

# resilient

YOUR INVITATION TO A *Jesus-Shaped* LIFE

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Discovery House®

*Resilient: Your Invitation to a Jesus-Shaped Life*

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# INTRODUCTION

My experiment began shortly after I arrived in England. Merryn and I had moved here from Australia after one of the most tumultuous experiences in our lives. After ten years of waiting, our dream of having a child had come to an abrupt end and we had made the move around the world to start our lives again. For me, the relocation meant leaving a fulfilling career in broadcasting, and for the first time in years I no longer knew who I was or why I was here. Looking back now, I see the time was perfect for the experiment.

I had read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount plenty of times before, but normally briskly. These famous words in chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's biography of Jesus contain much reassurance—like how the grieving will be comforted, the poor blessed, and all of us provisioned by God's care. But for the most part the Sermon is challenging, demanding, radical. It was easy to breeze past the hard parts about loving one's enemies when just ahead lay the nice ones about God giving us good gifts.

Then one day I started my experiment. I decided to read the Sermon every day for a month. All of it, not just the comforting bits. Each morning I read it slowly and prayerfully, either in whole or in part, and on weekends I studied it in depth. The experiment stretched beyond one month to two, and then on to three. Before I knew it, the Sermon had taken hold of me.

And for good reason. In the Sermon I found a guide to the essential aspects of life—our callings, relationships, practices, choices. From sex to prayer to conflict to possessions, the Sermon covers the grittiest of topics without embarrassment or apology. In it I discovered the radical idea that "little people" like us are God's change agents in the world. And in it I read that if we put Jesus' words into practice we will lead resilient lives—lives that bound back after difficulty.

For most of us in the West, life is full of freedom and opportunity. We can pursue almost any career. We can live almost any lifestyle.

But dark clouds are never far away. A spouse leaves us. A client sues. Unemployment strikes us. Our dreams fail to come true. An illness, a loss, a betrayal, a tragedy—through them we find we're vulnerable to life's storms. And not only storms from without, but storms within: desires turned lustful, ambition turned idolatrous, anger turned deadly, and other sins that can drown us. In the Sermon we find One who calms storms with a word and leads us forth in strength. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against us, we will stand, not collapse (Matthew 7:25).

My reading of the Sermon each day began to shape me—revising my priorities, keeping desires in check, putting my dreams into perspective, influencing how I should act. In living out the Sermon, I failed as much as I made progress, and still do. But because perfection isn't possible, perfection wasn't the point. My heart was slowly being recalibrated to the heart of Jesus, who lived out everything he preached. Without my realizing it, this was all helping me to start again.

I made a lot of discoveries from my experiment. Those discoveries were recorded in my journal, later written into articles for the *Our Daily Journey* devotional, and now with significant expansion and additional material, are presented in this book of ninety readings. As you'll see, while the Sermon is the main river we'll travel down, some connected streams are worth diverting into. Jesus' Sermon is expansive, drawing many biblical themes together. My advice is to read these pages slowly and prayerfully. There's no need to hurry. Resilient lives are built on a foundation, and foundations take time to prepare.

The famous words of Jesus' Sermon have been quoted by presidents, chanted by activists, pondered by theologians, and shouted by rock stars. They've been printed on posters, T-shirts, fridge magnets, and bumper stickers, depicted in artwork, shared on the net, etched in stone, and tattooed on skin. They've been admired, ignored, scorned, adored, preached, painted, and performed. But one thing is required if they're to manifest a resilient life: according to Jesus, they must be lived (Matthew 7:26–27). As you read and pray, expect to act. Expect to birth experiments in your own life.

Some days we wake to a world of crystal skies and bright possibilities. And other days it's to rain pelting our windows, thunder

rattling our roofs, winds shaking our walls, and torrents threatening to overwhelm us. Jesus never said we'd be spared the storms of life. We will creak under their winds, we will be tested and stretched. But in living out Jesus' words we're told we won't break. We will recover, spring back. Just like the One who came bounding back after being stretched beyond all limits:

Scarred, but triumphant.

And ever resilient.

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them.

"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

God blesses those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

God blesses those who are humble,  
for they will inherit the whole earth.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,  
for they will be satisfied.

God blesses those who are merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure,  
for they will see God.

God blesses those who work for peace,  
for they will be called the children of God.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."

*Matthew 5:1-12*

# COME, WHOEVER YOU ARE

“God blesses those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
God blesses those who are humble,  
for they will inherit the whole earth.”

MATTHEW 5:4–5

They gather on the lush, rolling slopes to hear him. He sits down, taking the customary position of a teacher, and looks as many of them in the eye as he can. He has so many things to tell them. A deep draw of breath, and then he begins to talk. “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,” he says, “for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. . . .”

