

#SummerBlessed

Maybe Not What You Expected



April 28 – June 9, 2019

A SMALL GROUP
SERIES

Study Guide

(Large Print)

INTRODUCTION

This series began to emerge in my thinking last summer while on a mission trip to Gros-Morne, Haiti. We, the Sumter First team, arrived in June to complete the church that the Sumter First family had funded. From the moment we departed the airport in Haiti, the landscape littered with garbage notified us that we were no longer in the land of plenty. A hot two-hour bus ride delivered us late in the night to our base camp for the week. The accommodations were not what I expected, I'm not sure what I expected in a third-world country, but this was not it. Our accommodations did not include the things that I had become accustomed to ... running water, working toilets, electricity, air conditioning, or a refrigerator with food. The trip to the site every morning was difficult; most of the time it was in the back of a pick-up truck over rough terrain. So, enough of my complaining. I know you must be wondering what all this complaining has to do with being "blessed". Truth is, it has everything to do with being blessed.

First, I discovered that I was both blessed and spoiled. Doing without the things that I've taken for granted for just a few hours can make me miserable; this was going to be an entire week without those things.

Secondly, I discovered a group of people who had none of the things that I believe make me a blessed person. And yet, they were filled with happiness and considered themselves blessed. They were amazed by the gift of a soccer ball and dresses made from pillow cases. How is this possible, how could people with so little, be so blessed? How could they have so much joy in their heart? Could it be that their definition of being "blessed" and my definition are not the same?

If you were to take a moment and search "#blessed" on twitter you would be surprised and maybe even embarrassed by what many people consider make them blessed. Could there indeed be a different meaning for being blessed?

Ken Hemphill says that the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes, redefines what it means to be blessed. Ken says: "They redefine blessing to mean 'those who have God as their king.' ... We have often thought of blessing in terms of material things, physical healing, and a parking space near the door. All of these things may be fine, but they live under the umbrella of the only blessing we really need: a relationship with the King, everything else is nice but nonessential."¹

For the next several weeks we'll explore this new definition of being blessed. Jesus' definition of "blessing" may not be what you expected. Jesus says that you can be blessed and have nothing that the world considers makes you a blessed person. As we discover Jesus' definition

¹ EKG, Ken Hemphill, Broadman & Holman Press, 2004, P. 147

of being blessed, people who have God as their King, we will understand why even the people of Haiti can be “blessed”. Let the journey begin!

Pastor Greg

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

- Participate in the daily devotions. (Download the church App [sumternaz] and signup for the “Blessed” track – you’ll receive the daily devotions on your phone.)
- Bring your study guide to church on Sunday morning to take notes during the sermon.
- Participate in the class discussion.
- Pray for the members of your class.
- Invite a friend to attend with you.

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SERIES OUTLINE

Key Terms.....	4
April 28 th – Week 1.....	6
AM - I'm Blessed, Matthew 5-7 <i>(The Kingdom of God)</i>	
PM – Blessing Redefined	
May 5 th – Week 2.....	14
AM – Blessed by Being Broken, Matthew 5:3-5 <i>(Who we are before God, an Awareness of Sin)</i>	
PM – Broken in the Right Places	
May 12 th (Mother's Day, No Small Groups)	
May 19 th (Graduation Sunday, No Small Groups)	
May 26 th – Week 3	22
AM – Blessed by Extreme Hunger, Matthew 5:6-7 <i>(Seek first the Kingdom of God)</i>	
PM – The Menu	
June 2 nd – Week 4	30
AM – Blessed by Suffering, Matthew 5:8-12 <i>(Kingdom work is difficult, but it's worth it.)</i>	
PM – Peace in the Midst of the Storm	
June 9 th – Week 5	38
AM – Blessed to be a Blessing, Matthew 5:13-16 <i>(We have been blessed to bless others, even when the blessings are not what we expected)</i>	
PM – Who Are You Blessing?	

KEY TERMS

The Beatitudes: The beatitudes serve as the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. Beatitude, from the Latin *beatitudo*, means “blessedness” or “happiness.”² A beatitude begins by pronouncing someone blessed, and then gives the reason for their happiness. This blessing is not just reserved for some time in the future but can be lived and experienced in the present. The beatitudes describe the character of one who is a follower of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God: Jesus spoke of a kingdom that broke the mold of any kingdom the people had experienced before. The kingdom Jesus spoke of gave strength to the weak rather than the king. The kingdom he spoke of was established to love one’s enemies, instead of conquering them (Matthew 5:43-48). This kingdom was not about power and competition, but about a way of life that allowed them to live as God’s holy people. Jesus declared that this kingdom was near and that they should pray: “... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”³

² Beacon Dictionary of Theology, Richard S. Taylor & J. Kenneth Grider, Beacon Hill Press, p.66

³ Your Kingdom Come – Study Guide, Timothy Green, Shawna Songer Gains, Timothy Gains, Beacon Hill Press, P.10

Matthew 5:1-16

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

He said:

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

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

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

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

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and
falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice
and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the
same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness,
how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything,
except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be
hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.
Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in
the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in
heaven.

