



The
CHOSEN

An Interactive
Bible Study

Season 2

Blessed Are the **Chosen**

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DAVID  COOK

transforming lives together

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CONTENTS

Introduction: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT	7
Lesson 1: THE POOR IN SPIRIT and the sons of thunder	17
Lesson 2: THOSE WHO MOURN and the God who sees	33
Lesson 3: THE MEEK and the motherload	49
Lesson 4: THOSE WHO HUNGER and the ones who cease	69
Lesson 5: THE MERCIFUL and their mandate	85
Lesson 6: THE PURE IN HEART and sights unseen	101
Lesson 7: THE PEACEMAKERS and what they pursue	117
Lesson 8: THE PERSECUTED and the precious	135
Conclusion: BLESSED ARE THE CHOSEN	152
Notes	154
About the Authors	158



Introduction

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

“Seeing the crowds, he [Jesus] went up on the mountain,
and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And
he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

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

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:1–12

Blessed is both a familiar and unfamiliar word. Christians tend to use it in place of the word *lucky*, lest anyone think *we think* good things happen by chance. We also “bless this food to our bodies” before eating, mind our manners with a “bless you” after sneezing, give our blessing to things we like and withhold it from things we don’t, and believe our judgment is subtle when we “bless his heart”—especially if we use a southern drawl.

Blest? Or bless-ED??

But in Matthew 5, Jesus used the word **nine times**, which begs the question: What does the word **blessed** really mean? And while we’re at it, is it pronounced with one syllable or two?

Of course, the real issue isn’t how to pronounce the twenty-first-century English word, but instead how the first-century word was defined. While most English translations of

The first-century Greek word for *blessed* was *makários* (μακάριος), and it’s used 50 times in the New Testament.

Conditional expectation: things we have to do in order to get something in return.

Matthew 5 use the word *blessed*, a few use the word *happy*. And indeed, happiness is included in some New Testament contexts (as in, *if you do this, you’ll be happy*, like in Matt. 24:46, Luke 11:28, and Deut. 28:1–14)—but not all. In the Sermon on the Mount, the “blessed” statements are not “do this and be happy” life hacks; they aren’t expressions of conditional expectation. Rather, they are declarations of what already is for the those who follow Jesus. Perhaps each sentence could just as easily begin with “congratulations.”

Congratulations to those who are poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Congratulations to those who mourn, because they shall be comforted.

Congratulations to those who are meek, because they shall inherit the earth.

Congratulations and so on and so forth **because God’s favor is upon you.**

And now we're getting somewhere because as we're going to see in the coming pages, God's favor is better than happiness, contrary to the "pursue happiness no matter the cost" culture we live in. Happiness, by definition, is conditional, which means it's also temporary and most often fleeting. On the contrary, the blessings Jesus spoke of—usually called the Beatitudes—point to a fuller, more significant kind of human flourishing. Not in the material sense like those who seem to "have it all," but in the faith-affirming, peace-abiding, future-securing sense our souls truly long for.

Beatitudes:
the blessings listed by
Jesus in the Sermon
on the Mount.

So who gets to experience God's favor? Well, only those who follow Jesus.

In our season 1 Bible study called *What Does It Mean to Be Chosen?* we focused on Isaiah 43, the Old Testament anticipation of a coming Messiah, and what the arrival of Jesus meant and still means for His followers. Specifically, we explored what it means to be called and rescued by Jesus, to rest in His presence, to be cherished and protected, to change course in order to follow where He leads, to testify of His kingship, to be cleansed of sin and made new, and to be established and carried along the way.

Pun not intended ...
but also not deleted.

And being carried is right where this new Bible study picks up.

Just as season 2 of *The Chosen* depicts more of Jesus's way of living and being and teaching, so does the Sermon on the Mount. In every word spoken that day, we see the

For Bible Nerds (like us) Who Want to Know

Two of the four Gospels in the New Testament have summaries of the Sermon on the Mount: the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. Matthew has the longer summary (three chapters totaling 111 verses in Matthew 5–7), and Luke has the shorter summary (33 verses in Luke 6:17–49). While we will make the occasional reference to Luke's account (four "blessed" statements in Luke 6:20–23

and four corresponding "woe" statements in Luke 6:24–26), this study will primarily focus on Matthew's lengthier list of nine "blessed" statements.

