



BLESSED TO
BE

QUARTER ONE
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One of the greatest joys I have as a pastor is to share the message of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. But as amazing as this truth may be, it's just the beginning. Not only are our sins forgiven when we place faith in Him; we are also made into brand-new people capable of walking the Christian path with hearts restored by His supernatural power.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." Being recreated means we're equipped to live in a better way, as children of our heavenly Father. Being equipped, however, is just the first step. We must learn and choose to walk in that newness daily. And here at In Touch Ministries, it's our mission to help you.

That's why we plan to spend 2020 exploring Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. When our Lord preached the Beatitudes, He was describing the awesome blessings that come to those who live as a "new creature." I invite you to join us this year as we study the Beatitudes verse by verse. It is my hope that you'll be challenged to deepen your walk with Christ—and that you discover what it means to be truly blessed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stanley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

We all have a notion of what it means to be blessed. Some of us may picture it as being wealthy, famous, or even young. For others, it might mean life is generally going well—a satisfying job, good grades, maybe a healthy family. But are any of these circumstances truly evidence of a blessed life?

We live in a culture that elevates people who have wealth and confidently believe in themselves—that is, those who are self-sufficient. But the Bible defines things differently. In the pages of Scripture, blessing looks a whole lot more like utter dependence on God. It's

Memorizing the Beatitudes

This year, we'll memorize a section of the Sermon on the Mount, practicing a few verses at a time. And when we put them all together, we'll have committed the Beatitudes to memory! The quarterly guide will provide the verses you need to focus on each month. This quarter, we'll practice ...

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.’”

—Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

too easy to celebrate our own accomplishments, give ourselves a pat on the back, and move on to conquer the next task. God asks for more from us—He wants us to give Him all that we are. And in exchange, we receive everything He is.

God's blessing is far more than just a winning lottery ticket, a bigger paycheck, or the perfect spouse. In fact, each of those things is far too small, too insignificant when measured against what He offers us: life, joy, and the promise to be with us always. It's a promise to everyone who follows Him—a reassurance of His presence today and every day until He returns.

So how do we live this kind of life blessed by God? Jesus gives us the blueprint in the Beatitudes from His Sermon on the Mount.

As the world around us celebrates fame and fortune, He says the blessed life requires a true change of heart—a new and transformed way of experiencing the world.

In this first volume of our 2020 ministry guide, *Blessed to Be*, we'll begin an exploration of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. We will examine what it means to be blessed, consider what it looks like to depend on the Lord, and expand our understanding of His comfort.

JANUARY

BLESSED TO BE:

AN OVERVIEW



In the Old Testament, when God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, He communicated His instructions through “thou shalt not” statements—a list of actions and evils His people were to avoid in going about their lives. But in the New Testament, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount presents the Beatitudes—statements that suggest not so much what we should or shouldn’t do but who we could become. This message of humility, charity, and love

is meant to transform us from the inside out.

These blessings are much more than commandments or the result of good works. They tell us the way of Jesus and help us understand how we must shape our attitudes, values, and interactions with the world around us. This month we’ll explore what it means to be blessed in this way—and what it might look like to accept the invitation Jesus offers us in the Beatitudes.

Memorize *You’ll see a selection from the Bible each week, as a reminder to work on memorizing the Beatitudes. This month you’ll focus on the bold verses:*

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.’” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

Pray *Use this prayer, or let it inspire one in your own words, as you move through the weekly reflections in the following section.*

Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing me with Your Word. Direct my heart, my mind, and my thoughts to align with Your ways. It is through Your Son’s sacrifice that I have hope in Your blessings. Holy Spirit, help me to focus on myself less. Lord, I pray that I would understand what it means to depend on You completely and be comforted by You. Amen.



Early in their career,

even talented chefs may burn themselves or cut a finger while preparing delicious meals for their guests. But anything worth doing requires practice, and after years of working in the kitchen, the likelihood of an injury decreases. When you think about the Beatitudes, are they something you want to work at? Maybe you feel you've already got a handle on them. Or perhaps they seem impossible to accomplish.

Jesus did not preach these words as a reminder that we're unable to fulfill what He calls us to. Instead, we can view them as an invitation—to His disciples, the crowd, and all of us who have come to believe in Him. By telling us what blessings will come to His redeemed people, He is offering a guide for how to interact with the world and direct our heart.





Try This

Have you ever seen a builder's blueprints? Architects take a building's purpose into consideration before intricately mapping out details for everything from the floor plan to the electrical system. Think about the Beatitudes as a blueprint for our life—guiding principles that will help us become righteous as we seek after God. In your own words, write down your understanding of the guidance the Beatitudes offer. Revisit these thoughts throughout the year as you continue in your exploration of the Beatitudes. Ask yourself, *How has my understanding changed? What do I see now that was initially hidden from me?*

Memorize

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

—Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)



Have you ever

opened the hood of a car and looked at the engine? It might seem like a jumble of metal, wires, and tubes, but each of these parts is essential to ensure that the engine works correctly. If one part is missing, the car won't run.

