

## Session 1: Matthew 5:3

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** God draws near to us, the poor in spirit, and forms us into the image of Jesus.

**Head Change:** To know the Beatitudes are not traits that God is expecting us to create, but what he is accomplishing in us.

**Heart Change:** To feel welcomed into the presence of God not despite being poor in spirit, but precisely because we're poor in spirit.

**Life Change:** To carry our burdens to God in prayer and believe he gives the kingdom of heaven to the likes of us.

### OPEN

**What comes to mind when you hear the word “blessed”?**

We may assume that to be blessed is merely to be happy or to enjoy good fortune. But, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus casts a different vision of what it means to be blessed: to be commended by God. In this session, Matt Chandler, pastor at The Village Church in the Flower Mound, TX, introduces us to the idea that the blessings of the Beatitudes are not a formula for happiness, but a declaration from God about us, often despite our circumstances.

### READ

Read Matthew 4:23–5:12.

\_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

This image shows a vertical rectangular sheet of white paper with horizontal grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on its right side, suggesting it is resting on a surface.

## DISCUSS

Before preaching the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had begun widening the reach of his ministry. Crowds were gathering from every corner of the region to come and follow Jesus, which sets the stage for our passage. Read Matthew 4:23–5:1.

*[Note: For further study on the geography mentioned in these passages and its connection to the kingdom of God, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this session.]*

Imagine the scene as Jesus ascends the mountain to teach. **What stands out to you as you consider the crowds of people who have come to see and hear Jesus?**

One of the key themes that undergirds the Beatitudes—a theme that Matt said is the foundation these Beatitudes are built on—is the kingdom of God. In fact, our study begins near the end of Matthew 4 because, as Matt asserted, Jesus’s initial preaching of the kingdom of God is a prerequisite to understanding what’s going on in the Beatitudes.

**In your own words, how would you define the kingdom of God?**

The kingdom of God can simply be defined as the reign and rule of God over all peoples in heaven and on earth. Though the kingdom of God has always existed, part of Jesus’s work was to proclaim the good news that “the kingdom of [God] had come near” (Matt 4:17). Large crowds from every corner of the region (all peoples, not just Jews) were coming and following Jesus. **How can our local churches reflect the reality of God’s kingdom on earth? In what ways is the nearness of the kingdom of God good news for you?**

Matt highlighted that Jesus frames the Beatitudes with this statement: “theirs is the kingdom.” **Having read through the Beatitudes, what does it say about God’s kingdom that it belongs to people such as those he describes? What does it say about God himself that he gives the kingdom to the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek, for instance?**

Jesus repeatedly uses the word “blessed” in the Beatitudes. It shows up at least nine times in these verses as a declaration of God’s approval. **In what ways does our modern conception of being blessed run contrary to Jesus’s use of the word?**

*[Note: For further study on the word “blessed,” see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this session.]*

At some point, we all face the conditions described in these Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, mourning, emptiness, etc. **Knowing that these conditions are somewhat common to the human experience, how does Jesus’s teaching in the Beatitudes encourage you?**

After giving his overview of the Beatitudes, Matt zoomed in on the first one, which says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matt said God pronounces blessing on you “when you’re at the end of yourself, when you come to God with empty hands.” **Have you ever come to the end of yourself? What that was like for you?**

**During that season, while you were at the end of yourself, how did you experience God’s blessing? In what ways did you find it difficult to recognize God’s blessing during that time?**

For those who are poor in spirit—those at the end of themselves—Jesus promises that “the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” **In what ways do you draw encouragement from Jesus’s promise in this passage?**

Matt made a connection between the first Beatitude and Psalm 51, which states in verse 17, “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” **What does it mean to have a broken and contrite heart? What are the similarities between this passage and the first Beatitude?**

Matt described the first Beatitude as an invitation “into the presence of Jesus . . . to confess your weakness, to confess your need and receive the kingdom.” All that’s required of us is to simply come to Jesus. **In what ways are you weary? Frustrated by an ongoing struggle with sin? How do you imagine God would respond if, instead of avoiding or running *from* him, you ran *to* him? What, if anything, is preventing you from doing that?**

## LAST WORD

The Beatitudes are not a set of virtues or behaviors that we are called to manufacture on our own. Instead, Jesus is working the Beatitudes into us. They're a way of being that, over time, Jesus accomplishes in us. In the Beatitudes, we find the ethic of the kingdom of God.

