

Creative meditative prayer idea

Praying with the Beatitudes – pursuing an upside-down life

The more we study the Beatitudes, the more there is to find. And perhaps sometimes the more we question. But they are an invaluable resource in prayer – whether we fully understand their truth or not – for as we dwell in them we find they are helping us enter Jesus' teaching on the upside-kingdom... in prayer and in life.

This resource brings together several different ideas they've inspired on different occasions into one meditative prayer resource that can be used individually, or in a small group setting. We think it will work best used a section at a time, perhaps punctuating a retreat, or during a specially set aside time each day for ten days as there is a lot to think about and pray through here.

We've referenced the NIV, Amplified and "The Message" versions of the Bible in order to bring through more depth... but you might like to explore the language and insight provided by additional translations as well.

Please have at least one version of the Bible to hand to reference and as you move through the points under each section, our recommendation is that you try to inhabit each one fully before moving on or reading ahead.

1. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down... His disciples came to him... he began to teach them... (Matt 5: 1-2)

- Imagine Jesus climbing up the mountainside – withdrawing? Gaining a vantage point to better see with his eyes what was on his heart? Surveying the crowd? Seeing who would follow?
- Don't rush on from this image. Ask Jesus to help you to truly draw aside... to be able to focus on him – and to switch perspective enough to see the people in the crowd through his eyes, and through his words.
- You might even like to consider climbing up yourself – or changing your perspective and vantage point – before you continue praying. Do you want to go physically higher as you focus on these beatitudes? Or to be able to look out of a window as people pass by... or to be near to a computer ready to purposefully search through the crowd?
- Wherever you are sat, remember that Jesus has invited you to follow him... and you have chosen to respond. You are hearing words to disciples, not to the crowd...
- Actively choose again to follow, to listen... to heed, to focus – knowing what you will hear is not likely to support the world's 'wisdom'. Are you ready to listen? This is Jesus teaching... are you ready to obey? To absorb? To consider the possibility of thinking differently? To embrace becoming different yourself and living differently as a result?

2. Blessed?

- What do you associate with the word – and concept – blessed? When do you feel most blessed?

- Scan through the words that come after 'Blessed are...' in Matthew 5:3-12... do they resonate with the times, places and situations in which you feel 'blessed'?
- Ask Jesus to help you understand – in your heart as much as your mind – what kind of 'blessing' he is talking about in this passage.
- Now read the following list of phrases which are some of the various translations of 'blessed' that the Amplified version of the Bible uses against different appearances of 'Blessed' in this passage:

- happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous
- with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favour and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions
- with a happiness produced by the experience of God's favour and especially conditioned by the revelation of his matchless grace
- in that state in which the born-again child of God enjoys his favour and salvation

How do these phrases speak to you and help you better understand how 'blessing' can be paired with some of the words it is here?

How does Billy Graham's description of the beatitudes as 'beautiful attitudes' shed further light on the blessing of a transformed perspective and character for the individual demonstrating it and for those whose lives they touch?

- Ask God to fill you with his Spirit and help you prize and seek this type of blessing, even when that means it needs to come more from picking up your cross than from the breakthrough, abundance or miraculous provision he does also bring...

3. The poor in spirit (the humble, who rate themselves insignificant)... (Matt 5: 3)

- Poor in spirit is a hard concept to get your head round sometimes. What does it mean to you? How are being humble and rating yourself as insignificant the same and how are they different?
- *The Message* translates this verse as 'You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.' Where do you feel at the end of yourself? Take a moment to bring these areas to God – perhaps jotting them down so you can then focus on one at a time in turn.
- Ask God to bring to mind how some of these experiences of lack might be an opportunity for more of him and his rule to enter your life and circumstances.
- (You might like to follow by reading our blog article <http://journey.thesanctuarycentre.org/2015/03/23/the-generous-opportunity-of-lack/> or listening to www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/at-the-end-of-myself.mp3 to help you reflect and pray more about this beatitude.)

4. Those who mourn... (Matt 5:4)

- Take a moment to consider what you think makes this beatitude different to the others...
- While every other beatitude talks about people with character attributes and lives that indicate they are submitted to God... everyone is universally addressed here. This promise of comfort is given to *everyone* who mourns, which we know includes absolutely *everyone* at some stage during their life.
- Consider that although mourning is universal whether people know God or not, we all often face a choice whether we mourn in each situation, or whether we stay at the early stages of grief. Consider also that we face the choice whether to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). Thank God for the healing power of mourning to help us process bereavement and loss, and the privilege of reflecting his heart when we choose to mourn for our loss or alongside others in theirs.
- Thank God that in his compassion, comfort is extended to everyone who mourns. Thank him for drawing close to the broken-hearted (Psalm 34:18) and for the fact that he mourns with them. Thank him that he has reflected his desire to comfort the broken-hearted in the way he has created us, so that people around those who are grieving often naturally want to give comfort.
- Are you grieving? Bring your pain to God again and ask for his help in becoming more aware of the comfort he is giving. Tell him about the comfort you long to receive and ask that he would provide this directly through his presence and indirectly through bringing the right people around you.
- Spend some time asking God to bring to mind others who are grieving – whether they are specific individuals connected to you, or groups of people affected by challenges and circumstances you feel strongly about or by situations in the news. (You might like to jot them down on a piece of paper so you can more easily then focus on one at a time in turn.) Thank God he promises they will be comforted and pray that they would be able to receive this comfort from him and those he has placed around them.