#SUMTERBLESSED

WEEK #1 – DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, April 22nd

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Devotional Thought: “I Am Blessed”

Yesterday was Easter Sunday and we gathered to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord. As we begin this series, “#SumterBlessed”, I can think of no greater blessing than knowing that Jesus willingly gave His life for me. Of all the blessings that I have received in life, none can compare to His sacrifice for me.

In the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12, Jesus redefines what it means to be blessed. If we are not careful, we can easily lose sight of what it truly means to be blessed – to have God as our king. This series will help us rediscover the source of true blessing.

In the summer of 2018, during a mission trip to Haiti, I encountered a group of people who had little or no material possessions, and yet, they had discovered the true meaning of being blessed. They had experienced the forgiveness of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and they had a deep abiding joy in their heart. You could see blessings on their face.

Can people see the blessings of Christ in your face? Have you taken for granted the greatest blessing of all?

Prayer: Lord, I am blessed beyond measure! May the blessing of knowing you be visible on my face today!

Tuesday, April 23rd

Scripture Reading: Numbers 6:24-26

Devotional Thought: “Bless You”

“God Bless you” or “Have a blessed day” are terms that we use often. But what do they mean? Why do we say them?

I did a little research and found that saying “God bless you” when someone sneezes dates back to a plague that occurred in Italy in 590AD. People believed that sneezing was a sign that someone was getting sick with the plague. There is a tradition that Pope Gregory commanded that any time a sneeze was heard, the sneezer was to be blessed by saying

“God bless you” as protection against the plague.⁴ So now you know.

Today, as your pastor, I consider it a privilege to pray this prayer of blessing, sometime called a beatitude, for you and over you. Please receive this prayer as a blessing from the Lord, and in turn be a blessing to someone you meet today.

Receive this prayer of blessing:

24 “The LORD bless you
and keep you;
25 the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
26 the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”

Prayer: Lord, thank you for protecting me, thank you for smiling upon me, for being gracious to me, and for giving me peace.

Wednesday, April 24th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:17-20

Devotional Thought: “To Abandon or Fulfill”

Did Jesus come to abandon or fulfill the law? Jesus makes the answer to that question clear in Matthew 5:17 What does He say? _____

When it came to this matter of the law, the Pharisees, who knew law, seemed to have the most difficulty with it. They found ways to follow the letter of the law, but not the spirit and intent of the law. They appeared clean on the outside but were dead on the inside.

“The trouble with the Pharisees was that they were interested in the details rather than principles, that they were more interested in actions rather than motives, and that they were interested in doing rather than being.”⁵

Jesus says that the purpose of the law is to inspire holy living among God’s people. As a member of His kingdom, do you love, learn and live by His Word (Matthew 5:19)? How is that happening in your life? _____

⁴ Southern Living, Meghan Overdeep, May 18, 2018

⁵ Beacon Bible Commentary, Ralph Earle, Beacon Hill Press, 1964, p.73

When it comes to living the Christian life, describe the difference between “doing” and “being”. _____

Prayer: Lord, teach me to love, learn and live your Word.

Thursday, April 25th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:21-26

Devotional Thought: “Thou Shall Not Kill”

Now there’s a law, thou shall not kill, that really shouldn’t require a lot of thought. Jesus decides to stir the pot by taking this commandment to a different level when He says: “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment (Matthew 5:22).

The anger that Jesus speaks of in this passage is the grudge that we’re holding onto, that demonstrates itself in our conversations and actions. Jesus speaks of a kingdom where love overcomes hate.

Broken relationships can hinder our relationship with God, and they can hold us captive in the prison of bitterness. Are there any relationships in your life that Jesus is speaking to? Are there any grudges that you need to release? Is there any unsettled anger that is hindering your ability to worship?

Prayer: Lord, help me to let go of any anger that is hindering my relationship with you and to witness for you.

Friday, April 26th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:27-30

Devotional Thought: “Difficult Conversations”

Several years ago, I was introduced to a leadership lesson entitled: “How to Have a Difficult Conversation”. It’s a tool that I’ve found helpful in everyday life. The instructor was from Duke University, and he based his plan on the conversations that Jesus had with people in difficult moments about difficult topics. This portion of the Sermon on the Mount certainly fits that description. Today’s passage speaks to the sin of adultery at a new level – warning that “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

So, here’s how Jesus had a difficult conversation about difficult topics:

- **Jesus set the stage** – this is what we need to talk about. Jesus got to the point.

- **Jesus placed people first** - He delivered justice, but He was also merciful in His conversation.
- **Jesus called for a decision** – what happens from here?