Incidentally, is anyone surprised that Matthew's account of the sermon is the longer one?

Yeah, neither are we.

character, power, and promises of the One who carries us. Once we belong to Him, we're not only given a new identity, we're ushered into a new reality. One that is sure, imminent, and permanent. And so—

We have hope no matter our circumstances.

We have assurances and riches and resources no matter our circumstances.

We are blessed no matter our circumstances because God's favor is upon us.

That said, this new reality is not automatically seen or understood by spiritually untrained eyes. And wrapping our heads around God's favor—understanding it, accepting it in spite of who we know our sinful selves to be, prioritizing it over other things, and allowing it to fundamentally change the way we see and experience the world—brings with it some intrinsic hang-ups.

Hang-up 1: What We Care About

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!"
Matthew 7:11

The key to experiencing all the "blessed" feels is to value God's favor more than we value earthly things. That doesn't mean earthly things don't matter or that they aren't gifts from Him. Of course God gives good gifts to His children, which include earthly things, and we should be thankful. We should steward our relationships, health, and finances well. But we should also hold them loosely, recognizing that God, His presence, and our future home with Him in heaven are the **only** things our hearts fundamentally need.

But holding our lives loosely is hard.

Hang-up 2: Works vs. Grace

Even after being saved by grace, most of us return to our default works-based setting, which means we tend to see the Beatitudes as things we must do in order to secure God's blessings. *I didn't earn God's forgiveness or the eternal life that freely came with it, but by golly, through good behavior and my own spiritual fortitude, I'm gonna earn more of His favor along the way.*

So ridiculous.

The truth is, when we believe Jesus is who He said He is and we surrender our lives to Him, **the blessings become ours because they're His.** By His grace, He offers His life to us along with everything it includes. The blessings are ours already.

But comprehending blessing so extraordinary and so freely given is really hard.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
Ephesians 2:8-9

Hang-up 3: Blessed, Not Easy

The Beatitudes actually present us with a challenge, but it's not a challenge to work harder so we can earn more of God's blessings. Nor should we hear Jesus's sermon and respond by burning down our houses in order to become poor, or try to get non-Christians to beat us up in order to be persecuted.

Duh.

Instead, the challenge is to recognize God's favor in our lives *in spite of our difficult circumstances*, because having His favor doesn't mean our lives will be easy. Clearly God doesn't fix all our problems or Jesus wouldn't have said, "Blessed are those who mourn." Indeed, there is still disease and death, heartache and struggle, persecution and poverty. God doesn't always change our earthly circumstances, which is why Jesus took the time to illuminate the bigger picture: God is with us in every circumstance, *which changes every circumstance*. He

"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

long-suffers alongside us. He comforts us in the mess. He reminds us of our future with Him in heaven, where He promises there will be no more tears.

But seeing beyond our difficult circumstances is really, **really** hard.

The In-Between

John 11:1–44

The story of Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus has massive significance, and not just because Jesus brought a dead man back to life. Lazarus had been gravely ill and his sisters sent word to Jesus—who decided *not* to return in time to heal His friend. By the time Jesus did go back, Lazarus had been dead four days. The community, along with Mary and Martha, was devastated and grieving, but Jesus told them to reopen the tomb and commanded Lazarus to come out.

And then he did.

“Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’”

John 11:41–44

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
John 14:6

The obvious takeaway is that Jesus has power over life and death. He *is* life and gives life—physically, in the case of Lazarus, but also spiritually. When we surrender to Jesus, we’re “born again”; our sins forgiven and forgotten, we’re made new. But there’s a second extraordinary aspect of this famous story, because before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He wept.

“Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept.”

John 11:32–35

Jesus didn’t weep for Lazarus. He knew His friend was about to walk out of the tomb and that many would glorify God as a result. The circumstances were, in fact, part of a divine master plan to prove to the people watching that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah they’d been waiting for.

Messiah:
the promised deliverer
of the Jewish nation (or
“Savior”) prophesied
in the Hebrew Bible
or Old Testament.

Which means Jesus wept because the people He loved were weeping.

