



## LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 8: Matthew 5:1-12  
**The Future is Now**

November 6, 2016

**Before you begin this study, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God is saying in these scriptures.**

### Introduction

For the last several weeks we have studied the journey of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt through their challenging times in the wilderness to the brink of the promised land, using all of this as a metaphor for our own journey from the slavery of sin through the wilderness of disobedience and trial. Having made this journey, we can now examine the promised land itself. We must learn to live a new life as God's free people. Jesus fills us with His Spirit and empowers us to live in this new freedom. Just as the Israelites received God's Ten Commandments as part of God's covenantal promises, so too we can experience the blessed life we have through following Jesus' teachings, including the Beatitudes which we study this week. DeGroat provides this reassurance (p. 221), "God never gives up on us. He continues to remake our lives, casing the big vision for our maturity that we find in the Beatitudes." As you gather in your study group, join the crowd who gathered around Jesus. Listen to what He has to offer to you, wherever you are on your faith journey.

### Day 1: Read Matthew 5: 1-4

1. Jesus had just called the disciples to follow Him and was beginning to draw crowds to hear His teaching. Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down to teach, as was the custom of Jewish rabbis in that day. (Remember also that Moses went up the mountain to receive God's law.) This scripture passage has been called the Beatitudes. The word Beatitude comes from the Latin word "beatus," which means happy, blessed or fortunate. Each one begins with the word *blessed*. **What does the word blessed mean to you? (Use a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.) What does it mean to you when someone tells you to "Have a blessed day" or "God bless you"?** The NIV Study Bible footnote says that "blessed means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate or enviable state of those who are in God's kingdom." The most common connotation of "blessed" means recipient of gifts or good things. Some Biblical scholars think of it as Bless-ED, an attribute meaning set apart, child of God. Note also that the Beatitudes were meant to give a view of the character of the people of God, who were a part of His Kingdom, and to give them assurance of the blessings to look forward to, inner peace and of His presence with them, in this life and the fulfillment of eternal promises.
2. **In verse 3, Jesus talks about the "poor in spirit." What does this mean? Was He referring to poor people?** The word 'poor' often brings to mind a financial deficit, which can certainly deflate the spirit, but the challenges of life can also lead to spiritual impoverishment. On page 208, DeGroat writes, "Blessed are the poor, the spiritually impoverished, the helpless, the beggars, those who are dependent. Jesus sees us at our most needy." On page 209, DeGroat quotes Simon Tugwell: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, those who have allowed themselves to be stripped of the old spirit, the spirit of acquisitiveness and security..." The blessing is that when you feel unacceptable to yourself or the world's standards, you are accepted in full measure, with a place in God's Kingdom; this is in contrast to the spiritually proud and self-sufficient attitudes people sometimes have. **How does James 4: 7-10 help you to understand this phrase? James uses terms like "submitting" and "humbling." What gets in the way of our being poor in spirit?**
3. **What is the "kingdom of heaven" that Jesus is promising?** (See Isaiah 61: 1-3; Matthew 5: 10 and 19; Matthew 24: 34; and Luke 4.) The spiritual battle for the eternal Kingdom is between the temptation

of Satan (Luke 4) and the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. The Kingdom begins here on earth as we believe in Jesus and follow him. **To whom does Jesus promise this? Why does Jesus use the present tense instead of the future tense when talking about the kingdom of heaven?** The Kingdom of heaven is for 'whoever' accepts Jesus' teaching and follows Him (John 3:16). He sees our effort, what is in our heart. In *Leaving Egypt* (page 209), Chuck DeGroat answers the question about how people can be happy and blessed while broken: "The wilderness constantly reminds me that wholeness is not perfection." All of us have levels of brokenness at some point on our journey through life, even as devout Christians.

4. **Verse 4 says that mourners are also blessed. Do you think that every mourner is blessed?** (See Isaiah 25: 8; Isaiah 61: 1-3; Luke 4: 16-21; and Revelation 7: 17.) Mourning can be for any loss or for another person. The Israelites mourned the loss of their previous home, even though their change was eventually for the better. Even good change can bring about mourning for what is left behind. Jesus acknowledged embracing feelings. He wept at the loss of friends and at the deep spiritual needs of the people. **By whom are the mourners to be comforted?** Our comfort comes from the Lord. He listens to our cries of lament. **As you have mourned in your life, perhaps because of a significant loss, who or what provided comfort? How has your grief increased your sensitivity or empathy?** DeGroat writes on pages 211 "...those who are not first broken lack the capacity to grieve fully and deeply."