This is how we should think about the Beatitudes, too—regarding them as a complete unit, where every piece is essential to the function of the whole. And when we consider them all together, we begin to see a picture of the kingdom that is to come. We get an increasingly clearer understanding of the Lord's ideas of happiness, wisdom, and justice. If we choose to follow Him, He offers these blessings to all of us.





Try This

Think about the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. What do Jesus' words mean to you? Is it easy to consider the Beatitudes as an entire unit, or do you find yourself focusing on specific verses? Perhaps there are even verses you don't like or don't understand. If you were allowed to remove any of the Beatitudes from the list, would you? Which ones? Write down any verses that come to mind, and take time to pray over them. Perhaps these are areas of growth the Lord has in mind for you.

Memorize

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

—Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)



It's easy to use

the words *bless*, *blessed*, or *blessing* in casual everyday conversation—in emails or social media posts, on bumper stickers, or when someone sneezes. Maybe you've even heard people say, "Bless your heart" (and not always with the kindest intentions).

When we speak of blessing, we're often referring to life going well—when nothing's really troubling or inconveniencing us and things are going so smoothly we might even take them for granted. We should thank God when we are thriving. But changing difficult circumstances is only one way God might choose to bless us.

When things aren't going well, we might believe God's blessing amounts to getting us out of difficult situations. But that's not always how He works—instead, He tenderly comes alongside us, loving and drawing us closer to Himself, even in the most difficult circumstances.





Try This

When you think of blessings in your own life, what comes to mind? This week, write down a few examples on an index card and consider how they've drawn you closer to God. Are there any specific experiences, interactions, or readings that helped you?

Memorize

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

—Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)

The background is an abstract composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes in vibrant red and teal. The strokes are layered and overlapping, creating a sense of depth and movement. In the lower right corner, a small, dark silhouette of a person stands on a rounded hill, looking out towards the left. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

When we come
to Christ for salvation,
we must come with an

*attitude of
humility.*

To think even for a minute
that we can do His work in
our own strength is ludicrous.

CHARLES F. STANLEY,
THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

*to
turn*

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to

→ **DEBBIE, WHAT'S THE POINT?
NOBODY NEEDS YOU. YOU'RE
ALWAYS GOING TO BE ALONE.**

Debbie Gonzalez lived in her three-story condominium, with thoughts like these as her only companions. After years of enduring this internal chatter, she had one pressing desire: to die.

Every day was the same. She'd wake on the third floor and head downstairs to work in her ground-level office. Later she would eat and watch TV on the second floor before going upstairs and climbing into bed again.

Gonzalez was in her 50s, and the idea of living another 30 years felt like a prison sentence. "I just couldn't handle the emotional pain anymore."

She began planning how to end her life, and the thought brought her peace. Her older sister was in San Diego, taking care of a grandniece. Though too far away for daily visits, she knew something was wrong and called every day to check that Gonzalez was still alive.

"I didn't want to hurt my sister," Gonzalez says. "Even though I was talking to her, I couldn't

U G H T E R

by **JOHN VANDENOEVER**
photography by **IVAN KASHINSKY**

As she read, she felt the presence of Christ urging her to hand Him everything.

tell her what was going on.”

As a younger woman, Gonzalez had participated regularly in her church's prayer groups and filled the wide margins of a Bible with notes from her preacher. But when serious conflicts arose in her marriage, she opted for divorce. “I walked away, and my church family disowned me.” It marked the beginning of a deep depression that would last 20 years.

Gonzalez's sister kept calling, hoping to encourage, but her words fell on deaf ears. She even tried reading a book over the phone. But it came across as just more noise—until Gonzalez recognized the same negative chatter she'd carried within herself for so long. Only now it was coming from her sister's lips.

“What are you saying? What are you reading?” she said into the phone. Her sister explained that she was reading a list of statements Satan uses to deceive us, as outlined in Dr. Stanley's book *When the Enemy Strikes*.

Gonzalez's sister ordered the book for her, and when it arrived the next day, she tore through its contents. Somewhere in the middle, she found herself on her knees in her bedroom. As she cried out to God, a verse came to mind: *Come to Me, all who are weary ... take My yoke upon you ...* She reached for her Bible—the one personal item she'd kept throughout her adult life—and the concordance directed her to Matthew 11:28–30. As she read, she felt the presence of Christ urging her to hand Him everything. Through her tears, she knew God was with her, that He had always been, even when she'd turned away.



“After some time, the tears turned to laughter and rejoicing. I had a very real sense that I was no longer bound.” Then her eyes landed on the notes she'd written beside this text more than 30 years ago: *His yoke fits*. “In that moment,” she says, “the depression left me and I've never felt a day of despair since.”

