

The Gateway to the Good Life
Matthew 5:1-3
Small Group Guide

Opening Icebreaker Question:

- If I asked you to complete this sentence, “Happiness is...,” What would you say? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

OPTIONAL BACKGROUND READING/INTRO: We’re in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew, also known as Levi, was the last kind of person you would expect the Son of God to hang out with. He was Jewish, but he worked for the Roman government as a tax collector, making him public enemy #1. His kind would be lumped in with prostitutes and drug dealers in our day. But Jesus invited him to be in his inner circle. Matthew wrote largely from a Jewish perspective, but making sure to point out how Jesus came for people of every background.

We’re looking at the beginning of the most famous sermon ever made – Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The words that Jesus spoke left such a mark on his first disciples, and have left such a mark on the world ever since, that atheists, agnostics, and humanists have all spoken of its greatness. Even Gandhi said that there was nothing in his 6000 year-old Hindu tradition that could equal this teaching.

And when Jesus begins this sermon, he does it with 8 succinct statements, probably framed this way for the sake of easy memorization in a pre-literary world. Those statements all begin, in English, with the words “Blessed are....” They’ve come to be known as the beatitudes.

Each Sunday in July and August we’re going to look at one of the Beatitudes, and see what it says about true happiness. This week we saw the gateway to this kind of life—the one prerequisite that determines whether you even have a shot at experiencing the life you’ve always wanted.

1. Pastor Josh summarizes what you need to know about the Beatitudes going in: “This is Jesus talking about [and giving us the secrets to] the good life.” If so, what’s your initial response to hearing this?

READ MATTHEW 5:1-3.

2. The first word in Greek, “Makarios,” is difficult to translate in English. It is usually rendered “happy” or “blessed.” The first is too temporary and the second is too archaic. **From verse 3, what clue do you get about Jesus’ definition of “happy”? How would our current culture define “happiness”?**
3. Pastor Josh says that Poverty of Spirit is the gateway to the good life, and there are three aspects of this he wants you to know. First, define poverty of spirit.
 - a. What does it mean to be poor in the everyday sense?
 - b. Then, what do you think it means to be “poor in spirit”? Sometimes it helps to define and clarify something by thinking of its opposite. What is the opposite of poverty of spirit?

- c. Per verse 3, what is the reward for being poor in Spirit? Why do you think God gives this reward for this spiritual attitude?
4. The second question that we considered on Sunday was, how do you get spiritual poverty?
- a. Josh mentioned two obstacles to poverty of spirit: 1) We have a hard time seeing our need for God, especially when all of our other needs are met, and 2) We have a hard time admitting it, even when we start to see it. Does one of these characterize you? Or has it at some point in time?
 - b. One way Josh insists we get poverty of spirit is when God gives us painful experiences. How might painful experiences help us get spiritual poverty?
 - i. Have you experienced this in your life, God using a painful experience to bring about poverty of spirit?
 - ii. If we knew painful experiences might develop our spiritual poverty, how might that change our outlook during our next time of suffering?
 - c. A second way Josh mentions that we get poverty of spirit is that God allows us to experience sin in other areas so we can see our greater sin of pride.
 - i. How would this work? Explain.
 - d. The third way Josh mentions that we can enter into this spiritual poverty, the gateway to the good life, is by reflecting on the teaching of Jesus, and specifically the Sermon on the Mount. **Read** Matthew 5:17-48.
 - i. What is your first reaction to Jesus' words about murder (and anger), adultery (and lust)? How are God's standards much more rigorous than the standards of the Pharisees?
 - ii. This could bring us to go beyond spiritual poverty to a lack of hope. What hope or encouragement can keep us from going off the deep end after understand the depth of God's standards?
5. So, why do you think poverty of spirit is the gateway to the good life? Look at and respond to Peter Kreeft's quote in the footnote below, which is a good summary.¹ According to the second half of v. 5, what does poverty of spirit put you in the posture to receive?
6. How might being poor in spirit affect your relationships with others? Describe.
7. Prayer: Among our usual prayer requests, pray that God will help us embrace spiritual poverty in order to appropriately depend on him for all our needs and to relate to others authentically.

¹ Faith alone opens the door of the soul to the divine Lover who impregnates it with his own life.... So spiritually, our strength is our receptivity.... If we come to God with empty hands, he will fill them. If we come with full hands, he finds no place to put himself. It is our beggary, our receptivity, that is our hope.