5. The meek... (the mild, patient, long-suffering) (Matt 5:5)

- “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild” reads rather differently as “gentle Jesus, patient and long-suffering”... spend some time thanking him for the passion that led him to the cross for you and for all the times God has been faithful to you despite your heart-posture, words or actions towards him or others.
- Look up Galatians 5:22-26 and read the list of fruits of the Spirit. (If you have access to multiple translations, compare the way this list is voiced in them and what stands out to you – www.biblegateway.com is a brilliant way to look at lots of different translations easily and freely) How do these characteristics resonate with the qualities the Beatitudes seem to be celebrating?
- Ask Jesus for more of his Spirit so you can display all the fruits... but especially patience/long-suffering/forbearance or – as *The Message* translates it – being “content with just who you are—no more, no less.”

- Have you come across any Christians that are patient and long-suffering in a way that has blessed, inspired or challenged you? Thank God for each one in turn now and pray a prayer of blessing over them.
- The meek/humble will “inherit the earth” – what do you think this might mean? Is it a promise or reward for the future... or a statement of reality about the present when viewed with a humble perspective? Or perhaps both?
- Henry Thoreau said “There are two ways to be rich: one is by acquiring much, and the other is by desiring little.” Ask God for *his* perspective on being rich to be sown and take root in you – both in terms of what you prize as centrally important, and how much you desire of all the good things he has provided in this life.
- *(You might like to follow up by on this beatitude by watching the following clip from Ray Vander Laan about the biblical context for ‘green pastures’ and consider how it speaks into your understanding of Psalm 23, and life as a whole - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdzhbv2eGxk>)*

6. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (uprightness and right standing with God)... (Matt 5:6)

- What righteousness do you hunger for in your life? What about in the lives of others – and in the systems of the world? Bring these things to God again and pour out your longing, pain and just frustration.
- Ask God for yourself and the church as a whole that you/we all would increasingly find your/our “fill” and “satisfaction” in seeking his will – and seeing it done – rather than in the pursuit of your/our own agendas.
- Pray blessing, strengthening and encouragement for all who sacrificially pray, campaign, give and/or work to seek justice for others, speak up for the voiceless or serve the poor and oppressed. If you feel ready to, ask God to grow your commitment to this area of his heart and kingdom.

7. The merciful... (Matt 5:7)

- Take a moment to consider what you think makes this beatitude different to the others...
- This is the only beatitude where exactly the same thing that’s given/demonstrated is what’s received... Read Matthew 6:12... in what ways does the Lord’s prayer voice a similar truth?
- Thank God for the unmerited favour and grace that has been extended to you through Jesus and receive again his complete and perfect mercy for all your sins, shortcomings and regrets.
- Who around you needs mercy and forgiveness from you? Ask God to bring people to mind – and for the specific ways in which they need to receive it/you can show it. (You might like to jot names and actions down on a piece of paper.) Now ask for God’s help to give this mercy... especially where it will be costly to your time, energy, resources or pride.

- Are their groups of people that you have held on to unmerciful attitudes about? Ask God to help you to remember that it is only him who can judge, and for strength to lay down your criticism at his feet in repentance.
- Pray blessing on each of these groups in turn and ask that God would extend his mercy to them – directly and through others... then ask if there is anything he’s asking you to do as part of the answer to this.
- Who do you need mercy and forgiveness from? Ask God to help them to demonstrate this to you too – and for you to understand more about the power of extending mercy even as you seek to receive it.

8. The pure in heart... (Matt 5: 8)

- What a promise... “for they shall see God”!
- Think about what you associate with the word and concept of “pure” – what does it bring to mind?
- Ask God to give you a heart like this – simply, singly and wholeheartedly focused on him and his kingdom... Then thank him that through Jesus you *can* have this kind of heart!
- Now pray for other Christians close to you, your own church and the church as a whole that more and more of them would desire to have pure hearts wholly focused on Jesus and furthering his kingdom.

9. Peacemakers (the makers *and* maintainers of peace)... (Matt 5:9)

- Pray for everyone who is involved with making or maintaining peace – whether they know God or not, asking him to strengthen their resolve, encourage them where they feel the task is beyond them, and protect them where they are in danger because of their stance. Remember especially before him:
 - Leaders and diplomats
 - The United Nations Assembly and Peacekeeping forces
 - Mediators and peace promoters on the ground
- Who are you struggling to have peace with? Offer to God any relationships where conflict persists and your heart feels hardened towards those involved. Ask that he would soften your heart towards each person involved and pray a blessing over them.
- Romans 12:18 says “If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Give to God the grief you feel over any relationships where you have done everything you can but conflict remains. Ask for strength to leave this relationship – and the pain of its brokenness – with him.

10. Blessed are those who are persecuted, insulted, falsely accused or hated because of righteousness (for being and doing right)... or because of their association with Jesus (Matt 5:10-12)

- This is perhaps the hardest beatitude of all... what are your own experiences of seeing its truth in your life? Have you experienced more of “the kingdom of heaven” because of – or in the midst of – persecution, false accusation or opposition and hatred as you’ve obeyed and owned Christ?
- Thank God for being close to you and teaching you in these times and for his assurance that this will be true for every believer who faces persecution in his name. Thank him for the assurance of being in good company – with him and his prophets. And most of all, thank him for his saving work that means one day all suffering, pain and persecution will cease and those who have suffered with and for Jesus will be with him forever.
- If you have access to a computer, watch the following two clips and pray for the people and nations featured or discussed:
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=1wMONz2nZgg
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTD6TZN7qj4>
- Pray for all Christians you know personally – or have heard about – who are being contested, opposed or persecuted to be protected and to keep soft hearts towards God and others. As hard as it is, pray for them to rejoice in sharing in Christ’s sufferings and to hold firm to the hope that he has won for them.
- *(You might like to follow up on this beatitude by visiting www.opendoorsuk.org and viewing the latest version of The World Watch List. Perhaps you could print it out and display it somewhere that will remind you to pray for Christians in nations facing major persecution? Please also consider writing to some of them to encourage them using the information available at www.csw.org.uk)*