## **Day 2: Read Matthew 5: 5-6**

1. **In verse 5, what does it mean to be meek? (See Psalm 37: 5-11 and Matthew 11: 27-30.) How is meekness different from shyness or weakness? How does meekness compare with humility? What gets in the way of our being meek?** Meekness involves commitment to and trust in God, listening to God's word, and resting on God's love and power rather than being angry or fretful. The NIV Study Bible footnote says it is "...not so much an attitude toward man, but a disposition before God." The meek may be humble and gentle of heart, but not necessarily weak or ineffective.
2. **In Numbers 12: 3, Moses is described as meek. In what ways was this true of him? What leaders in our society or our world (including religious leaders) exhibit meekness? Which ones don't?** Numbers 12:3 tells us that "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Moses was not arrogant, like Aaron or Miriam were. God called many people who were meek and humble, by earthly standards, into leadership roles.
3. **According to verse 5, what will the meek inherit? The meek will inherit the earth. What do you think this means, and why would the meek receive this blessing?** Psalm 37:11 tells us "The meek shall possess the land." Considered a Messianic Psalm (Old Testament foretelling of the Messiah to come), the promise of land was considered the Promised Land, with the arrival of the Messiah, a new Heaven and a new Earth. Rewards were not promised to tyrannical self-serving people, but those who had a Jesus heart of love and service to others.
4. **In verse 6, what does Jesus mean by hungering and thirsting for righteousness? (See Isaiah 11: 4-5; Isaiah 55: 1-2; John 4: 14, 6: 48; Romans 1: 17 and 3: 21-22; and Philippians 3: 7-11.) Hungering and thirsting gives us a picture of one whose focus is on Christ and the fulfillment of life in Christ. What is righteousness? (See a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia.) Righteousness is a right relationship with God. It is God through Christ's death and resurrection, by the Holy Spirit, who puts us into right relationship with God, and thus also with others and with nature (see NIV footnote on Romans 1: 17 and the other passages note above). Righteousness is a life lived that is pleasing to God and a deep desire to do His will. Is there something we can do to develop a greater hunger for righteousness, or does it result from a set of circumstances in our life beyond our control? What gets in the way of our hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Sometimes a setback in life can lead us to seek God's guidance for a re-ordering of our life with a more positive outcome. Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you to the righteous expression of life that God has intended for you.**

### Day 3: Read Matthew 5: 7-8

The next Beatitude is a shift from the first four that spoke to our brokenness. This begins our encouragement to move toward people who need OUR healing help in their brokenness.