If you're anything like me, you've probably read the Sermon on the Mount's “God blesses” statements—called the Beatitudes—as a list of virtues Jesus wants us to pursue. So, we think he wants us to be humble (Matthew 5:5), to hunger for justice (5:6), to be merciful (5:7), pure (5:8), and peace-loving (5:9). These are all wonderful qualities to have and are reinforced elsewhere in scripture. And given that Jesus' Sermon is all about action, it's a natural way to read these verses.

However, if we're to be consistent in reading the Beatitudes this way, some of these “virtues” become tricky. Does Jesus really want us to become poor (5:3), to mourn (5:4), or to be persecuted and insulted (5:10–11)? This way of reading the Beatitudes can also lead to a works-based understanding of God's salvation: only when we are humble, gentle, merciful, and so on, will God then “bless” us.

Perhaps Jesus was making a different point. Luke's recording of the Beatitudes suggests Jesus wasn't addressing people who *thought* they were poor, hungry, or sad, but people who literally were (Luke 6:17–23). This has led scholars like Dallas Willard, Scot McKnight, and others to suggest that Jesus' Beatitudes are not a list of virtues at all but a list of outcasts rejected by society yet blessed by Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Those who assembled on the mountain to hear Jesus speak were a motley group indeed: not the happy and successful people of the

world, but those who had experienced trials and trouble (Matthew 4:23–25). It was this group of people, those gathered before him, that he blessed: the economically and spiritually impoverished (5:3), the grief-stricken (5:4), the lowly (5:5), those seeking but denied justice (5:6), those who have shown mercy and lived rightly (5:7–8), peace-makers instead of political radicals (5:9), those persecuted for doing right or for following Jesus (5:10–11). All such people were “written off” by both the secular society and the religious elite of Jesus’ day. To worldly leaders who valued strength rather than humility, and compliance to their wishes rather than rebellion for the sake of God, people with these qualities held little value. But they were valuable to Jesus.

If this is what Jesus is saying it means his Sermon begins with a radical idea. It means Jesus ignores the world’s popularity lists. It means he welcomes all who society rejects. The doors to his kingdom are flung open to the sick, the sad, the uneducated, and un-pretty; to the picked on, the beaten up, the socially awkward, and homeless; to pushers, dealers, con artists, killers; to the addicted, or emotionally unstable; to you and to me.

So come, whoever you are.

Jesus takes us all.

The LORD is close to all who call on him,  
yes, to all who call on him in truth.

PSALM 145:18



What “written off” person do you know?  
How can you be as grace-full towards them as Jesus is?

## COME, RICH OR POOR

They were terrified, but the angel reassured them.  
“Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news  
that will bring great joy to all people.”

LUKE 2:9–10

Good news for *all* people. That’s what the angel said. This radical invitation, the idea of God’s house being open to all, that we are beckoned to enter it whatever state we’re in, begins well before Jesus sits to give his Sermon. And while society’s outcasts are given a special welcome, they’re not the only ones offered the invitation.

Scene one: a small peasant home in Bethlehem, Judea.<sup>3</sup> There a group of shepherds kneels before a baby sleeping in a feeding trough (Luke 2:8–20). The society of the day despises these shepherds as unclean, and that is why they can’t believe they’re here. How could *they* have been given such a privilege?

Scene two: also in that little peasant home. Now a group of Persian princes stands gazing at that child (Matthew 2:1–12). They are powerful, esteemed, and rich—you don’t bring gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh without money. Their fine clothes and jewels look out of place in this village, but soon they also kneel before this exceptional child.

For this child would become a boy and this boy a man; and this man would be found to be so much more. A carpenter by trade but a King by birth. The God of the universe visiting his people in person (John 1:1).

From the beginning this King would be different than others. As those shepherds kneel down we see he’s a King for the poor, and as those princes kneel down we see he’s a King for the rich. A fisherman kneels down—here’s a King for the workers (Luke 5:8); a government official seeks his help—here’s a King for the rulers (John 4:46). And what kind of King hobnobs with both religious leaders *and* sinners (Luke 7:36–38)?

This kind of King.

Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount lifting up the “have nots”—the lowly, the poor, the ridiculed and unwanted—making it clear that while society might reject them, he does not. But that doesn’t mean Jesus is automatically against the “haves.” Rich or poor, ruler or worker, priest or sinner, he came for us all. We can be wealthy or destitute, powerful or lowly; we can be burdened with all the shame our sins have brought upon us. Yet this King will accept us, heal us, forgive us, change us.

Kneeling is most fitting before a King born for all.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor  
and gave him the name above all other names,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:9–11



Have you ever felt unworthy of meeting Jesus?  
Have you ever thought others unworthy of him too?