

BLESSED

Finding God's Favor in Suffering

When a large crowd surrounded Jesus one day, He began to talk about blessings. Blessings are a gift of a good thing, but not always a good thing we can hold in our hands. He was talking about blessings for people who were suffering or working toward characteristics such as humility and mercy that are not often rewarded. In studying the blessings that Jesus associated with different struggles, we can learn about some things that are important to God and model ourselves after how He describes His children.

Clarity in Poverty

Read

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. - Matthew 5:3 (NLT)

Reflect/Discuss

- What in your life gives you the illusion of self-reliance?
- How can we see the Kingdom of Heaven right now, in our midst?

Consider

Poverty, both physical and spiritual, is painful. Feeling hungry often, not having enough money to buy medicine, not being able to find work, struggling to fulfill your child's needs - all these things hurt. Spiritual poverty is simply the pain of living apart from a relationship with God, whether we recognize that pain or not. Even those who do have faith in Jesus Christ experience pain when our sin distracts us from unity with Christ.

Did you know that the awareness that we are in need is a blessing? In Matthew 5, Jesus said we are blessed to recognize our need for God! He even told his followers that it was easier for a camel to fit through the eye of a needle than for someone with riches to see their need for God (Matthew 19:24). Poverty is not punishment and wealth is not evil, but poverty does allow us to see clearly our need for a provider, Jesus. The blessing of recognizing our need for God is that we find ourselves standing in front of the Kingdom of Heaven with an invitation to come inside and have our needs satisfied. It is not a promise of material wealth, but an invitation to trust.

Act

- If you have enough food, clothing, and shelter, find one way you can share with someone today.
- Write down three aspects of your life right now that make you aware of your need for God.

Go Deeper

- [What Does Compassion Look Like?](#)

Honoring Emotional Depths

Read

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. - Matthew 5:4 (NLT)

Reflect/Discuss

- How can we bring comfort to others even if we cannot remove pain?
- How are anger and sorrow related?

Consider

Mourning is an expression of deep sorrow, often in response to death. Mourning is also appropriate for symbolic death - a deeply felt loss - such as the loss of relationship or the suffering of injustice. Grief often brings us to an understanding that life, healing, and wholeness are usually out of our control. Intense grief can lead us to questions about God's presence or care for us, or those we love.

We can ask those questions. Jesus does not diminish mourning. His comfort is not a negation of losses we experience. For those of us mourning, even though we hoped never to be here, Jesus blesses us with His comforting. Comfort is not necessarily healing or restoration, but it is the easing of distress. When we comfort one another, we share in one another's pain so that the weight is less heavy on one person. If you have a cut, and you put on a salve or medicine that makes it sting or throb less, that is comforting. Likewise, we can take comfort in Christ because He shares our burdens and our sorrows. He offers to carry them with us, so that we can rest (Matthew 11:28).

Act

- Call or text a friend who has experienced a recent sorrow. Tell them you were thinking of them, ask them how they are feeling, listen to the answer without suggesting how to make it better.
- Journal your true feelings about something that upsets you, even if you're scared by the words that come to mind.

Go Deeper

- [Comfort in Grief](#)

Thirsty for Change

Read

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

- Matthew 5:6 (NLT)

Reflect/Discuss

- What is one thing in your life or your city that you find unjust?
- Think or talk through the emotions and steps you typically take when you are confronted with injustice.

Consider

Justice is getting the proper response to an action, usually appropriate punishment or repayment as a result of something wrong having been done. We understand justice because we can never forget experiences of not getting it. Justice is important to God. Justice can also be scary because in humility, we recognize that we are often spared punishment that we deserve.

In a message to the prophet Amos, God said that in response to his people forgetting their role to help those who are suffering (their behavior having allowed injustice), "I want to see a mighty flood of justice, and endless river of righteous living" (Amos 5:24). We are told that Vengeance (Revenge) is left up to God, not to us (Romans 12:19), but Justice is the work of God's people. If you are thirsty for that mighty flood, your blessing is that you will get to drink water.

Act

- Set aside 10 minutes today to devote to seeking justice. That could include making a phone call, donating \$10, or asking a friend involved in justice work how you can help them.
- Practice reading scripture with an eye for how God brings about justice.

Go Deeper

- [The Justice of God](#)

Mysterious Rest

Read

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. - Matthew 5:9 (NLT)

Reflect/Discuss

- Would you describe yourself as someone at peace?
- Are there prerequisites to peace?

Consider

Peace is freedom from disturbance or the absence of war, either in the literal sense, or of wars within relationships and within ourselves. The Bible calls God's people to peace often, but it also acknowledges that there are many obstacles, some out of our control, to attaining peace. "If it is possible on your part, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18 BSB).

Jesus includes in the blessing for peacemakers, "those who work for peace" and 1 Peter 3:11 talks about seeking and pursuing peace. It seems that attaining peace is unlikely without turmoil and without intent. Peace may require the attainment of justice, death of ego, reconciliation of war, or any combination of those things. True and lasting peace is something mysterious and divine. In fact, Paul describes peace from God as a peace that "passes all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

Peacemakers will be called the Children of God because peace does not exist outside of the power of Christ. Those who work for such a goal, one that surpasses understanding, could only be getting it from one place, their Father.

Act

- Think of one sentence you can say to someone in your life, today, that will move you in the direction of peace.
- Ask God for an understanding of peace and for internal resources to seek it.

Go Deeper

- [Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#)

Joy Within Humiliation

Read

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. - Matthew 5:10 (NLT)

Reflect/Discuss

- What might persecution today look like as a result of belief in Jesus?
- What attitude should we take toward people persecuted for beliefs other than our own?

Consider

In Jesus' time on Earth and for many early followers of Christ, sharing the message of Jesus as the Savior and following His example led to violent reactions or even death. Those people saw Jesus' followers as a threat to their power and authority. Jesus' message still puts His disciples at risk of physical danger all over the world.

How do you know if violence or hostility toward you is "for doing right?" We know what is right and what is worth dying for because it is not about us or our definitions of "right." The gospel prevails in spite of persecution, and persecution is a powerful witness to our belief that we are so right, in Christ, that we can suffer indignity, violence, and even death to proclaim God's radical upending of human power structures. Doing right in the face of destruction and death is the work of Jesus' followers, who are children of God. Therefore, we are already citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, and we are blessed.

Act

- Think of one person you know of who might be alone in what they are standing up against. Perhaps someone shut out of their own family because of their faith? Ask them how you can support them. If you can't think of anyone, ask a friend or a church leader who you think might know of someone.
- Study the responses to power of Bible characters who were beaten or killed for their faith. (Paul, Silas, Steven, John the Baptist, James)

Go Deeper

- [How to Respond to Persecution](#)

Following the example and teachings of Jesus tends to lead us directly into struggle with ourselves and brokenness of all sorts that surround us. Our response to these hardships become what define us as children of God and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We see from the life of Jesus that our sorrows are known to Him and He gives us resources to advance his Gospel, remaking our own hearts even as we work to share His story with the people around us. Nothing is too small for Jesus to care about, not too big for him to resolve, neither our own shortcomings or the suffering of the world around us.

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