We learn in the first Beatitude that God pronounces blessing on those who know their need for him and who accept Jesus's invitation to come to him. All that's expected of us is to come, weary and weak as we are, "for the kingdom of heaven is [ours]."

Take a few quiet moments to bring your weariness, your frustrations, and any ongoing struggle with sin into the presence of Jesus, and confess your need for him, either alone or in the company of others. Assure yourself of the truth of this passage by reciting it aloud.

## GO DEEPER

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the Beatitudes.

### 1. *Geography and the Kingdom of God*

The biblical authors were more skilled and intentional with their language than we often realize. For example, in the leadup to the Beatitudes Matthew names certain cities and regions. Matthew is communicating something specific to his readers.

Read Matthew 4:23–25.

This passage highlights how widely word about Jesus spread throughout the area, both near and far. Presumably by word of mouth, people from Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan—virtually every corner of the region—had heard news about Jesus and flocked to him, Jews and Gentiles alike.

**What do you think Matthew is trying to show his readers by including the names of each of these regions in his gospel account?**

People were coming to Jesus from afar. **What does their willingness to travel from such distances communicate about the person and message of Jesus? Why were they willing to pick up and follow him?**

Read Acts 1:8. Pay attention to the geographic language; notice the similarities between this passage and Matthew 4:25. **In these passages, who is Jesus inviting into the kingdom of God?**

In both passages, there is a movement that should catch our eye. In Matthew 4:25, Jerusalem, Judea, and “beyond the Jordan” (i.e., the ends of the earth) were coming and

following Jesus. In Acts 1:8, followers of Jesus are being charged with going to Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth (beyond the Jordan). In both cases, the implication is that the kingdom of God “belongs to such as these,” both Jews and Gentiles, or any who are “poor in spirit.”

**When you encounter the phrase, “ends of the earth,” what thoughts come to mind?**

The gospel according to Matthew is written to a first-century, primarily Jewish audience. It is embedded in its own Middle Eastern geographic context, so when Matthew uses the phrase “beyond the Jordan,” or when Luke writes “ends of the earth” in the book of Acts, they are referring to people like us whose lives are lived outside of Jerusalem. We are the people at “the ends of the earth.”

Did you know that you are a person who was once at “the ends of the earth”? God, in his grace, brought the gospel from first-century Galilee to you. **Take a moment to give thanks to God that he sent the good news of the gospel to you.**

## **2. Peek at the Greek: “Blessed”**

“Blessed” is a word that gets thrown around a lot. And its pervasiveness seems to be depriving it of its true meaning. But when Jesus uses “blessed,” he has a specific definition in mind.

Read Matthew 5:1–11.

**How many times does Jesus use the word “blessed” in this passage?**

**What are a few of the ways you hear the word “blessed” used today?**

The word for blessed, *makarios*, is a word so rich with meaning that it’s difficult to capture its fullness with a single English word. Wrapped up in this word, all at once, is the idea of happiness, being fortunate, and even flourishing. And in the Beatitudes, Jesus is using *makarios* to pronounce blessing and divine favor on people.

Therefore, in the first Beatitude, Jesus is making the claim

that God looks favorably upon those who are poor in spirit.

**How does the Greek meaning of the word “blessed” change your understanding of these opening lines of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount?**

Take a moment to consider the significance that these Beatitudes are pronouncements of blessing—objective realities—and not commands that we’re called to rigidly obey. They’re not acts of obedience that we must manufacture ourselves, but they are an ethic that Jesus is working into us. In other words, we are not being called to seek out mourning, poverty of spirit, or, as we’ll see later, persecution. But when we encounter those things—and we likely will—we can be certain that Jesus will look on us favorably and pronounce blessedness upon us. Because, Jesus himself says, “the kingdom of heaven is [ours].”