Four years have passed and Gonzalez still lives on the same three levels. Though her circumstances are the same, she's no longer crippled by that cruel voice. She may hear it casting doubt from time to time, but she goes back to her Healer. By reading the Bible, she's reminded of the things God does—and specifically what He's done for her. “The most amazing part is that my world on the outside looks exactly the same. It's what He did on the inside that's made all the difference.”

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus tells the multitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” To be poor in spirit is to empty ourselves of self. When we recognize we have nothing to offer but surrender, we're positioned to experience God's limitless comfort and peace. Gonzalez says she doesn't feel despair about the three decades she missed of walking with God. Instead, she's looking ahead to the next 30 years. “Now I'm like, ‘Lord, we've got to get going!’” 🌸



When we make

promises, we may be offering people something that will happen immediately, or it could take time to fulfill. The promises in the Beatitudes carry a sense of both *now* and *later*—Jesus calls specific kinds of people *blessed* and offers assurance about them in the present and in the future.

In His message, Jesus tells the people gathered around Him that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”—as in “right now, if you’ll have it.” And many of us already see glimmers of His promise in our own life: Perhaps we’ve experienced comfort and mercy from our community, felt satisfied about the way we’ve served others, or even sensed the reassurance of God’s promises as we’ve prayed. Jesus has brought the kingdom of heaven to earth, and we get a glimpse of that when we follow Him. But we’ll also get to experience it fully when He returns.





Try This

Read through Matthew 5:3-11 and consider each condition and promise. In verses 3 and 9, the promises are in the present tense (“theirs is the kingdom” vs. “for they shall be”). What does it look like for you to have the kingdom of God present in your life right now, with everything you have going on—all the challenges, questions, worries, and even moments of joy?

Memorize

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

—Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)



What if someone

asked you to change the way you drive a car, brush your teeth, or wash your dishes? *I've been doing these things the same way for years, you might think, and it works. Why change?*

We know that when Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, His chosen disciples were there listening, but so were a lot of other people. Imagine being one of the crowd—someone who didn't know Jesus quite so well or was hearing His message for the first time. Learning it was necessary to drastically change the way you live now for the sake of your eternal future, you might have thought His promises sounded strange or intimidating.

Whether we have intimate knowledge of Jesus, as the disciples did, or find ourselves in the crowd of curious onlookers, His message is in fact strange and countercultural. It's no surprise that many of us feel confused or put off by it, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, that need not remain the case.





Try This

Think about your own experience reading the words of Jesus. Is there a verse that has challenged you recently? Write down how it makes you feel, and bring it to God this week, asking for His clarity and discernment.

Memorize

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

—Matthew 5:1-2 (ESV)



This month, after looking at what Jesus said, we focused on developing our understanding of what it means to be blessed. Then we examined our own heart and considered how others might hear His words. Thankfully, this month is just the beginning.

Keep in mind what you've gleaned about God's blessing as we head into next month and learn what it means to be truly dependent on Him. We'll also gain understanding about developing poverty of spirit and humility, even when they feel countercultural.

Questions for Reflection

As we end this month and look ahead to the next, take a moment to think about the questions in this section. You can answer them in your head, write your thoughts in a journal, or have a discussion with your friends or small group.

- **WHEN JESUS PREACHES THE BEATITUDES**, what kinds of blessings is He talking about? Does it feel easy to think about His words as an invitation to live in a particular way?
- **HOW HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT BLESSINGS** in the past? As you've considered the Beatitudes this month, has your understanding changed?
- **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT** the Beatitudes as a unit?

One More Look

In our year-long project of memorizing the Beatitudes, this month you learned:

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.’” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

HOW DO YOU GET BEYOND
A SPIRIT OF STRIVING AND
INSTEAD HAVE A SPIRIT OF
TOTAL TRUST IN AND
DEPENDENCY ON GOD?

|

FOCUS UPON
GOD AND
HIS KINGDOM.

Charles F. Stanley, *Our Unmet Needs*



FEBRUARY

BLESSED TO BE

DEPENDENT

When you think about what it means to be poor, what comes to mind? Many of us will picture a scarcity of resources like food, water, and money—we imagine a lifestyle where there isn't enough to go around. But throughout the Bible, the word doesn't always mean a lack of material possessions or goods. In fact, being poor in spirit has little to do with economic standing but everything to do with being utterly

dependent on God in all things, regardless of circumstances. The poor in spirit are the ones who recognize that there isn't anything they have that hasn't been given by God. It's a lifestyle of existing day by day with total openness to the Father.

Throughout the month, think about this beatitude as an invitation to consider how you rely on Jesus—and a call to even greater dependence on God.