Is Jesus having a difficult conversation with you about anything in your life that needs to change?

Prayer: Lord, help me to be attentive your conversations.

Saturday, April 27th

Time of Reflection: (Use the space below to record what God has been saying to you this week.) _____

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WEEK #1 – SERMON NOTES

April 28th

SERMON TITLE: I'm Blessed

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5-7

SERMON FOCUS: Discovering what it means to be truly blessed.

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WEEK #1 – SMALL GROUP

April 28th

TITLE: Blessing Redefined

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:1-12; Matthew 5-7

OPENING:

- During the opening of your small group you will be asked to introduce yourself. Be prepared to tell the group about your first car.

What year was your first car? _____

What model and make was your first car?

What's one thing you remember about your first car?

Did you feel blessed to have that car?

- Prayer Requests: Sharing prayer requests, praying for each other and following up on requests will be vital to this small group series. (List the prayer requests in the space below and use it during your prayer time this week.)

DISCUSSION:

- Using this week's "Daily Devotional" and the "Study Terms" write your understanding of the following terms in the space below.

The Beatitudes _____

The Kingdom of God _____

- “Blessed” is a term that we use often. We bless people when they sneeze. We tell people to have a blessed day. Are we just being nice, or do we really mean it? What do we mean when we offer these blessings? _____

- Who do we usually consider to be blessed? How does the world define blessing? _____

- The Jews believed that the sign of being blessed by God was material prosperity at every level of life, and yet, Jesus says exactly the opposite. Read Matthew 5:1-12. How does Jesus redefine what it means to be blessed? _____

- **Video:** “Haiti, A Blessed People”

What did you notice about the people of Haiti? Keep in mind they have no running water, no electricity, no air conditioning, etc.

- “Jesus spoke against the background on which God’s Word became clouded. People had lost sight of where true blessings were found.”⁶ Have we lost sight of where true blessings come from? Why? _____

⁶ The Sermon on the Mount, Sinclair Ferguson, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, P.13

APPLICATION:

- In the introduction Ken Hemphill said that the beatitudes redefine being blessed as those that have God as their King? Does this change how you define being blessed? _____

- Who or what is the source of your blessing? _____

- Is there anything you need to change? _____

- Closing prayer – Number 6:24-26

²⁴ ""The LORD bless you
and keep you;
²⁵ the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
²⁶ the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.""

- Remember to continue with your daily devotions.

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WEEK #2 – DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, April 29th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:3

Devotional Thought: “Have You Ever Been Broke?”

I had the privilege of growing up under the leadership of a godly mom. She was a tower of strength in times when I know she was emotionally and financially broke. She was doing her best to raise two teenage boys in a single-parent home with little income. I knew we didn't have much, but for some reason I never thought of us as being poor.

When Jesus speaks of being “poor in spirit” in this passage He is not talking about being emotionally or financially broke. In fact, it has nothing to do with either of those things. Truth is, we are somebody because we belong to God and He has promised to meet our needs.

However, what is at stake in this passage is our complete awareness of our absolute need for God. One writer described being “poor in spirit” as essentially the dethronement of pride. It is a confession that we need God and the forgiveness granted through His Son.

Are you willing to be “poor in spirit”? What does that mean to you? _____

Prayer: Lord, I admit that I am spiritually broken, spiritually bankrupt and in need of your grace.

Tuesday, April 30th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:4; Luke 15:11-32

Devotional Thought: “Full of Ourselves”

Most of us have encountered children that we consider to be full of themselves. Essentially, we're saying that they are pleased with themselves; life is all about them.

The story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11–32 describes a young man that was full of himself. At least, until he had squandered his wealth on wild living. And then ...

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am

starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

This is the story of a young man that would understand what it means to “mourn” over sin and to be “comforted” by his father. Blessed are those that are broken by the impact of sin, and who then seek the forgiveness of God.

What would it mean to mourn over sin? When is the last time we experienced brokenness over the impact of sin?

Prayer: Lord, break my heart over sin. Cause me to weep over a nation in need.

Wednesday, May 1st

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:5: Matthew 11:29

Devotional Thought: “I Am Sending You”

Matthew 5:5 declares that it is the meek who will inherit the earth. In our culture, that statement doesn't seem to describe the people that we see getting ahead. In the minds of many, the concept of “meekness” creates an image of someone who is weak.

The biblical idea of “meekness” doesn't suggest that picture at all. The Bible speaks of individuals who have great strength, and yet, they demonstrate meekness and humility. How strange a combination is that?

Jesus is meek and humble in heart.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
Matthew 11:29

Moses demonstrates meekness and humility later in life.

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11)

In Moses' case the Lord responds with “I will be with you”. So the bottom line is ... meekness means that we recognize that we can do nothing without God, and as a result we submit to Him as our King.