Unlike Jesus, Mary and Martha didn’t know their brother would be raised. They were *in between*, that part of the story where (1) they knew and loved Jesus but (2) their circumstances were still overwhelming. Not only had they lost a loved one; they’d lost their provider and protector. Women in ancient times wholly depended on the men in their lives (their fathers or husbands or, in the absence of both, their brothers) for the very roofs over their heads. Which meant these women were not only devastated by their loss; they were also afraid.

To add insult to their injured hearts, their Messiah, *who was also their friend*, didn’t come to their rescue. At least, not in the way they had asked Him to, which may be why Mary didn’t immediately go to Jesus when He arrived—she stayed inside. When she did speak to Him, she blamed Him. “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (v. 32).

Jesus wasn’t mad at Mary for being overwhelmed with grief and fear. And anger. He knew she was in the in-between, stuck in hard circumstances, the future unknown to her.

It was, in fact, her grief that made Him grieve—because He was in the in-between with her. That space between calling Jesus “Lord” for the first time and being delivered from the broken, brutal world we live in. That space where even though we’ve put our faith in Jesus, heartache, worry, and confusion still churn. That space where the way forward is sometimes unsure and circumstances can cause us to lose sight of what’s true—which is exactly why Jesus took the time to teach us what’s true, no matter how things appear.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart.

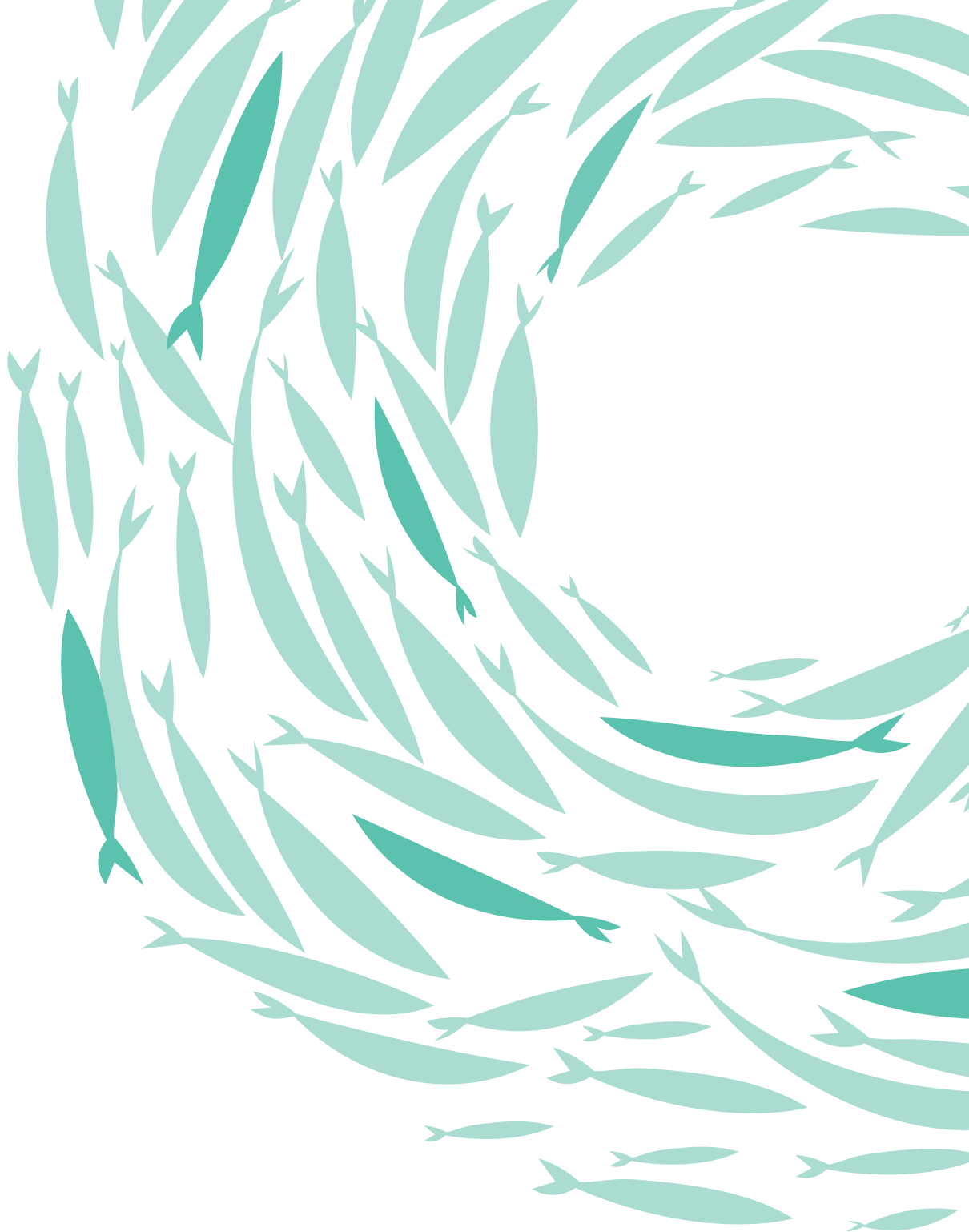
Blessed are the peacemakers.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes our new reality—our actual reality, regardless of our circumstances. He describes things we can’t always see but remain true anyway; a kingdom not visible to the unsaved or spiritually untrained eye, but when brought into focus, provides hope that supersedes the hard things. In His sermon, Jesus describes the truth about what matters: who we are when we belong to Him, what we have when we belong to Him, where we’re going because we belong to Him, and what it means to be blessed in the in-between and unto eternity.