Memorize *You'll see a selection from the Bible each week, as a reminder to work on memorizing the Beatitudes. This month you'll focus on the bold verse:*

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

Pray *Use this prayer, or let it inspire one in your own words, as you move through the weekly reflections in the following section.*

Heavenly Father, thank You for calling me to dependence. Help me to turn to You first, trusting that my eternal security comes only from You. Holy Spirit, guide my thoughts back to Your truth and comfort. I pray that I would seek You, Lord, and focus less on my own abilities and strengths. Amen.



The Pharisees

questioned Jesus constantly—quizzing Him, accusing Him of breaking rules, and even attempting to trap Him into saying something blasphemous. When the leaders questioned His association with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responded by saying, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick” (Mark 2:17). He challenged them to consider their own spiritual “health” because they had missed the fact we are all “sick” and in need of saving.

Today—2,000 years later—it’s easy to distance ourselves from the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. But maybe they weren’t so different from us in some ways: As we go about our daily life, it’s common for us to trust in our own abilities, self-righteousness, and works. Perhaps we even think that these qualities or actions are the very things that cause God to love us.

But God’s love isn’t conditional. And the more we recognize our own poverty of spirit, the more abundantly we experience His love.





Try This

Jesus lived a life of poverty, with regard to both spirit and material possessions—He was a man with “nowhere to lay His head” (Matt. 8:20). In this beatitude, Jesus isn’t romanticizing poverty. Instead, He’s challenging us to deepen our relationship with Him. Sometimes that requires us to struggle and be humbled.

Have there been any such experiences in your life that helped you open yourself to God? Write down one or two examples that come to mind and reflect on them this week. As you pray, ask the Lord to help you trust and open yourself up to Him even more. You might even imagine physically placing in His hands any obstacles that come to mind.

Memorize

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” —Matthew 5:3 (ESV)



Before his conversion,

the apostle Paul thought he was living the way he was meant to live—honoring his people and religion by persecuting followers of Christ. He was a Pharisee and, because of his background and training, was considered “a Hebrew of Hebrews.” But that was not the vision God had for Paul’s life. Not only did Paul come to believe Jesus was the Son of God, but his letters also make up nearly half the New Testament.

Sometimes God does something similar with us. We don’t necessarily become blind, as in the case of Paul on the road to Damascus, but the Lord often uses our failures and struggles to unsettle us. His goal in doing so is to remind us who He is—and who we are in Him. Being open to God is more than daily quiet time and reflection; it involves turning to Him in times of struggle and failure. It requires recognizing that we can’t rely on ourselves to become who He intends us to be—that is, the kind of people who are completely open to His will *and* His Word.





Try This

Like Paul, many heroes of the faith are known as much for their struggles as for their victories. Peter denied Jesus, Thomas doubted Him, and Jonah ran away. With these and the many other scriptural examples, God always remained faithful. He came alongside and reminded them of their dependence on Him.

Think of a time when you turned to the Lord in a difficult situation. Perhaps it was a season of life when you were dealing with grief, failure, or loss. Or what about a time when you didn't turn to Him, choosing instead to rely on your own abilities and resources? What did you learn about God and yourself in each of those situations?

Memorize

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” —Matthew 5:3 (ESV)



Truly relying on God

requires us to be humble. But humility isn't something we can think or work ourselves into, nor is it something we can take pride in. Instead, it's a lifelong discipline of transforming the way we live and thinking less of ourselves.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis describes humility as being so free from any bias in our own direction that we can rejoice in our successes and abilities as frankly and gratefully as those of the people around us. Imagine coming in second in an Olympic event, and instead of focusing on how you could be better, rejoicing in the excellence and accomplishment of the other athletes—those who came in first or third or didn't place at all.

Humility requires us to see ourselves rightly as a small part of God's larger story. And it's important to recognize that in this story, God has given all of us unique gifts—not because we, individually, are greater or more valuable than the people around us, but because He has specific plans for each of us.





Try This

In Luke 18, Jesus tells a parable of two men—a Pharisee and a tax collector—who went to pray in the temple. The Pharisee told God just how righteous he was. However, the tax collector asked God for forgiveness, praying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (v. 13 ESV). Jesus said the tax collector was the one who was justified, because “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (v. 14 ESV).

This week, imagine the perspectives of both the Pharisee and the tax collector. Have you ever prayed by telling God all the good things you’ve done? Or prayed with repentance, asking God for His mercy? Each day, make time to pray the tax collector’s prayer. Perhaps when you wake up and lie down, or while driving or before meals, take a moment and pray, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.” You might even write it on a note card to keep with you.

Memorize

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” —Matthew 5:3 (ESV)



Every winter,

wild animals build stockpiles of food to get them through the difficult season, guaranteeing their survival until warmer weather returns. It's a pattern we humans follow, too, in difficult seasons of our own. We fight to get through challenging times—clinging to our possessions, ideas, and opinions to help us survive until a more pleasant season arrives.

