

The Unbelievable Beatitudes

How to receive their blessings in your life

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Chapter One

The Poor in Spirit

Each of the participants in your group should have read the chapter and done the Bible study for this week. After a welcome and prayer, provide a short overview as you get started to make sure everyone begins at the same place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

– Matthew 5:3

1. If someone asked you to describe or explain what it means to be “poor in spirit,” what would you say? If they asked you to give a current example of someone who has this quality, who would you name? Why?
2. Do we need to guard against having too low an opinion of ourselves? Why or why not?
3. What did each of the criminals hanging beside Jesus on the cross ask Him to do? How did their words reveal their attitude toward Jesus?
4. The examples of the thief on the cross and of Samson basically show end-of-life, deathbed conversions. How common do you think it is to feel genuine poverty of spirit before reaching “the end of our rope”? What life experiences and influences can help this process?
5. Why do you think riches are so valued today? Do you think it’s easier for a person to have poverty of spirit if they have material poverty as well? Why or why not?
6. Do you think people in the new earth will have more or less poverty of spirit than they had on earth? Explain your answer.

Fundamental Belief #7 Nature of Man

When our first parents disobeyed God, they denied their dependence upon Him and fell from their high position under Him. The image of God in them was marred and they became subject to death. Their descendants share this fallen nature and its consequences.

An In-depth Group Discussion Idea

Choose one of the following opening questions from above and encourage the group to reflect on the concept of making friends. These opening questions are intended to warm up the group to the topic. Use just one (or more if you have time). They are not yes/no questions but open-ended, so anyone can easily answer them.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH ACTIVITIES

Activity #1

Purpose: To explore the difference in our attitudes as we seek salvation from Jesus.

Preparation: Divide into two groups by numbering off, having even numbers go to one side of the room and odd numbers go to the other (or you can simply designate where the dividing line will be in the room). The first group will represent criminal #1, and the second group will represent criminal #2.

Assignment: The group representing criminal #1 should study their criminal's words in Luke 23:39. Then they should make a list of things people say today that come from a similar mindset. The group representing criminal #2 should study their criminal's words in Luke 23:40-42. They should also make a list of things people say today that show a similar attitude or mindset.

Wrap-up: Ask a spokesperson or two from each group to share some of the phrases on their list. Then ask someone to read Luke 23:43 and discuss what those words would mean to us if Jesus said them to us today.

Activity #2

Purpose: To understand how important it is to humbly admit our need for God's help.

Preparation: Read aloud or write on the board the first three steps of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous:

- 1) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

Assignment: Invite the participants to divide into groups of three or four (if the class is six or more people). Set a timer for 10 minutes and ask the groups to think of as many Bible examples as they can of people who took some or all of these steps. Remind them that the principles apply to all areas, not just alcohol. (In other words, the first step would be admitting we are powerless over our situation and need help.)
When the timer goes off, invite each group to share one of the Bible characters they talked about. They should report: why the person felt helpless, what they did about it, and the result. Then discuss with the entire group the following questions:

- 1) Why is it so important to admit that we are powerless and need help? How is this like the spiritual poverty Jesus was talking about?
- 2) What Bible characters can you think of that didn't take this important first step? What was the end result?

Wrap-up: Give each participant a 3 x 5 card or small piece of paper. Ask them to write out this sentence, filling in the end:

I admit that I am powerless over...

Encourage them to prayerfully consider what area or areas of their lives they need to turn over to Jesus. Close with prayer, asking God to help each member of the group with the struggle they wrote on their paper.



Media Resources

► Books

Authentic

Scott R. Ward (Review and Herald Publishing, 2012)

If you've ever wanted a genuine, thriving relationship with Jesus but didn't know exactly what to do to make it happen, this book was written for you. Even if going through the motions has left you empty, if reading the Bible and praying are just two extra items on your daily to-do list, if you feel far from God, there is hope.

The solution isn't praying longer or reading the entire Bible in a certain amount of time, although praying and reading your Bible are essential to an honest-to-goodness relationship with Jesus. Real relationships involve two-way communication and a connection that inspires actual feelings—cold, hard facts don't produce love, after all.

Within these pages you'll discover how to come heart-to-heart with Jesus in Scripture, what role multisensory symbols have in the devotional experience, and the key elements of a mutually satisfying, lifelong journey with Jesus.

Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work

Timothy Keller (Dutton Adult, 2012)

In a work world that is increasingly competitive and insecure, people often have nagging questions: Why am I doing this work? Why is it so hard? And is there anything I can do about it?

Tim Keller, pastor of New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and New York Times bestselling author of *The Reason for God* as well as *The Skeptical Student* in the *Encounters with Jesus* ebook series, and many others, has taught and counseled students, young professionals, and senior leaders on the subject of work and calling for more than twenty years. Now he puts his insights into a book for readers everywhere, giving biblical perspectives on such pressing questions as:

- What is the purpose of work?
- How can I find meaning and serve customers in a cutthroat, bottom-line-oriented workplace?
- How can I use my skills in a vocation that has meaning and purpose?
- Can I stay true to my values and still advance in my field?
- How do I make the difficult choices that must be made in the course of a successful career?

With deep insight and often surprising advice, Keller shows readers that biblical wisdom is immensely relevant to our questions about our work. In fact, the Christian view of work—that we work to serve others, not ourselves—can provide the foundation of a thriving professional and balanced personal life. Keller shows how excellence, integrity, discipline, creativity, and passion in the workplace can help others and even be considered acts of worship—not just of self-interest!



Media Resources

with excerpts from the resources

► Books

Spirituality of the Beatitudes: Matthew's Vision for the Church in an Unjust World

Michael H. Crosby

“The kingdom of God can only be received by empty hands. Jesus warns against (a) worldly self-sufficiency: you trust yourself and your own resources and don't need God; (b) religious self-sufficiency: you trust your religious attitude and moral life and don't need Jesus.”

–From the chapter, “Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit”

The Ragamuffin Gospel

Brennan Manning

“Freedom in Christ produces a healthy independence from peer pressure, people-pleasing, and the bondage of human respect. The tyranny of public opinion can manipulate our lives. *What will the neighbors think? What will my friends think?* The expectations of others can exert a subtle but controlling pressure on our behavior. ...

“In Christ Jesus, freedom from fear empowers us to let go of the desire to appear good so that we can move freely in the mystery of who we really are. Preoccupation with projecting the ‘nice guy’ image, impressing newcomers with our experience, and relying heavily on the regard of others leads to self-consciousness, sticky pedestal behavior, and unfreedom in the iron grip of human respect.”

–From the chapter, “Freedom From Fear”

Christ's Keys to Happiness

George W. Barrett

“Surely the Beatitudes need to be understood in an unusual, profound, and, in the best sense of that word, sophisticated way if they are to be accepted as describing the attitude and conduct that make for blessedness and joy. Living by them can be dangerous living indeed. We easily overlook this fact, for the Beatitudes have gathered to themselves all the sentimental associations connected with the allegedly simple teachings of an idyllic country preacher who went about doing good, while the truth is that he who taught the Beatitudes died because of the way he lived and for what he taught. His own warning is plain enough. ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ His words were fulfilled when he was crucified between two thieves.”

–From the chapter, “Words From Two Hills”

***Surrender: The Secret to Perfect Peace and Happiness*****Gregory L. Jackson**

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► DVD***Pilgrim’s Progress: Journey to Heaven***

This DVD, hailed as “a modern retelling of John Bunyan’s classic story,” follows the suspenseful journey of Christian from the City of Destruction to the gates of heaven. As the back says, “Beyond the gripping drama, Bunyan’s powerful allegory teaches us the hazards and hopes of the Christian life, and the triumphant glory that awaits all who faithfully follow the King of kings!” It’s 103 minutes long and available for purchase or public showings through www.ReelChristian.com



Web Links

With sample excerpts from the website

► Web Resources

“David Asscherick: Friend of God—1

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=in21OupAznw>

This sermon on the Beatitudes was delivered by Pastor David Asscherick during a week of prayer at Oakwood University. He mentions how the Beatitudes are “be attitudes,” or the attitudes we should have. “Everybody’s spiritual journey begins with an awareness of their brokenness and their bankruptcy before God,” he states. “Christianity is unpopular because it paints a very uncomplimentary and very accurate picture of the human condition. And Jesus begins by saying, ‘You’re a sinner.’ You have to start by admitting that you have a problem: that you’re a sinner and need a Savior.”

<http://thereviewfacebook.com/>

This creative site, an imaginative Facebook page from Adventist pioneers, showcases the challenges faced by early believers as they were confronted with “new light.” Certainly a humble, open spirit was necessary in order to move the faith forward. • through insight from the Scriptures.