

**Gathering Question:** How would you describe the word “blessed”? You might even want to write your definitions down on a piece of paper. Don’t write your name on your paper and hand it to the leader. When he reads each definition try to guess which one of your group members wrote that definition of blessed.

## **Unexpected Blessings**

A hymn by William Cowper reminds us to look for blessings in unexpected places.

“You fearful saints, fresh courage take:  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.”

In the beatitudes we find simple words and profound thoughts. These beautiful words have attracted Christians and even seekers for generations because they speak of a different way of life—a way of life that makes such good sense. The more we explore the implications of this way of life, the more seems to remain unexplored. There is a richness and depth of meaning in this way of life that is hard to describe. The wealth found in the beatitudes is inexhaustible.

The beatitudes have varied effects on people. Some accept the words of Jesus as a challenge that can be explored and practiced. To some people this is like a new law that God demands, somewhat like the Ten Commandments found in the Old Testament. But for others the beatitudes represent a set of unattainable ideals. The more they read these words the more they despair. How can a person develop this kind of heart-righteousness--turn the other cheek, love their enemies, etc.? Is it impossible? Yes! And that is the point! This is the kind of life that God is able build in yielded lives. Because of the impossible nature of this way of life, it is even more imperative that the Spirit of God is present to mold us and make us over into his image.

You will notice in these beatitudes that there is nothing that tells a person how he can become a Christian but all the way through we discover that the works and fruit that this way of life calls for is only possible if a person is a Christian and is in a state of grace.

**Read:**

Matthew 5:1-12

**Reflect:**

1. How does our normal description of the blessed or fortunate person compare with those Jesus considers to be blessed?
2. Why is it so hard to admit our own spiritual poverty?
3. How can a person cultivate a healthy, hearty, spiritual appetite that Jesus promises to fill?
4. Which beatitude do you find it the hardest to accept? Why? How have the beatitudes challenged you to be different?