All around us, we hear messages affirming this strategy, telling us that the only way to attain joy and fulfillment is to rely on ourselves and our own strengths. Yet being poor in spirit is about being truly dependent on God—and finding security in His truth and goodness. Jesus wants us to be empty of our craving for earthly possessions. It goes against what society tells us to value, but He offers something even more valuable: eternal joy and fulfillment. And we can take comfort in knowing that if all of our “stuff” is wiped away tomorrow, we'll still have His gracious presence.





Try This

One of the common cultural messages promoting self-reliance is to avoid having anything in our life that is a “crutch.” Many non-Christians even refer to a belief in Jesus as one of these crutches, implying weakness in those who follow Him. But what if that isn’t necessarily a bad thing? Imagine having a broken leg and needing crutches but not using them. Or being sick and choosing not to take medicine. Is that the way to bring about healing?

This week, make a list of things that you lean on besides Jesus. What makes you feel secure, safe, or fulfilled? You might even include things you use to distract yourself in difficult times. As you pray, offer each of them to God, and ask Him to help you depend on Him more completely.

Memorize

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” —Matthew 5:3 (ESV)



This month we looked at what it means to be poor in spirit and dependent on God. We contemplated our own needs in times of struggle, examined the discipline of humility, and considered examples of the faithful in Scripture.

As we move ahead, continue to think about what it means to be poor in spirit, and how that affects the way we interact with and are grieved by the world. Jesus promises to comfort us in mourning—something we'll look at next month.

Questions for Reflection

As we end this month and look ahead to the next, take a moment to think about the questions in this section. You can answer them in your head, write your thoughts in a journal, or have a discussion with your friends or small group.

- **DO YOU FEEL BLESSED TO DEPEND ON GOD?** Why or why not?
- **WHAT DOES TRUE HUMILITY LOOK LIKE?** Do any examples of false humility come to mind?
- **CAN YOU NAME ANYONE IN THE BIBLE** who struggled to depend on God? How did God interact with that person?

One More Look

In our year-long project of memorizing the Beatitudes, this month you learned:

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.’” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

GOD NEVER WASTES
ANYTHING. HE USES

everything

GIVEN TO HIM
AND MULTIPLIES IT FOR
HIS PURPOSES AND
OUR BLESSING.



CHARLES F. STANLEY,
LIVING IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

MARCH

BLESSED TO BE

COMFORTED



We all know what it's like to mourn. Whether it's because of a broken relationship, a tragic event, or the loss of a loved one, grief touches everyone at some point. Thankfully, many of us know what it means to be comforted or offer comfort in these difficult experiences, when life feels hopeless or out of control. These kinds of interactions are integral to the human experience, but when Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn," He's not just stating a fact. He's calling us to a different type of mourning. This way of handling grief

comes from meditating on God's presence and how much we need Him in a broken world—and it goes beyond our own personal experiences. Because we know what Jesus promises, we can grieve that the world isn't yet what it will one day be. But at the same time, we can also take comfort in knowing His kingdom will surely come.

As you contemplate this month's verse on being comforted in mourning, consider what it means to grieve sin, and meditate on Jesus' promise. He offers us more than just comfort in difficult times—He promises us salvation.

Memorize *You'll see a selection from the Bible each week, as a reminder to work on memorizing the Beatitudes. This month you'll focus on the bold verse:*

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.**’” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)

Pray *Use this prayer, or let it inspire one in your own words, as you move through the weekly reflections in the following section.*

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your comforting presence. In my mourning and in my joy, You are with me. Holy Spirit, help me to seek You when I am in grief, when I feel fragile, and when I am faced with the brokenness of the world around me. I pray, Lord, that today I would experience Your promised comfort. Amen.



When you go

through something difficult or get bad news, it's common to experience a wide range of emotions. Contemporary psychologists talk about these feelings as the stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. And it makes sense that we would go through them even when we acknowledge our own moral bankruptcy—in other words, when we grieve our brokenness.

Think back to last month, when we discussed becoming aware of our spiritual poverty and opening ourselves to the Lord. In the process, we may find ourselves mourning because we've grieved the One who has been so good and loving to us. Or we may become acutely aware of how our shortcomings have affected loved ones or the world around us.

This is a “godly grief,” as Paul puts it (2 Cor. 7:10). It's more than sadness or regret—it involves hope and a desire to make things right with God, to take action. And Jesus wants us to bring that grief to Him and repent, seeking His eternal comfort, peace, and salvation.





Try This

The second beatitude builds on the first one. Last month we reflected on what it means to be poor in spirit. How does acknowledging your total dependence on God affect the way you think about your own shortcomings and brokenness? Does it change your thoughts about God's promises concerning what the world will be? As you pray this week, offer your concerns to God and ask for His comfort.