1. **What does it mean to be merciful, as verse 7 describes?** (See Psalm 41: 1; Matthew 9: 13; 12: 7; 18: 32-35; Ephesians 4: 32; and James 2: 13.) Being merciful involves regard for the weak; it doesn't condemn the innocent; it cancels the debts that others have to them; it shows kindness and compassion to others rather than being judgmental. **What gets in the way of our showing mercy? How is there a blessing in showing mercy to others, particularly to someone who has deeply hurt us or betrayed us? How is this possible?** Showing mercy to others, whether in forgiveness or compassion, is not always easy. We learn it from God, who has shown us unconditional mercy and grace in the forgiveness of our transgressions (Romans 8:1-4); or we learn it from others who have extended mercy to us when we least deserved it. God will help us to express it to others when we may not be able to on our own. In *Leaving Egypt*, Chuck DeGroat says "Our brokenness cultivates the soil, in which a truly merciful life can blossom." (page 216).
2. **Can you think of significant or dramatic examples of mercy extended to others, in our current society or in recent history? What lessons can we learn from this?** You may think of public or more personal examples. People make huge mistakes of varying level of severity. Many athletes, politicians, faith community leaders, and other public figures are given 'second' chances when they express lament at their misdeeds or self-serving actions when they humbly and sincerely resolve to reform their behavior, to continue to serve in the capacity they were originally called to.
3. **In verse 8, what does it mean to be pure in heart? (See Psalm 24: 3-4; 2 Corinthians 7: 1; 2 Peter 3: 13-15, and 1 John 3: 1-3.)** In the Bible, the term "heart" refers to will, or the choices one makes— thoughts, desires, and decisions. Being pure in heart involves the following: not worshipping idols, not swearing falsely, being free from everything that contaminates our bodies and spirits, being holy, spotless and blameless, being at peace with God, and being like Jesus. This is a big order, indeed! **Where does a pure heart come from?** A pure heart comes from God the Holy Spirit and our hope in God. The NIV Study Bible footnote states that this includes our attitudes and motives. "In Biblical language the heart refers to the center of the human spirit, from which springs emotions, thought, motivation, courage, and action." (See Psalm 51: 10 and Acts 15: 8-9.) **How does this help us to understand that the pure in heart will see God?**
4. **What circumstances in life can affect the purity of our hearts, either positively or negatively? Is a "heart of faith" that is rooted in Christ different from a secular good and charitable heart? What is the difference?** There are many charitable efforts to help the oppressed and unfortunate in our world. They are wonderful, and we are called to help with the practical needs of others. A Christ-centered heart is also interested in spiritual purification and seeking God's help in maintaining it. We reach out with a holistic approach with Christian witness.

### Day 4: Read Matthew 5: 9-10

1. **In verse 9, what is a peacemaker? (See Romans 14: 19; Romans 12: 9-21; James 3: 16-18; and Hebrews 12: 10-11.)** A peacemaker is a child of God, one who loves and honors others, one who serves the Lord, does good, prays, lives in harmony, blesses those who mistreat them rather than taking revenge, is peace-loving with Godly wisdom, and accepts God's discipline. **Who are the peacemakers in Jesus' day? Who are the peacemakers in history or in our world today?** DeGroat writes (p. 218) "Instead, God's faithful commitment to bringing about peace in our hearts opens up the possibility for us to relax into the arms of the faithful, attentive, emotionally available Father. That love will propel us to move into the lives of others with the same invitation to God's shalom." Jesus does not give us peace as the world does (John 1:12). He often used the words "Do not be afraid" and has assured us of His ever presence to give us comfort.

2. **Where do you find the source of peace? (See John 14: 27)** The source of peace is Jesus. Hopefully, each of us will find Jesus as the ultimate source of our peace. The world we live in can give us disappointment and create fear and instability. **Describe a situation where someone was a peacemaker for you. How have you been a peacemaker? What did you learn from these experiences? What gets in the way of our being peacemakers?** In *Leaving Egypt*, DeGroat reminds us that to bring about peace in others, we must have peace within ourselves. Most people desire peace in their lives and communities. Reaching that utopian goal often presents challenges where differing sides need mediation to come to some terms of agreement. You may think of great past or present leaders on the world or national stage, but each of us needs to be the peace-keeper we want everyone else to be, in our corner of the world.
3. **Why are peacemakers called children of God?** (See John 1: 12-13; Romans 8: 14; and 1 John 3: 1.) John 1:12-13 tells us that "all who believe in God and receive Him, become His children." 1 John 3:1 says "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God." Their mission as disciples of Jesus was to share and demonstrate His message of peace and love to others. Their mission field is wherever they are and striving to reach beyond as far as possible, to extend their Christian influence. Ours is the same, today.
4. **In verse 10, what does it mean to be persecuted because of righteousness?** This means to be persecuted for doing what is good and right and for living a Godly life. **Are you aware of people who have been persecuted because of righteousness? Why are they persecuted? (See also 1 Peter 3: 13-14; 2 Timothy 3: 12.) What encouragement or blessing do they have?** Jesus says that theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