Prayer: Lord, today I admit that I need you, and I surrender my will to your will.

Thursday, May 2nd

Scripture Reading: Psalm 1:1

Devotional Thought: "The Road to Blessedness"

Recently college basketball fans were glued to their televisions watching "March Madness". March Madness is 64 college basketball teams on "the road to the championship". The slogan for "March Madness" is "the road to...", whatever city the championship will be held in, i.e. this year the championship was in Minneapolis, so it was "The Road to Minneapolis".

This year I noticed something I had never noticed before. Once the tournament reached Minneapolis, the site of the championship games, the words on the basketball floor now read "The Road Ends Here", instead of the "Road to..."

Spiritually speaking, the road that you are on, leads to where the road ends. The Psalmist puts it into perspective for us:

¹ Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.

Are you on the road to blessedness?

Prayer: Lord, let my walk be pleasing to you!

Friday, May 3rd

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:31-32

Devotional Thought: "Hitting Home"

The devotional part of this series, for the most part, is a verse by verse reading of the Sermon on the Mount. That approach brings us face-to-face with some very difficult topics. And if you thought last Friday's topic was tough and to the point, well, you've not read anything yet.

In this passage Jesus addresses the matter of divorce. This issue impacted my home when I was only 6 years old. So, the words of Jesus in this passage speak to me directly. They are difficult and in your face. So how are we to understand them? What do they say to us?

A brief devotional doesn't provide enough space or time to cover the matter in significant detail. So, I want to mention

two items, spending the major portion of the devotion on the latter.

First, the debate was that the Old Testament law allowed for divorce. To which Jesus replied, that approach to the topic is the result of hard heartedness. There is no question: God hates divorce because of the suffering that it creates for families. However, we must also remember that God extends mercy and grace.

Secondly, Jesus' response points us to God's original intention for marriage. When it comes to this matter the Scriptures speak for themselves.

²³ The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.
(Genesis 2:23-24)

⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh. 'So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."
(Mark 10:5-9)

Prayer: Lord, bless the marriages in our church and our families so that they reflect your biblical plan.

Saturday, May 4th

Time of Reflection: (Use the space below to record what God has been saying to you this week.)

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WEEK #2 – SERMON NOTES

May 5th

SERMON TITLE: Blessed by Being Broken

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:3-5

SERMON FOCUS: Who We Are Before God

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WEEK #2 – SMALL GROUP

May 5th

TITLE: Broken in the Right Places

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:3-5

OPENING:

- What bones have you broken? How did it happen?
- Prayer Requests: Share prayer requests, pray for each other and follow-up on requests from last week. (List the prayer requests in the space below and use it during your prayer time this week.)

DISCUSSION:

- What did you discover in your devotional time this week about brokenness? _____

- Video: “Your Kingdom Come”
- List the three blessings in Matthew 5:3-5 and the response in the space below:

The Blessed (Who)

The Response

- Let’s explore the three beatitudes identified in this passage further. (Keep in mind as you explore these qualities, that they are intended to help us discover who we are before God.)

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit”? What does it not mean? Why is the kingdom of God the response?

What does it mean to “mourn”? What does it not mean? Why is the response comfort? _____

What does it mean to be “meek”? What does it not mean? Why do they inherit the earth? _____

- Oswald Chambers said: “We must first know Jesus as Savior before His teaching can have any meaning to us or before it can have any meaning other than that of an idea that leads to despair”.⁷ What does this statement have to do with the three beatitudes we’ve studied this week? _____

- Read the story of the Prodigal Son and identify the beatitudes you discover in his life. (Luke 15:11-32) List them below:

APPLICATION:

- How do the first three beatitudes influence who we are before God? _____

⁷ Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, Oswald Chambers, Discovery House, 1960, p.15

- What area of your life is God working on? _____

- Do you ever attempt to do life on your own? Why? _____

- Closing prayer

- Remember to continue with your daily devotions.

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WEEK #3 – DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, May 20th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:6; Psalm 63:1-8

Devotional Thought: “Are They Eating and Drinking?”

Many of us have made a phone call to the doctor after hours because we were concerned about the physical health of a child. You usually start by talking to the answering service who gathers some information about your child. We wait anxiously for the doctor to return our call.

It has been my experience that the doctor listens to our concerns and then he asks a series of questions. “Are they eating and drinking?” is the question that sticks out in my mind. Why would the doctor ask such a question? What does that have to do with my child’s fever? It may have nothing to do with the fever, but it has everything to do with one’s overall health.

Just as physical food and water influence our physical health, so too, spiritual food and water influence our spiritual health. When you see it on paper, it seems to make sense, i.e. – Physical food = physical health, Spiritual food = spiritual health.