Which means congratulations are in order.

God’s favor is upon you.



John, Son of Zebedee (a.k.a., the Beloved Disciple)



Recognized as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), the apostle John, son of Zebedee, authored five New Testament books (the Gospel of John, the letters of 1–3 John, and Revelation), totaling about 21 percent of the New Testament. John was the only named apostle present at Jesus’s crucifixion, at which time Jesus assigned the care of His mother, Mary, to him (John 19:25–27). Church tradition reports that John was a leader of the church in Ephesus in the middle of the first century. After his exile on the nearby island of Patmos, where he had the visions described in the book of Revelation, John returned to Ephesus. Likely to have been the youngest of Jesus’s apostles, John is thought to be the only one to die of old age rather than as a martyr (sometime between AD 98–106).

James, Son of Zebedee (a.k.a., James the Greater)



Jesus dubbed James and his brother John the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17), perhaps for their harsh response to opposition (Mark 9:38; Luke 9:54). Or perhaps it was their father, Zebedee, who was the “thunderous” one. Or perhaps it was all of the above since apples tend to fall near the tree. Regardless, James was in the inner circle of Jesus’s friends, which included Peter, James, and John. According to Acts 12:1–3, he was the first of the apostles to die as a martyr for the gospel, being put to death by the sword at the command of Herod Agrippa I (AD 41) before persecution dispersed the apostles from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:19).

Lesson 1

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

and the sons of thunder

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

Matthew 5:3

SAMARITAN TRADER: You Jewish boys are far from home.

JESUS: Yes, as a matter of fact we are. Shalom to you too.

SAMARITAN TRADER: Here’s our traditional Jewish greeting for you ...

(The traders hurl rocks at Jesus but miss. John and Big James stand in shock but quickly process what they’ve seen. Before the brothers can spring forward, Jesus thrusts His arms to the side, stopping them like a gate.)

JESUS: Don’t lift a finger.

SAMARITAN TRADER: That was a warning.

BIG JAMES: Try it again and see what happens!

JESUS: Quiet, Big James.

SAMARITAN TRADER: Shalom to you too.

(Members of the caravan spit on John as they pass by.)

JOHN: You filthy dogs!

JESUS: I said quiet!

(The brothers practically shake with rage. When the caravan has passed, John pivots so that his back is to the traders, his face close to Jesus’s.)

JOHN (*practically hissing*): Let us do something.

JESUS: And what would that achieve?

JOHN: Defending Your honor.

BIG JAMES: They reviled and humiliated You.

JOHN: They deserve to have bolts of lightning rain down and incinerate them.

BIG JAMES: Yes, fire from the heavens!

JESUS: Fire?

JOHN: You said we could do things like that. Say the word, and it will happen.

(Jesus stares at them.)

BIG JAMES: Why not? We knew we couldn't trust these people; we shouldn't have come here in the first place. They don't deserve You.

