring each person into right relationship with God—which was the key ingredient the religious teachers of His day were missing. He would accomplish this better righteousness for us by becoming the ultimate Sacrifice and taking the penalty for our sins (verse 20; John 16:10, nlt).

- **Discuss**

How should we value the Law as we live under the grace God has given us? In what ways do we sometimes allow legalism to creep into our expectations for ourselves and others?

**The Law’s Deeper Meaning      Matthew 5:21–30**

Say: Many Christians can truthfully say they have never murdered, stolen, or committed adultery. Yet keeping the letter of the Law is not the way to please God. Jesus helps us understand what God truly desires from us by quoting the commandments and identifying the heart conditions behind them. His point is that when our hearts are pure, right behaviors will follow. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

It is not enough for us to simply avoid murder. Jesus went deeper. He said if we have anger in our hearts toward someone, we are subject to judgment, just as if we had committed the act of murder (Matthew 5:21–22). Anger is a gateway emotion that can lead to bitterness, character assassination, name-calling, hatred, or even murder itself. Jesus instructed us to mend broken relationships before worshipping God. He told us to lay down our offering, resolve our conflict in person, and only then go back to our act of worship. We can only fulfill the intent of the original commandment by resolving conflicts and making peace with our brothers and sisters in Christ (verses 23–26).

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- **Resource Packet Item 3: Conflict Resolution**
  - Distribute the worksheet, and ask students to label each statement according to the instructions. As you discuss the results, tabulate the responses to find common areas of difficulty.

Jesus turned His attention next to the commandment forbidding adultery. He expands the concept beyond extramarital sex to include lustful looks and thoughts, going so far as to say people should gouge out their lustful eyes and cut off their sinful hands. Jesus' use of dramatic hyperbole illustrates the seriousness of the issue. After all, "it is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (verse 30, nlt).

- **Discuss**

What prevents Christians from confronting and resolving conflict?

What does habitual lust reveal about a person's attitude toward God?

### **Part 3—Prove Your Fidelity to God**

#### **Commitment Matters      Matthew 5:31–37**

Say: One indication of a person's character is his or her ability to keep commitments to other people and God himself. Compromise can be tempting sometimes, but righteous people honor their promises. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Of all the earthly commitments people make, marriage is the most binding. Although the concept of divorce had entered the Israelite community because of sin, it was not part of God's plan (Matthew 19:8). God has not changed His view on divorce. He is the God who "always stands by his covenant—the commitment he made to a thousand generations" (Psalm 105:8, nlt). Because of His love for each individual, He wants husbands and wives to keep their promises to each other and to Him.

Jesus then addressed other kinds of vows. While some vows recorded in the Old Testament were made because of absolute obedience and love for God, others were an attempt to bargain with God. The Pharisees distinguished between two types of oaths: those taken in the name of God (which were fully binding) and those sworn by created things (which could be withdrawn).

Jesus countered by asserting that every oath involves God, who created heaven and earth. Even today, people sometimes use God's name to add weight to their oaths, but Jesus said our word alone should be sufficient. Integrity matters, because our actions reflect on God and His character. We must honor our commitments because of our position as God's people.

- **Discuss**

Why do you think divorce is so prevalent today, even within the Church?

Share about a time you kept a commitment or failed to do so. What were the results?

What did you learn from the experience?

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#### **Love Matters      Matthew 5:38–48**

Say: How we react when people mistreat us reveals a great deal about our relationship with God. When someone harms you, seeking revenge is natural. Forgiveness is supernatural. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

According to the Old Testament, if someone hurt another person, the offended party could retaliate with the same measure. This system may have deterred crime in the newly formed nation of Israel, but the kingdom of heaven is different. The time of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matthew 5:38) had passed. Instead of letting offenses control our actions, Jesus taught His followers to use those very offenses as means to show love and generosity to the offender.

Jesus also expanded the concept of love to include one's enemies. This was revolutionary teaching. In fact, it still is. Jesus' followers must still be willing to forgive those who hate us and to see our enemies as God sees them. Jesus himself demonstrated this principle of ultimate love when He came to earth to live and die for rebellious humanity (Romans 5:8). God extends His kindness to everyone, so it is natural for Him to expect His children to do the same.

Jesus challenged His followers to "be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, nlt). The word "perfect" means "full-grown, mature, and complete." While sinless perfection is unattainable in this life, our single-minded goal should be to show the same kind of love God shows. The sacrificial, unconditional love that sent Jesus to the cross should compel His followers as well.

- **Discuss**

Why do you think it is difficult to "love your enemies" and "pray for those who persecute you" (verse 44, nlt)?

How can you practice seeing all people—whether friends or foes—as God sees them?

### **What Is God Saying to Us?**

Say: Jesus' first recorded sermon explains God's desire to bless His people and establishes the standards of citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Most, if not all, of these Kingdom principles run counter to our modern culture. Often, what the world celebrates, Jesus corrects. But the kingdom of heaven is populated by people who are humble, loving, peaceful, and generous. They are people of integrity. They reflect God's heart. They are willing to submit to God's standards regardless of the world's response.

### **Living It Out**

#### **Ministry in Action**

Ask God to adjust your attitude so it reflects the principles Jesus taught.

Identify any interpersonal conflicts and work to resolve them.

Ask God to reveal any ways you are being controlled by past hurts. Forgive the person who hurt you and pray for God to bless him or her.

### **Daily Bible Readings**

#### **Monday:**

Blessing of Righteous Living.

Psalm 1:1–6

#### **Tuesday:**

Blessing of Being Forgiven.

Psalm 32:1–11

#### **Wednesday:**

Blessing of Trusting the Lord.

Psalm 40:1–5

#### **Thursday:**

Blessing of Believing in Christ.

John 20:24–29

#### **Friday:**

Blessing of Giving.

Acts 20:32–35

#### **Saturday:**

Blessing of Spiritual Blessings.  
Ephesians 1:3–8