Jesus says that it is those who hunger and thirst after righteousness that will be filled, satisfied. It is simply not enough to be a Christian who accepted Christ on a particular day at a particular moment. As we grow in our relationship with Christ, we should experience a deepening hunger and thirst for the things of God. The spiritual food that you take in will influence your spiritual health. If you are not eating often, you will grow weak. If you find that you aren’t hungering for the things of God, it might be time for a spiritual check-up. Spiritually speaking, are you eating and drinking?

Prayer: Lord, I invite your Holy Spirit to renew in me an extreme hunger for righteousness.

Tuesday, May 21st

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:7; Matthew 20:1-16

Devotional Thought: “Transformed Character”

Jesus begins to define the character of the individual that has acknowledged their need for God, and as a result, has a hunger and thirst for the things of God. When an individual truly begins to seek the face of God a transformation of character will begin to take place. Here, Jesus identifies the

characteristic of mercy. It's a simple principle, if you have received mercy, you should show mercy.

This is the moment that our relationship with Christ leaps from the pages of scripture, moves from our heart to our hands and feet. As a follower of Christ, we have been called to action.

Matthew 20:1-16. Read this passage remembering that we can be merciful because we have received mercy. What does this passage say to you about mercy?

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being merciful to me! Show me someone in need of mercy and grant me the wisdom to put that mercy into action.

Wednesday, May 22nd

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:33-37

Devotional Thought: "No, Maybe, Yes"

Several years ago, I had a friend who struggled with getting to the point. His wife described him this way. If he says "no", that means no, and don't ask me again". If he said "maybe" that really meant "no". And if he said, "yes", that really meant "maybe". It just seemed as if you couldn't get a straight answer from him.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees would twist the law just enough to side step the truth. The Pharisees would avoid swearing by God's name, but instead would substitute heaven, the earth, Jerusalem – or even the head on their own shoulders. Let's be clear before we go any further, Jesus said do not swear at all! However, the Pharisees were attempting to side step the truth. It just seemed as if you couldn't get a straight answer out of them.

Jesus declared that our "yes" should mean "yes" and our "no" should mean "no". In practical everyday language this message is communicated by this question: "If you tell

someone you're going to be somewhere or accomplish a certain task, can they depend on you?"⁸

Prayer: Lord, help my "yes" be "yes" and my "no" be "no". Help me to be known as a dependable person.

Thursday, May 24th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:38-42

Devotional Thought: "Really!"

Did Jesus just say?

... if someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek.

... if anyone wants to sue and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.

... if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

Really! What is Jesus saying to us in this passage? The law of Moses basically said that punishment should fit the crime. However, as Jesus often does, He takes the conversation to a different level. Jesus introduces a higher law, one that reflects His love for others.

We might think of it this way. Jesus certainly isn't suggesting that we should never resist evil. No, this conversation is more about the love of God that is at work in our hearts. It is that love that would cause us to ...

... think before we respond.

... resist the tendency to get even.

... extend grace where it may not be deserved.

Is there any relationship in your life where these verses apply?

Prayer: Lord, I need your help today!

Friday, May 25th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

Devotional Thought: "Love Your Enemy"

The more I read the Sermon on the Mount the more it seems as if Jesus speaks right into the very heart of everyday life. Things that you and I deal with in this earthly life. Let's face it, when Jesus declares that we should love our enemies that becomes personal.

⁸ EKG, Ken Hemphill, Broadman & Holman Press, 2004, P. 192

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to a luncheon on Shaw Air Force Base hosted by the Chaplaincy Department and the base commander. They wanted to say thank you for the deployment meal that we provide at the base every year. On behalf of the Chaplaincy Department and base commander, I say thank you to all who cook, serve and give to make this outreach possible.

So back to the devotional. While on the base we had an opportunity to visit the group that oversees the weapons used to fight our enemies. The individual providing the tour informed us that each weapon had a specific purpose. He showed us one weapon that is accurate within 3 feet. In fact, he said that the F-16 could deliver this weapon through a window to strike a specific target.

The words of Jesus in Matthew 5:43-48 are like that guided missile. We can talk about the enemy in general without too much discomfort. However, when we move beyond the enemy in general, the devil, it becomes personal in our own lives – meaning the enemy has a face and name. They are the people that have hurt us, said things about us, etc. Now that is a different story!

Has the Lord guided the words of this passage into your heart today? Remember, what He has called us to is not possible in our own strength. But with the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, anything is possible.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love the people in my life that appear unlovable.

Saturday, May 26th

Time of Reflection: (Use the space below to record what God has been saying to you this week.)

#SUMTERBLESSED

WEEK #3 – SERMON NOTES

May 26th

SERMON TITLE: Blessed by Extreme Hunger & Thirst

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:6-7

SERMON FOCUS: Seeking the Kingdom of God first.

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WEEK #3 – SMALL GROUP

May 26th

TITLE: The Menu

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:6-7

OPENING:

- Where is your favorite place to eat? What do you usually order? Describe a time when you were extremely hungry.