(John's eyes search those of his Master wildly.)

JESUS: Why do you think I had you work Melech's field? What was I trying to teach you?

BIG JAMES: To help?

JESUS: You think it was just to be more helpful, or to be better farmers? It was to show you that what we're doing here will last for generations. What I told Photina at the well, and what she then told so many others ... it's sowing seeds that will have a lasting impact for lifetimes. Can you not see what's happening here? These people that you hate so much are believing in Me without even seeing miracles ... it's the message, the truth that we're giving them. And you're going to get in the way of that because a few people from a region you don't like were mean to you? They're not worthy? What—you're so much better, you're more worthy?

JESUS (CONT'D): Well, let me tell you something: you're not! That's the whole point. It's why I'm here.

Trading Up

Right before his account of the SOM, Matthew commented on the arrest of John the Baptist and said, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven is at hand**’” (Matt. 4:17). Which meant Jesus’s followers were launching—however slowly and imperfectly this side of eternity—into His kingdom way of living. They were trading in their old way of seeing, thinking, and behaving for a new way, similar to the trade Jesus described in Matthew 11:28–29 when He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Indeed, the world has a way of burdening us, sometimes beyond what we can bear. Jesus acknowledged our pain and struggle by inviting us to bring it all to Him: to trade our burdens for His rest, our neediness and weakness for His tender care and limitless strength, our chaos and confusion for His peace, our brokenness for His wholeness.

He invites us to trade in. To trade up.

Same thing is true in the SOM. Jesus took the time to describe the blessings we receive when we give our lives to Him—and it isn’t just heaven. It’s life to the fullest here and now because we belong to Him and **He is with us**, carrying us and comforting us, equipping us and satisfying us, providing for and promising us a kingdom in which we’re heirs of creation itself! The life our Creator and King offers and freely gives to those who follow Him is far better than what the world offers or could ever give—if only we’d see and embrace our new reality as sons and daughters of the Most High.

But more often than not, we think and behave like the Sons of Thunder.

SOM = Sermon on the Mount ... because we’re already weary of typing it out.

“[Jesus] appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder).”
Mark 3:16–17

Your Turn

1. What burdens are you attempting to carry in your own wisdom or strength?

You've Got to Be Kidding

Samaritan:
a person from Samaria.

Jews in Jesus's day looked down on Samaritans as the tainted descendants of Israelites who had intermarried with pagan foreigners (Luke 9:51–56; 10:25–37; 17:11–19). Thus, the Samaritans developed their own religious worship center at Mount Gerizim, their own version of the Old Testament Scriptures, and their own particular beliefs.

Insert sarcastic tone here, because the stupidity and ugliness of racism is nothing new.

“And [Jesus] sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’”

Luke 9:52–54

James and John spent a lot of time with Jesus. They personally experienced His forgiveness, patience, and graciousness. They watched Him welcome all kinds of people with all kinds of problems—even Samaritans—with no strings attached. They witnessed Him heal the spiritually possessed and the physically oppressed. They saw Him turn the other cheek when He was mocked or rejected, pouring Himself out to serve and to seek and to save. Yet somehow,

after all that, the brothers thought Jesus might give a thumbs-up to their murder plan.

Oh the irony of the Thunder Twins calling for harsh punishment of others when they'd been on the receiving end of unmerited grace. But that's what we humans tend to

do. We recognize our own desperate need for Jesus, only to forget it once we know Him. We compare ourselves to those we deem worse, judging the hearts and minds of others as though we're in any position to do so, all the while failing to extend the very love and mercy we've been repeatedly shown by God Himself.

But blessed are the poor in spirit.

Being poor in spirit isn't a money thing—though being financially poor sometimes makes it easier to be poor in spirit. *Lack* of any kind has a way of tenderizing our hearts and exposing our real need. Conversely, wealth sometimes makes it harder to be poor in spirit since it fosters self-sufficiency and even pride, which are enemies of the lowly posture required to be “poor in spirit.” Indeed, some of the terms for “poor” in the Bible were regularly used for those so lowly, so disadvantaged and distressed, they needed outside intervention—which isn't far from how we sometimes use the word today. For example, when we see a news report of a horrific accident and a man being cut from his car and rushed to the hospital, we might say, “That poor guy.” Of course, we're not referring to his bank account. We're referring to his desperate need for intervention and help.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the “poor” Jesus refers to are those who are ready and willing to look to God for help. Because when we recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy—our desperate need to be saved from sin and all its consequences—we get real low real fast. And if we're smart, we stay there. To be poor in spirit means to take a knee, now and forevermore. It means to live in surrender to our Savior, relying on Him for the help we can't possibly provide ourselves.

