

## Day 1

January 6



*Pray | To reflect the character of Jesus in your daily life*

THE BEATITUDES DESCRIBE a Christian's character and the spiritual blessings of living a holy life.

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, Jesus had compassion for the people and sat down to teach the disciples and crowds. The first 12 verses, also called The Beatitudes, reveal the kind of character Jesus values in his followers. Notice how the words *poor, mourn, meek, hunger, merciful, pure, peacemakers* and *persecuted* stand in stark contrast to the world's values. The world pursues wealth, celebrates sin, self-promotes, desires temporary indulgence, lacks forgiveness, seeks vengeance and is willing to compromise values to avoid persecution or discomfort. While the beatitudes do describe a mature Christian's character, they are not a checklist to *do* in exchange for spiritual blessing. Like the fruit of the Spirit, we cannot grow in these character traits apart from the Holy Spirit's power. These traits are evidence of a transformed life that reflects the character of Jesus, our Savior.



*Read | Matthew 5:1-12, Philippians 3:17-21*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

What evidence reveals that your life and heart are transformed by Jesus? Where are you trying to achieve Godly character in your own strength instead of God's power? Consider adding prayer for these ten character traits to be displayed in your life on a regular basis.

The book Philippians tells us this world is not our home. When we follow Jesus, our lives and priorities reflect our Savior and our eternal destination. In what area is the Holy Spirit convicting you or revealing an area of worldly pursuit? Pray and ask God to give you his perspective and wisdom to make changes.

Holiness cannot be achieved apart from the Holy Spirit. When we display the character traits in the beatitudes, it's only through the grace and power of God. God does all the work and then generously gives us spiritual blessings! Consider God's lavish kindness and thank him through praise and worship.

## Day 2

January 7



*Pray | Ask God to give you a right view of and response to your sin*

BLESSED ARE THE POOR in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The first two beatitudes go hand in hand. First, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Or, blessed are those who recognize their spiritual poverty. People in physical poverty lack sufficient resources for life. Without Jesus, our sin nature means that all people are in spiritual poverty and lack sufficient resources for spiritual life. We all need a Savior. This realization moves us to cry out to Jesus; He alone can reconcile us to God. Second, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. What are they mourning? Because the beatitudes are a list of a Christian's character traits, we see that God comforts us when we recognize our spiritual poverty and mourn our sin. All of us sin is against God. Still, in his great mercy and grace, he comforts and forgives us because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice. God's grace gives believers the kingdom of heaven and replaces our shame with freedom.



*Read | Matthew 5:3-4, Romans 3:23, Romans 7:14-20, Joel 2:12-13*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Romans 3 is clear: we have all sinned and fall short of God's glory. If you recognize your sin, God doesn't just stop there. Through Jesus, he forgives your sin and gives you the kingdom of heaven. Don't let this day end without learning more about Jesus if you do not know Him personally yet.

Paul reminds us in Romans 7 that believers still wrestle with sin. While we aren't supposed to accept or excuse our sin, we are also not to carry shame and guilt. Is there a sin that keeps showing up in your life that you've accepted or maybe beat yourself up with? Ask God to give you a right view of sin and confess it, then receive and trust that God's grace is greater than your sin.

In the book of Joel, we're given a visual picture of what it looks like to mourn our sin. If you feel ambivalent or unsure of how to mourn sin, take some time to ask God to help you 'return to him with all your heart.' Consider fasting as you ask God to give you a right view of your sin and to rend your heart.

## Day 3

January 8



**Pray** | *For a pure heart and unhindered relationship with God*

BLESSED ARE THE PURE in heart for they will see God.

To sinners like us, a pure heart can feel impossible. How can we possibly receive this blessing? God didn't give an impossible standard; He knows our hearts and calls Christians to a life of continual confession and repentance.

God is perfectly holy and cannot be in the presence of sin. The only way believers stand righteous before God is through Jesus' work on the cross. While unconfessed sin can't remove a believer's salvation, it can hinder our connection to God. It's about *our* position toward God, not *his* position toward us. When God shows us our sin, we choose to keep sinning or confess and repent. Harboring sinful habits, thoughts and attitudes obscures our view of God. But when we regularly confess and repent of sin, we have a pure heart. As we experience God's character and attributes, we *see* him. What a gift!