- Prayer Requests: Share prayer requests, pray for each other and follow-up on requests from last week. (List the prayer requests in the space below and use it during your prayer time this week.)

DISCUSSION:

- What did you discover in your devotional time this week about being hungry? _____

- Video: "Jungle of Distractions"

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:33-34, Jesus speaks these words. What do they have to do with being hungry and thirsty?

³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- What are we to seek (hunger and thirst) for?

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- What do you think Jesus means by the word “seek”? Can we “seek” something with different levels of intensity? What usually determines the level at which we seek something?

- John Wesley said that the first three beatitudes prepare the soul to be hungry. List the first three beatitudes below and describe how they would prepare the soul to be hungry.

Beatitude #1 _____

Beatitude #2 _____

Beatitude #3 _____

- Jesus promised that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be satisfied. And yet, we often seek other things in life to bring satisfaction. What do we turn to? Why?

APPLICATION:

- What’s on your spiritual menu? How do you feed your soul? How often do you eat and drink spiritually? Daily? Only when you are in a crisis? When you have spare time? _____

- Are you truly hungry & thirsty for the things of God? How is that influencing your life? How would that influence your life?

- What did you discover about mercy this week? _____

- Closing prayer
- Remember to continue with your daily devotions.

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WEEK #4 – DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, May 27th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:8

Devotional Thought: “Pure Heart”

We live in a culture that seems to embrace things that are pure. We look for and expect purity in our orange juice, our laundry detergent, and we look for labels that say, “no additives”. Why? Because we know that things that are pure are better for us. If that is true of everyday items, then that same interest in purity should be part of our relationship with Christ.

The Church of the Nazarene is a holiness church that believes God desires to do a second work of grace, Entire Sanctification, in the life of every believer. At the moment of salvation our sins are forgiven, and we receive all of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of entire sanctification our hearts are cleansed, made pure in perfect love, and God gets all of us.

The believer, through the work of the Holy Spirit, experiences a shift from double-mindedness and self-centeredness to a heart that is single-minded and Christ-centered. In this moment, a lifelong journey toward spiritual maturity begins.

Through God’s sanctifying grace, hearts are purified; believers receive power to live the Christian life and a boldness to proclaim the gospel.

Have you sensed that God is calling you to a deeper walk with Him?

Prayer: Lord, give me a pure heart that is totally devoted to you!

Tuesday, May 28th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:9

Devotional Thought: “The Peacemaker”

In one of my pre-marriage counseling classes, I teach a session on conflict resolution. It has been my experience over the years that most of us have never been taught how to address times of difficulty in our lives. It seems to me that most of us approach conflict in our lives with one of two approaches: (1) Silence – to keep the peace nothing is said. And yet, the issue that caused the conflict remains unchanged. (2) Talk really loud – it is the belief that the person who can talk the loudest

for the longest wins. Unfortunately, at the end of the shouting match the problem remains.

One may assume that Jesus is simply talking about the latter in this passage, the shouting. Jesus actually speaks to both of these approaches to conflict. We have been called to reconcile the broken relationships in our lives, whether those relationships be in marriage, family, friends and even at church.

“No kingdom activity bears a more powerful witness to the Father’s character than the commitment to peacemaking.”⁹ Peacemaking is hard work, but it’s worth it. It is the peacemakers that are the children of God.

Romans 12:17-18 says this about the matter:

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Are there any relationships in your life that need to be reconciled?

Prayer: Lord, you are our example when it comes to making peace. May I follow your example!

Wednesday, May 29th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:10-12

Devotional Thought: “Because”

Jesus was honest about the cost of being a follower. Jesus made it clear that if you chose to follow Him there would be trials and difficulties. No one could ever say that they had been called to be a follower of Jesus under false pretenses.

By the end of the first century, the word for “witness” and the word for “martyr” became the same Greek word. In this period of history, an individual who was a witness for Christ had a very good chance of being a martyr too.

If you were to encounter persecution for the sake of righteousness, would you consider that to be a blessing? The answer to this question seems to be in the “because” found in these verses. See if you agree.

⁹ EKG, Ken Hemphill, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004, p. 172

- Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.
- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
- Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.

Would you consider yourself blessed under those conditions?

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to reflect You when I am persecuted and insulted because of you.

Thursday, May 30th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:1-4

Devotional Thought: “Recognize Those in Need”

Over the years my eyesight has experienced changes. For many years, all the way through high school, I suffered with poor vision. The only problem was, I didn't acknowledge that my eyesight was poor. It was while at Trevecca Nazarene University that I had to face the reality of not being able to see the chalkboard. And yes, I did say the chalkboard.

I received my first pair of glasses in about 1983 and it changed my world. I saw things that I had never seen before. Over the years my eyesight has changed, and so have my glasses, to ensure that I could continue to see the world I live in.

