

Turning Your Heart Toward God



Kay Arthur, David and BJ Lawson



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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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TURNING YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This small-group study is for people who are interested in learning for themselves more about what the Bible says on various subjects, but who have only limited time to meet together. It's ideal, for example, for a lunch group at work, an early morning men's group, a young mothers' group meeting in a home, a Sunday-school class, or even family devotions. (It's also ideal for small groups that typically have longer meeting times—such as evening groups or Saturday morning groups—but want to devote only a portion of their time together to actual study, while reserving the rest for prayer, fellowship, or other activities.)

This book is designed so that all the group's participants will complete each lesson's study activities *at the same time*. Discussing your insights drawn from what God says about the subject reveals exciting, life-impacting truths.

Although it's a group study, you'll need a facilitator to lead the study and keep the discussion moving. (This person's function is *not* that of a lecturer or teacher. However, when this book is used in a Sunday-school class or similar setting, the teacher should feel free to lead more directly and to bring in other insights in addition to those provided in each week's lesson.)

If *you* are your group's facilitator, the leader, here are some helpful points for making your job easier:

- Go through the lesson and mark the text before you lead the group. This will give you increased familiarity with the material and will enable you to facilitate the group with greater ease. It may be easier for you to lead the group through the instructions for marking if you, as a leader, choose a specific color for each symbol you mark.

- As you lead the group, start at the beginning of the text and simply read it aloud in the order it appears in the lesson, including the “insight boxes,” which appear throughout. Work through the lesson together, observing and discussing what you learn. As you read the Scripture verses, have the group say aloud the word they are marking in the text.
- The discussion questions are there simply to help you cover the material. As the class moves into the discussion, many times you will find that they will cover the questions on their own. Remember, the discussion questions are there to guide the group through the topic, not to squelch discussion.
- Remember how important it is for people to verbalize their answers and discoveries. This greatly strengthens their personal understanding of each week’s lesson. Try to ensure that everyone has plenty of opportunity to contribute to each week’s discussions.
- Keep the discussion moving. This may mean spending more time on some parts of the study than on others. If necessary, you should feel free to spread out a lesson over more than one session. However, remember that you don’t want to slow the pace too much. It’s much better to leave everyone “wanting more” than to have people dropping out because of declining interest.
- If the validity or accuracy of some of the answers seems questionable, you can gently and cheerfully remind the group to stay focused on the truth of the Scriptures. Your object is to learn what the Bible says, not to engage in human philosophy. Simply stick with the Scriptures and give God the opportunity to speak. His Word *is* truth (John 17:17)!

TURNING YOUR HEART TOWARD GOD

Certain events and moments in time have changed the course of history. A few, a precious few, have even changed the course of eternity. Take for example the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His life changed not only history but even eternity.

Jesus' delivery of the Sermon on the Mount is one of those pivotal events. In what is now undoubtedly the most famous sermon in the world Jesus took righteousness to a whole new level, all in one fell swoop. He defined religion in a way that was then, and is still today, countercultural, radical, and even revolutionary.

The sermon itself can be preached word-for-word in eighteen minutes, but you could spend a lifetime studying it and never completely search out its depths. The introduction alone—the subject of numerous

books, essays, and discussions—is so powerful, so inspiring that it carries its own name exclusive of the Sermon on the Mount: *The Beatitudes*. In these few verses Jesus introduces the core belief system that changed the world.

As you study what it means to be blessed of God and how those blessings are manifest in our lives, you will see that this is the practical side of living in a real world. As we live out the blessings, we become a light shining in the darkness, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. We become ambassadors for the Son of God.

We then have the opportunity to impact world—all because we studied the introduction to a two-thousand-year-old sermon.

WEEK ONE

Do you want to be blessed by God? Well, of course. We all do. We want His blessing in our lives. This week we will define, from Scripture, the word *blessed* and we will study the first beatitude to see who it is that receives the blessing of God. Start with prayer. Before we get into the study, let's spend some time in prayer, asking God to help us see these familiar verses with a heart open to His truth.

OBSERVE

Matthew 5–7 is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began His sermon with the Beatitudes.

Leader: *Read Matthew 5:1–12 aloud. Have the group say aloud and mark...*

- every reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross: †
- draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**:

As you read the text, it's helpful to have the group say the key words aloud as they mark them. This way everyone will be sure they are marking every occurrence of the word, including any synonymous words or phrases. Do this throughout the study.

MATTHEW 5:1–12

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.

² He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking *Jesus*?
- Who was Jesus teaching?

- What did He start each statement with?

you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

¹² “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

OBSERVE

Let’s look at what the word *blessed* means.

Leader: Read 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:13–15; and Titus 2:11–13 aloud.

- Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word ***blessed***.

DISCUSS

- Who is the word *blessed* associated with in each of these passages?

1 TIMOTHY 1:11; 6:13–15

¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted....

¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without

stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

TITUS 2:11–13

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,

¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.