**Read** | *Matthew 5:8, Philippians 4:8, Isaiah 6:1-4, 1 John 1:8-9*



**Reflect** | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Our time and thoughts can reveal the state of our hearts. Philippians lists things God wants us to think about. Examine your heart. In what specific habits, thoughts and attitudes do you battle impurity of heart? Ask God to help you focus on and do things that honor him.

When face to face with the Holy God, Isaiah fell prostrate in despair. He recognized his sinfulness and knew he deserved death. How seriously do you view your own sin? How are the habits, thoughts and attitudes you identified above clouding your ability to 'see God?' Ask God to give you a clear view of your sin and take a moment to confess and ask for forgiveness.

1 John gives us a clear path to living with a pure heart. How often do you ask God to reveal your sin and spend time confessing and asking for the Holy Spirit to help you repent? Think of practical ways you can practice this in the morning, evening, or all day long so you can live pure in heart before God.

*Day 4*  
*January 9*



*Pray | To be a peacemaker, not a peacekeeper*

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, for they will be called children of God.

When peacekeeping forces occupy a land, they ‘keep peace’ by preventing further conflict. Their very presence is a show of force intended to prevent further violence, *or else*. As we see around the world today, true and lasting peace cannot be achieved until enemies resolve their issues. A *peacemaker* is defined as ‘one who makes peace especially by reconciling parties at variance.’ As sinners, each of us are born enemies of God. When Jesus died on the cross, his perfect sacrifice atoned for our sins, reconciling believers to God. Jesus *made* peace where we could not make peace for ourselves. The spiritual blessing of those at peace with God is to be called sons of God. Through Jesus, we are adopted into God’s family and richly blessed as heirs.

“peacemaker.” Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam Webster 2019.



*Read | Matthew 5:9, Isaiah 9:6, Gal 4:4-7*



*Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

One of the names of Jesus in Isaiah is Prince of Peace. Resolving conflict is important, but the most important peacemaking we can participate in is to bring others to Jesus so they can be reconciled to God. Who is God calling you to bring to the Prince of Peace? Spend time praying for this person by name. Ask God to help you listen and respond to the Spirit’s prompt to share.

Galatians tells us God sent his Son to redeem us so we could receive sonship. Are you reconciled to God by grace through faith in Jesus? If you aren’t sure how you fit into God’s family, sign up for the Story of God class, or ask a pastor or friend at Five Oaks to pray for you and help answer your questions. (Go to <http://www.storyofgod.church/> for more info.)

In Matthew 5:9, Christians are called to be peacemakers, reconciled to God and to others. We are to follow Christ’s example to *make* peace with others. In what area have you been avoiding reconciliation or just *keeping* the peace? With whom is God calling you to take the first step toward reconciliation? You don’t have to do it yourself -- God will give you the wisdom and discernment to obey.

## Day 5

January 10



### Pray | To stand firm for righteousness

BLESSED ARE THOSE who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Have you wondered why the disciples didn't spend more time praying for protection from persecution? Despite tremendous opposition and threat of physical harm, they boldly lived for Jesus and obediently shared the gospel. Many were persecuted or killed by the people they were trying to save. Their lives and the lives of believers today reflect the righteousness of God. Believers' lives look different from the lives of those who don't know Christ. While *sometimes* this means not participating in certain activities or conversations, it more often means gently speaking truth and living by example. This can be difficult in the workplace, in certain social situations and even in our own homes. However great the persecution, believers hope in the promise of the kingdom of heaven and the comfort and presence of God amid all suffering. Jesus calls us blessed when we endure persecution in his name.



Read | *Matthew 5:10-12, Matthew 10:21-23, 28, Corinthians 1:7-9*



### Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

Jesus told the disciples to *expect* persecution. In Matthew 10, he told them not to fear people who can kill the body and to instead serve God, who holds their soul securely. Who are you afraid to offend for fear of rejection or persecution? Ask God to give you words to speak truth in love, regardless of your fears.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul doesn't sugarcoat the intense persecution he and others have endured. Persecution caused them to stop relying on self and instead rely on God, *who raises the dead*. When you pray about persecution for the church or in your own life, are your prayers focused on escaping the circumstance or on God working in your heart? How does Paul's perspective change your understanding of God's work in your heart during persecution?

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