Memorize

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” —Matthew 5:4 (ESV)



“Jesus wept”

is the shortest verse in the entire English Bible (John 11:35), but it tells us so much about the heart of the Lord. As He grieves the death of his friend Lazarus, Jesus knows something His followers don't—His own death and resurrection are coming. And beyond that, the Son of God is aware that the time will come when He will see many of His friends and family raised to enjoy the new heaven and the new earth with Him. But for the moment, Jesus takes the time to weep and mourn.

Even though the Lord modeled the appropriateness of expressing grief, many of us hide our emotions when we are hurting. Maybe that's because we feel it isn't socially acceptable to grieve or we consider sorrow a sign of weakness. But if weeping and mourning are things God Himself chose to do, then we should view our own grief as an opportunity to be more like Him.





Try This

When we're going through difficult times, it's common to feel as if we need to grieve quickly, then dust ourselves off and get back to our normal routine. Have you ever felt like this? As you contemplate such experiences, think about Jesus taking the time to grieve for His friend. This week, ask the Lord to make you aware of His nearness in challenging circumstances and to help you take the time you need.

Memorize

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” —Matthew 5:4 (ESV)

Our loving heavenly Father holds on to us.



He hears our cries. He embraces us with His everlasting arms.

The closer we cling to Him, the quieter our spirits become.

CHARLES F. STANLEY, *FINDING PEACE*



Think of the way

dominoes often fall after they're lined up. Whether you've seen a video or tried it yourself, you know that after each tile is meticulously placed, gently moving even one can cause the entire arrangement to collapse.

It's easy to focus on ourselves and our well-being—to think first of our relationship with God without giving much thought to those around us. But when we consider our own sins, we need to recognize how they affect not just our walk with God but also the people whose lives touch ours. Similar to the way dominoes fall, our actions impact our loved ones, our communities, and even the earth in ways we may never see or fully understand.

Remember that the Lord's purpose isn't to shame us. Instead, He wants us to repent—to completely change the direction of our thinking—so we can receive His peace and spread love to others.