When I came to know Christ as my personal Savior my spiritual eyesight changed and has continued to change. In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus calls us to have eyes that see people in need, but He also warns that we should respond to needs because of our love for God. It is a matter of motive.

Do you see a world in need?

Prayer: Lord, give me eyes to see what you see in the world in which I live.

Friday, May 31st

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:5-15

Devotional Thought: “A Conversation with the Father”

Jesus assumes His disciples will invest themselves in prayer. That phrase “when you pray” is repeated throughout the

opening verses in this passage. I know this sounds trivial, but it is a necessary reminder ... the message is not “if you pray”, or “when you feel like praying” ... it is clearly when you pray. Prayer, for Jesus, was a part of being one of His disciples.

Jesus begins with a description of what prayer is not, maybe to respond to all the things that the disciples had been taught about prayer. Prayer is not to impress, but to commune with the Father. If you pray in private, you will pray differently in public.

The primary purpose of prayer, is to spend time in CONVERSATION WITH GOD. If we are not careful prayer can become a routine and we just go through the motions.

Are you having regular conversations with the Lord?

Jesus said, “This is how you should pray”: (Pray this prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you pray it.

Prayer:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’

Saturday, June 1st

Time of Reflection: (Use the space below to record what God has been saying to you this week.)

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WEEK #4 – SERMON NOTES

June 2nd

SERMON TITLE: Blessed by Suffering

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:8-12

SERMON FOCUS: Kingdom work is difficult, but it's worth it.

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WEEK #4 – SMALL GROUP

June 2nd

TITLE: "Peace in the Midst of the Storm"

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:8-12

OPENING:

- Where have you traveled? Did you ever have a time when you encountered difficulty?

- Prayer Requests: Share prayer requests, pray for each other and follow-up on requests from last week. (List the prayer requests in the space below and use it during your prayer time this week.)

DISCUSSION:

- What did you discover in your devotional time this week about prayer? _____

- Video: "Li YANG"

- Are you suffering for Christ? _____

- Is there a connection between a pure heart, peacekeeping and enduring persecution? If so, how are they connected?

- For each of the beatitudes in this passage discuss the response (what is received).
Pure Heart _____

The Peacemaker _____

The Persecuted _____

The Insulted _____

- Does Matthew 8:23-27 teach us anything about facing storms in this life?

²³ Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him.

²⁴ Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶ He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

APPLICATION:

- Are we facing persecution of any kind? How are we responding? How should we respond? Does it matter how we respond? _____

- Is the world in which we live any different from the world in which Jesus lived? What can we learn from that? Is there hope for our world? _____

- Closing prayer
- Remember to continue with your daily devotions.

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WEEK #5 – DAILY DEVOTIONS

Monday, June 3rd

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:13

Devotional Thought: “Pass the Salt Please”

By the very nature of the calling, disciples are called to be distinctive people; in other words, we are supposed to be different.

It is this distinctive character that Jesus referred to His disciples as “the salt of the earth”. The power of “salt” is that it is different from the food we put it on. And the power of any believer lies in the difference. Any time you add “salt” to food it changes; in most cases it adds flavor to the food. Christians are to add spiritual flavor to the world.

Salt is also a “preservative”. It was used to prevent decay, to act as an antiseptic. Disciples are then called to be moral “disinfectants”. When you became a Christian, you never thought you would be referred to as a “disinfectant”.

SHAKE your SALT SHAKER, and the world will be a little better place to LIVE.

Prayer: Lord, help me make the world a better place to live by shaking Jesus into the lives of the people that I meet.

Tuesday, June 4th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:14-16

Devotional Thought: “Reflection”

A disciple MUST bear witness to the FAITH. This is truth that is expressed when Jesus describes the disciples as being “the light of the world”. As disciples, we get light from God, therefore that light has to shine into the darkness of our world. People MUST see Jesus in us.

If we are to shine in this dark world our light has to be in an obvious place and not hidden. As Christians, we cannot go into hiding. – we cannot live in seclusion, but instead, we must LIVE and WORK in places where the influence of our lives will be felt, seen and heard.

In doing so, we can point people to our heavenly Father – it is the LIVING OUT OF GRACE that brings honor and praise to the father. Jesus said:

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32)

The “light” that Jesus speaks of is our “good deeds”. We must remember that it is not by works that we are saved – but it is by grace through faith. But all THINGS lead to God’s glory! Our integrity, faithfulness, punctuality, work ethic, a pleasant attitude and even enthusiasm – must shine like a bright “light” in a dark and fallen world.

Prayer: Lord, I want to be a reflection of You in all that I do.

Wednesday, June 5th

Scripture: Matthew 6:16-19

Devotional Thought: “Fasting”

Many individuals made a decision to fast during the season of Lent. Lent is a 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, not counting Sundays, set aside to prepare for Easter.