To be sure, the Samaritans who offended James and John had their own sin issues, and their prejudice toward the Jews closed their ears and hearts to who Jesus really was.

James and John were not actually twins, but it sounds sort of funny to say it that way.

Grace:
good stuff God gives that we don't deserve to get.

“Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”
Luke 6:24

Lowliness:
humble in manner or spirit; free from pride.

But then their rejection of Jesus led to the disciples' rejection of Jesus's authority—at least in that moment. Because calling down fire from heaven to destroy an entire village is the *opposite* of what Jesus was teaching His followers to do. They took their eyes off their leader and hardcore stared at their circumstances, which caused their self-righteous self-sufficiency to wield its ugly head.

Alternatively, when we're bent low, it's Jesus who lifts our heads. And it's Jesus who leads us on. Which means those who are poor in spirit don't have the time or inclination to judge others because they're too busy (1) doing battle with their own ongoing sin, (2) continually experiencing the grace that saved them in the first place, and (3) keeping their eyes on Jesus and His kingdom.

A kingdom that, incidentally, is already here.

Your Turn

2. In what ways are you like the Sons of Thunder?

3. What lack are you experiencing in your life, and what deeper need is it working to expose?

4. Read Isaiah 66:1–2 and underline what God says about those who are poor in spirit.

“Thus says the LORD:
‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.
But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.’”

Contrite:
feeling or
expressing
remorse or
penitence.

The Wheat and the Weeds

“He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” So the servants said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he said, “No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, ‘Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Matthew 13:24–30

For Bible Nerds (like us) Who Want to Know

The first Beatitude (Matt. 5:3) and the last Beatitude (Matt. 5:10) both close with “theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” which means that must be a significant promise for the blessed. But what exactly does it mean?

Well, for the first-century Jews hearing the SOM, the “kingdom of heaven” (a.k.a., “kingdom of God”) didn’t merely mean going to heaven when you die. To be included in a kingdom of some kind was to be ruled by a king and to enjoy the benefits (or hardships) of that king.

Those listening to Jesus’s sermon were suffering under Roman rule with Caesar as king, and they were longing to be rescued from his unjust rule. And the “kingdom of heaven” was their long-hoped-for, God-established society wherein the Messiah would be King, ruling with love and justice over His chosen people in a land of peace and fulfillment.

Of note is that this particular blessing is spelled out, *not* in the future tense, but in the present tense: “theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.” Not WILL BE. Which means the Jews might’ve been incorrect in some of their assumptions about the details, but they weren’t wrong to believe the kingdom is already here.

Strange that Jesus’s parable about the man who planted good seeds in a field, and his enemy who planted bad seeds in the same field, somehow describes the kingdom of heaven. But also, it totally does. Because we’re living in the age of planting and gathering—the part of the story where God is calling His people from every tribe, nation, and tongue in order to build His heavenly kingdom. Those who bend their knee to the King belong to that kingdom, and it belongs to them. They are the good seeds that sprout and spread in the midst of, *and in spite of*, a weed-filled, dying world.

Jesus taught His disciples about a new way to live—a heavenly kingdom way that begins on earth. He *wasn’t* merely teaching about making good choices, though we should obey God’s Word and try to be more like Jesus, and we should definitely NOT pray for fire to rain down on people’s heads. But while our choices are important, they’re *not* the focus of the Beatitudes in the SOM. Rather, Jesus wanted His followers to see and understand their **new reality** and that life here isn’t all there is. Jesus came offering Himself and everything that belongs to Him, which includes His kingdom membership. When we embrace Him, we’re in, despite the fact that we still live here.

And the knowledge of that should change everything. We’re here, but only for now. Our circumstances are difficult, but only for now. Our pain and

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:17–18

suffering are real, but only for now. Sin and sickness and strife are part of our lives, but only for now.