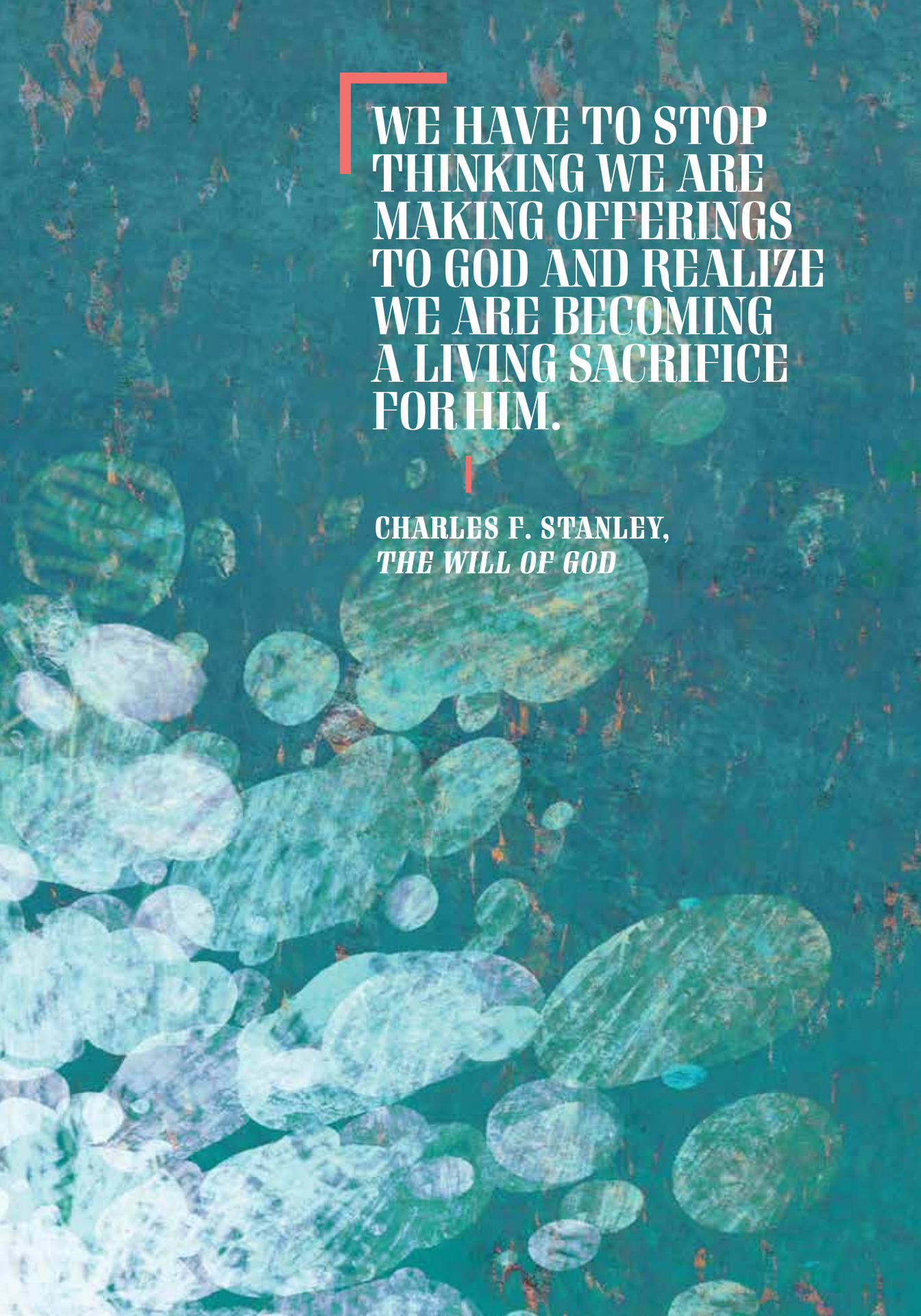


Try This

Everything we do in some way affects what surrounds us. It can be startling to think that each of us, because of our sin, adds to the pain or grief of people we know. From words spoken to actions taken, how do your choices affect your relationship with God? What about your relationships with coworkers, neighbors, friends, or loved ones? As you think about the impact you have on the world around you, take time to focus on both the positive and the negative aspects. You might make a list or pick one or two things to pray about.

Memorize

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” —Matthew 5:4 (ESV)



**WE HAVE TO STOP
THINKING WE ARE
MAKING OFFERINGS
TO GOD AND REALIZE
WE ARE BECOMING
A LIVING SACRIFICE
FOR HIM.**

**CHARLES F. STANLEY,
*THE WILL OF GOD***



On the night

before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke to the disciples about His departure and return, promising joy and comfort despite the world's hatred. But it's important to recognize that when Christ talked about comfort, He wasn't merely speaking about the age to come. He promised us the ultimate comfort of victory over sin and death. But He was also talking about how we—with the presence of the Holy Spirit and in relationship with fellow believers—can be comforted in the present age. Just as doctors offer medical care, we too can offer spiritual care to the people around us. However, that doesn't mean we ever stop being patients ourselves. We get to reflect the Lord's promise of comfort to others, even while we experience this promise fulfilled in our own life.

God does reassure us and bless us with His comfort, but it doesn't always appear in the form we'd expect. Our priority might be to find immediate earthly comfort, while His is for us to seek Him first in all things—regardless of whatever discomfort we might experience in that pursuit. Our only hope is to cling to Him, remembering that we are moving from a world where mourning is ever-present to a world where grief will pass away.





Try This

Can you think of times in your own life when you've experienced deep comfort and peace? How about when you've comforted someone else? Think about what made those experiences fulfilling and reassuring. Perhaps you offered kind words, made a meal, or just sat and prayed with a friend. This week, thank God for those comforts, and ask Him to reveal how you can reflect His peace in your community.

Memorize

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” —Matthew 5:4 (ESV)



This month we examined what it means to mourn for our own sins and the brokenness of the world. We considered how God's heart is grieved, contemplated His comforts, and then explored how we can offer His peace to the world around us.

As we look ahead to next quarter, keep what you've learned about His comforts in mind. We'll build on this by taking a deeper look at humility, righteousness, and mercy.