It is a time when individuals will pray, reflect and fast for the purpose of focusing on spiritual things. In this passage, Jesus addresses fasting and says that it is to be done in private.

Would you consider fasting a meal today for the final session of this small group series? Use the time to pray for your teachers, your class mates, and your church.

Prayer: Lord, today I humble myself in your presence to earnestly seek your face for others.

Thursday, June 6th

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-24

Devotional Thought: “Coleslaw”

During a recent visit to Kansas City I was invited to have dinner with a couple of friends at my favorite Kansas City barbecue restaurant called “Jack Stack”. They are famous for their “burnt ends”, and they are my favorite – you would have to try them to understand the name. So anytime I’m in Kansas City I find a way to eat lunch or dinner at “Jack Stack Barbecue”. If you’re interested, you can find their menu online – just google “Jack Stack Barbecue Kansas City”, it will make you hungry.

They’re also famous for their coleslaw. I don’t like coleslaw, but I love Jack Stack coleslaw. During my recent visit to Jack Stack with my friends the waitress brought some coleslaw to the table – I assumed the coleslaw came with my meal, so I grabbed my fork and dug in. My friends just watched me devour the entire serving of coleslaw; they said nothing. It was

only after the bowl was empty that I discovered the coleslaw was for the whole table. I ate ALL the coleslaw. For some reason, I forgot about the rest of the people at the table.

If we're not careful, it is easy to get focused on our own needs and miss the fact that we are surrounded by other people who are in need. The Lord blessed my table with coleslaw, and I ate the "whole thing".

This week our focus will be on the truth that we have been "blessed" to bless others. To whom much has been given, much is also required. How are you doing in that department?

Prayer: Lord, help me to share the resources that you've given me.

Friday, June 7th

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

Devotional Thought: "Overcoming Anxiety"

God's plan for overcoming anxiety:

- Don't Be Anxious Because "There Is More To Life Than Things". Life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Wife, children, family and friends – are all higher priorities than things. Virtues like honesty, integrity, kindness, mercy, patience, faithfulness and love are more important than stuff.

And because life is more than things – don't let them control you!

- Don't Be Anxious Because "Your Heavenly Father Will Provide". The birds of the air and the flowers of the field are both clothed and fed by our heavenly Father.

To overcome "anxiety", we must come to the realization that God loves us and that He will take care of us. If you don't believe this truth you will feel the need to take care of all your needs: physical, emotional and even spiritual.

- Don't Be Anxious Because You Can Only Live One Day At A Time. Verse 34 says: "Each day has enough trouble of its own." So, there is really no need to borrow "trouble" from tomorrow. Live in the present even though you know "tomorrow" is coming and you feel obligated to worry about it.

- . Make His Kingdom A Priority.

There is nothing more important than the Lord – Seek Him First. If we believe that the Lord is the most important thing in our lives – then why don't we live like it. We seem to give other things priority in our lives leaving God the leftovers.

- Depend Upon God for Your Needs

Our needs will be met as we focus on Him – seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you. “As we concern ourselves with the things of God, He will concern Himself with the things that we need.

Are you following God's plan in your life?

Prayer: Lord, help me to get with your plan for overcoming the anxiety in my life.

Saturday, June 8th

Time of Reflection: (Use the space below to record what God has been saying to you this week.)

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WEEK #5 – SERMON NOTES

June 9th

SERMON TITLE: Blessed to be a Blessing

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:13-16

SERMON FOCUS: We have been blessed to blessed others, even when the blessings are not what we expected.

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WEEK #5 – SMALL GROUP

June 9th

TITLE: “Who Are You Blessing?”

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5:13-16

OPENING:

- What is the best present you have ever received? Why?
- Prayer Requests: Share prayer requests, pray for each other and follow-up on requests from last week. (Take time to give thanks for prayers that have been answered during this series and continue to pray for others.)

DISCUSSION:

- What has been the most significant discovery in this series for you personally? _____

- What is the purpose of salt? How does that purpose relate to us spiritually? _____

- Who is our light to reflect? How is the light reflected? _____

- Jesus uses salt and light to challenge His disciples to make a difference in the world. How can we be “salt” and “light”? What does that look like in our own community? _____

- **Video:** “Blessed to Be A Blessing” (Alabaster Offering) What do you know about the Alabaster Offering that we receive in February and September of each year? _____

- Read Matthew 6:19-24. How can this passage of scripture be connected to “salt” and “light”? Can it be connected? _____

- Read Matthew 6:25-34. How should these verses impact our willingness to bless others? _____

APPLICATION:

- Share a story of how you have been blessed by others?

- How is your church blessing others? _____

- Are you blessing others? How? Are you giving of all that God has blessed you with? _____

- Closing prayer

Next Small Group Series: The Journey to Forgiveness