- Who is *blessed* characteristic of?

- *Blessed* or *blessedness* is first and foremost a characteristic of God. It is part of who He is, His state of being. What difference does this make to your understanding of us as believers being blessed?

OBSERVE

The Greek word for *blessed*—*makarios*—is also used in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament completed approximately 100 BC. By looking at passages where the ancient translators used *makarios*, we gain insight regarding what they understood the word to mean.

Leader: *Read aloud the verses on pages 7 and 8.*

- *Have the group say aloud and draw a box around each occurrence of the word **blessed**.*

INSIGHT

The Greek word translated *blessed* is *makarios*. It is sometimes translated as happy, but it carries a much deeper meaning. In English the idea of being happy is based on favorable circumstances. But to be blessed is to possess the favor of God. It is a state of being defined by fullness and satisfaction from God. To be blessed is to be walking in the fullness of God regardless of circumstances.

PSALM 1:1–2

¹ How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

PSALM 32:1–2

¹ How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!

² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!

PSALM 34:8

Taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!

PSALM 65:4


How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near to You to dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple.

DISCUSS

- Looking at each place you marked *blessed*, what do you notice about the person who is blessed?
- What difference do these descriptions make in your understanding of Jesus' use of the word in the Beatitudes?
- Are you, by these definitions, *blessed*? If not, why not?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Matthew 5:3 aloud. Have the group say and...

- draw a box around the word **blessed**.
- draw a cloud shape like this  around the phrase **kingdom of heaven**.

DISCUSS

- Who is blessed, according to this verse?

INSIGHT

The Greek word translated in Matthew 5:3 as *poor* means “to be poverty stricken, powerless, utterly destitute, and bankrupt.” To be “poor in spirit” means knowing you have nothing to offer and acknowledging your total dependence on God. It suggests a humility, which is the opposite of pride.

- Discuss what being poor in spirit would look like in the life of a believer.
- What is promised to those who are poor in spirit?

MATTHEW 5:3

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

LUKE 18:9–14

⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹² ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’

OBSERVE

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus gives us a great illustration of what it looks like to be poor in spirit.

Leader: *Read Luke 18:9–14 aloud. Have the group...*

- *mark every reference to **the Pharisee**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a big P.*
- *mark every reference to **the tax collector**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a dollar sign, like this: \$*

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to the Pharisee?
- According to verse 11, what was his prayer?
- What did he trust in?
- Verse 13 begins with the word *but*, which often indicates a contrast is being made. Who is the contrast between in these verses?

- What did you learn from marking the references to the tax collector?
 - What was the difference between the two men?
 - Who was the Pharisee using to measure his righteousness?
 - Who did the tax collector use as his standard for measuring righteousness?
 - Discuss how this parable illustrates what it means to be poor in spirit.
 - Have you ever really seen your poverty of spirit? Have you recognized your inability to meet God's standards? Explain your answer.
- ¹³ "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"
- ¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

PSALM 34:18

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.


PSALM 51:17

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

OBSERVE

Look at the following Old Testament verses and note how they would relate to what you have seen so far about being poor in spirit.

Leader: *Read Psalm 34:18 and 51:17 aloud.*

- *Have the group say and mark every mention of **God**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a triangle: *

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about God in these verses?
- How do these insights relate to what we have been studying?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read Isaiah 57:15 aloud. Have the group...

- mark every synonym and pronoun referring to **God** with a triangle.
- underline each occurrence of the words lowly and contrite.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to God?
- What does He want to do for the lowly and contrite of spirit?
- How does that relate to what Jesus said about the poor in spirit?

ISAIAH 57:15

For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

ISAIAH 66:1–2

¹ Thus says the LORD, “Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest?”

² “For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being,” declares the LORD. “But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.”

OBSERVE

In Isaiah’s day the people were going through the motions of worship without having a heart for God.

Leader: *Read Isaiah 66:1–2 aloud. Have the group say aloud and...*

- mark each reference to **the Lord**, including pronouns, with a triangle.
- underline the phrase **humble and contrite of spirit**.

DISCUSS

- What did you learn about the Lord in these verses?
- What does God look for in a person?

OBSERVE

After Matthew, a tax collector, began to follow Jesus, he held a dinner at his house.

Leader: *Read Matthew 9:10–13 aloud. Have the group...*

- *mark each reference to **Jesus**, including pronouns, with a cross: †*
- *mark every reference to **the Pharisees**, including synonyms and pronouns, with a big P.*

DISCUSS

- Who had Matthew invited to dinner?
- Why do you think he may have invited this particular group of people?

INSIGHT

The Jews hated tax collectors because they collected money to support the Romans. They often collected more than was needed and kept the extra for themselves.

MATTHEW 9:10–13

¹⁰ Then it happened that as Jesus was reclining at the table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were dining with Jesus and His disciples.

¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?”

¹² But when Jesus heard this, He said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

¹³ “But go and learn what this means: ‘I