Also part of our lives right now?

Access to the King.
We can actually approach the
God of the universe.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption to himself

as sons [and daughters] through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

Ephesians 1:3–6

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Hebrews 10:19–22

The high priest had to pass through a curtain to reach the Holy of Holies in the temple—the place where God’s presence dwelled. When Christ died on the cross, the curtain was torn in two, opening up and offering the presence of God to us all.

Access to the King's power.

We are not left powerless
in the world today.

“For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in **power.**”

1 Corinthians 4:20

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of
power and love and self-control.”

2 Timothy 1:7

“His divine power has granted to us all things
that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of
him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”

2 Peter 1:3

The attention of the King.

Our needs are brought before the
Father by Jesus Himself.

“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is **interceding for us.** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things

present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:34–39

“Consequently, [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since **he always lives to make intercession for them.**”

Hebrews 7:25

The presence of the King.
God is with us all the time.
In all the things.

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, **for he dwells with you and will be in you.**”

John 14:16–17

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

John 14:26

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only

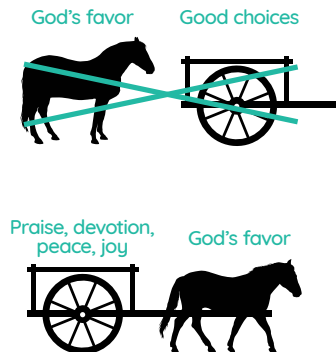
that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**

Romans 5:1–5

Your Turn

5. In light of the preceding verses, describe God’s favor toward the poor in spirit.

6. In His parable of the weeds, Jesus illustrated the coexistence of His kingdom and the broken world we live in. How are you experiencing this tension in your life?



7. Good choices are good and they flow from our love and devotion to Jesus. But our choices don’t determine our daily dose of God’s favor—that’s ours in full already because Jesus has secured it, which means we can’t earn favor before *or after* we belong to the kingdom. How should knowing that impact any “Sons of Thunder” tendencies you may have?

8. Read Revelation 21:1–4 and describe the fullness of the kingdom that lies ahead.

MELECH'S FARM (NIGHT)

(Night has fallen and Jesus and His disciples are seated around their new friend's fire, finishing their meal. Melech's wife, Chedva, and daughter, Rebecca, sit at his side.)

SIMON *(laughing)*: The boat almost flipped ... then the net strained so hard I thought my arms would come out of their sockets.

ANDREW: And James and John took their sweet time coming to help us.

(Andrew turns to John and Big James with a chuckle. The brothers, withdrawn and bothered, don't return the gesture.)

SIMON: I had to call for help five times before you moved.

MELECH: And so you followed Him. All the way into Samaria.

MATTHEW: We did suggest the alternate route along the Jordan.

MELECH: You didn't think it could be ... dangerous? For You?

(Chedva shoots Melech a forbidding look. Jesus stares into Melech's eyes.)

JESUS: Of course.

(Chedva clears her throat.)

CHEDVA: When I was a little girl, my father told me the Messiah would bring an end to pain and suffering. If You are who people are saying You are, when will You do that?

(The faces of the disciples glow in the firelight. They're interested in the answer too.)

JESUS: I am here to preach the good news of the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that is not of this world, a kingdom that is coming soon, where, yes, sorrow and sighing will flee away. I make a way for people to access that kingdom. But in this world, bones will still break, hearts will still break, but in the end, the light will overcome darkness.

Prayer Focus

Talk to God about your spiritual poverty and inability to earn His favor. Thank Him for pursuing you, and for choosing you to follow Jesus and enjoy His kingdom.

Ask Him to empower you by the Holy Spirit to live according to His kingdom values even when your circumstances are difficult.

Sample Prayer

Dear Lord,

Thank You for extending Your generous and undeserved love toward me. Forgive me for all the ways I attempt to earn the favor You've freely offered in Jesus, rather than simply acknowledging my spiritual poverty and dependence on You. Help me to acknowledge it, Lord.

Thank You for extending to me Your kingdom. Through Your Holy Spirit, help me to allow Your kingdom to break through in my life, even today.

Despite my current circumstances, help me recognize my happiness in You and all the gifts You have already provided.

Amen.