#### **Day 5: Read Matthew 5: 11-12**

1. **Verse 11 changes the terminology from "blessed are they" to "blessed are you." What do you think is the significance of this shift?** In the Old Testament, people were persecuted because of their faithfulness to God. Jesus is speaking to His disciples and new followers. He is acknowledging and teaching them that they very likely will suffer some level of persecution because of following Him.
2. **Verse 11 continues the theme of being persecuted. What other words are used in verse 11 to describe what people do to you?** The passage speaks of being insulted and falsely accused. **Have you experienced a situation where you were insulted, persecuted, or falsely accused? Have you had a situation where you were persecuted because of your faith in Jesus, because people knew you were a Christian? What did you learn from these experiences?** DeGroat writes (p. 218), "Being persecuted for righteousness is an inevitable byproduct of a life formed through the previous seven beatitudes. You see, a person who has matured in Christ's beatitude way finds life's greatest satisfaction in taking up the cross and following Christ. As Christ's life is formed in us, we can't help but live more faithfully, more boldly."
3. **Why did Jesus say in verse 12 to "rejoice and be glad" in the midst of persecution for following Him? Why is this difficult? What motivation do you have for persevering through times of persecution?** We can rejoice and be glad 'inside', as we know we are doing what Christ desires of us. He has commissioned us and is walking with us. The promise of eternal life free from all our earthly challenges, gives us hope and we can endure our sufferings. Christ reminds us that our reward in heaven is great, and that we should remember the prophets who were persecuted before us. We are on a mission adventure, fulfilling a great commission from Jesus to seek and disciple others for His Kingdom. We have His help and the support of a community of believers to encourage us. We have witnessed the miracles of many lives that have been changed and maybe even our own breakthroughs from wilderness wandering to the blessings of following the guidelines we have been given by God for the best life we can have now and for all eternity. We are in good company: the prophets and Jesus Himself were persecuted for doing what is right.

## **Day 6**

*(If you have the book Leaving Egypt, read chapters 15 and 16. If you do not have the book, consider how you might respond to these questions based on your own experiences and understanding.)*

1. In Chapter 15, DeGroat explores the definitions of a happy and virtuous life and the meaning of living faithfully in freedom. On page 205, DeGroat says, "Try as you might, you cannot get away from rules, responsibilities and requirements." He cites examples of seeking freedom from a restrictive lifestyle. **How are we like the Israelites, who grumbled on the path of the Exodus journey, but were rescued from enslavement and were looking forward to the Promised Land? What are the blessings and benefits of being freed from the slavery of negative lifestyle choices to a Christ-centered mission-oriented life, with His set of guidelines?**
2. On page 220, DeGroat says, "We enter into the wilderness restoration program exemplified in the beatitudes, not for some personal enrichment program, but for the sake of the world." **Why does the Beatitude lifestyle lead us to community mission and discipleship?**
3. Chapter 16 (p. 222) gives us additional insight into DeGroat's observations of the direction of the human heart going one of two paths. One path is returning "back toward Egypt, that place of emotional and spiritual enslavement, difficulty and division" (citing examples of neurosis lifestyle behaviors), or the other path that is "directed toward Home – toward a life with God" (exhibiting a theosis lifestyle and behaviors). **How crucial is it to know the condition of our hearts? God loves us and seeks us where we are. Which of the two directions are you heading on your path of life? Have you accepted the love and unconditional grace of God, made possible through the sacrifice of His son Jesus, who died on the Cross to welcome you into a brotherhood with him?**
4. We have survived the 'Journey' and arrived 'Home'. A life in Christ, a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), where we can feel comfortable and be ourselves and always remember we are God's precious children; He will never leave us. On page 235, DeGroat reminds us "God keeps accompanying us along the way: back then in a cloud, in a prophet, in manna, in a tent: and now in Jesus and, even more intimately in the Spirit. As we wander, God just draws closer, not farther away." **Do you have a blessed assurance and confidence of your place in the eternal Kingdom of God?**
5. DeGroat writes (p. 221) that "...we are participants in Israel's story, fellow wanderers through wilderness lands, breaking through to the promised land, but often plagued by old memories of Egypt. God never gives up on us. He continues to remake our lives, casting the big vision for our maturity that we find in the Beatitudes. The happy life, as we've seen, requires wilderness travel, but it launches us into new possibilities of growth, of service, of virtue, of freedom." **Pray and ask God for discernment in how you will live out each one of the Beatitudes to bring praise, honor and glory to Him!**