Questions for Reflection

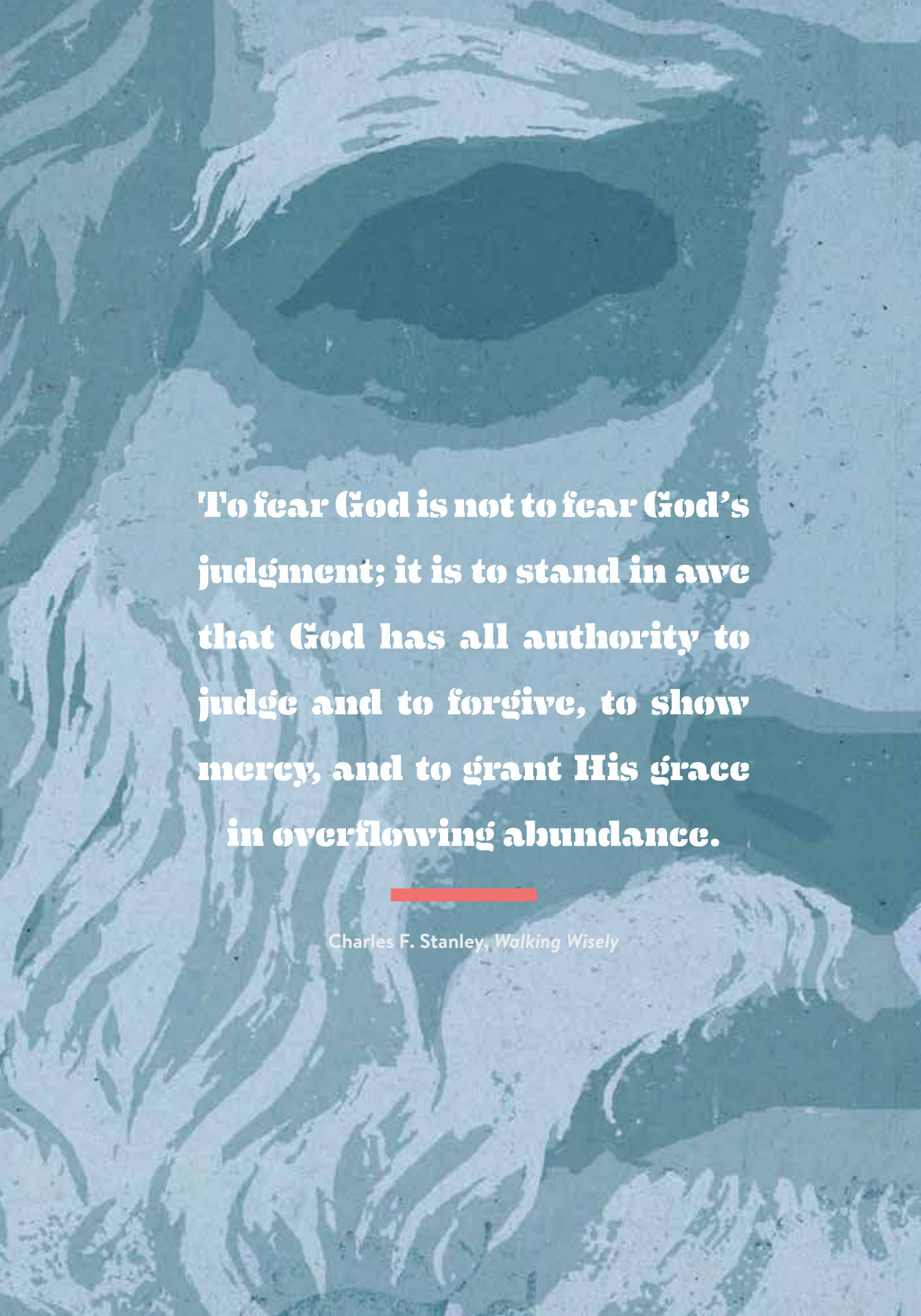
As we end this month and look ahead to the next, take a moment to think about the questions in this section. You can answer them in your head, write your thoughts in a journal, or have a discussion with your friends or small group.

- **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THINK ABOUT GRIEF** as part of our path to joy and salvation?
- **WE KNOW WHAT IT IS TO GRIEVE**, mourn, and feel sad. What does it mean to mourn in a way that comes from contemplating God's goodness and truth?
- **HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED** God's comforts in your own life?

One More Look

In our year-long project of memorizing the Beatitudes, this month you learned:

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.**’” —Matthew 5:1-4 (ESV)



To fear God is not to fear God's judgment; it is to stand in awe that God has all authority to judge and to forgive, to show mercy, and to grant His grace in overflowing abundance.

— Charles F. Stanley, *Walking Wisely*

In the Sermon on the Mount, and specifically in the Beatitudes, Jesus tells what a life blessed by God looks like. This kind of life requires a changed worldview, which doesn't always line up with what the culture around us values. We began this exploration by first contemplating what it means to be blessed. And we continued by examining our own life and interactions with the world as we depend on God and receive His comfort.

In looking ahead to the next volume of this year's ministry guide, keep thinking about what it means to be blessed. We'll build on our foundation by considering ...

- What it means to be gentle, faithful stewards of our inheritance
- What it looks like to long for and pursue righteousness
- How our own merciful actions beget mercy

One More Look

This quarter, you memorized a section of the Sermon on the Mount as part of our year-long project. The bolded text is what you've learned so far:

“Seeing the crowds, he 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.

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” —Matthew 5:1-16 (ESV)

GOD HAS MUCH
TO SAY TO YOU
EACH DAY.
THE QUESTION
YOU MUST ASK
YOURSELF IS,

Am I
listening?

CHARLES F. STANLEY,
DISCOVER YOUR DESTINY



There's so much more...

We want to bless you in so many ways!
Throughout our discipleship resources in
2020, you'll find more on *Blessed to Be*, a
yearlong walk through the Beatitudes.



TV/Video | Watch sermons on TV and
at intouch.org/blessed the first Sunday
of each month.

Radio | Listen for messages on the
Beatitudes in our broadcasts.

In Touch Devotional | Reflect on the
Beatitudes and put them into practice
with special Sunday readings.

In Touch Magazine | Go deeper with
articles and features inspired by the
Sermon on the Mount.

From the Pastor's Heart | Be challenged
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