

# A Way of Living

## 5 Bible Studies on The Beatitudes



John Birch

Cover picture taken near the town of Maaloula in Syria ©John Birch

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John Birch

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# Leaders' Notes

The passage from Matthew that we're looking at in this study forms part of a bigger compilation of Jesus' words that Matthew presents to his readers in chapters 5-7, and which we know as 'the Sermon on the Mount'.

The first thing to note here is that Jesus is not giving advice to non-believers. This is not Jesus the evangelist, but Jesus showing believers that there is a new and radical way of living now that they are experiencing God's kingdom being established on earth.

Within the Sermon on the Mount there is wide ranging and practical advice on such issues as marriage, adultery, swearing oaths, anger management, charity, judging others and prayer. But Matthew begins with this intriguing passage which is fairly all-encompassing - Jesus' words directed at our relationship with God and those among whom we live and work.

Remember when the scribe asked Jesus which was the greatest of the commandments in Mark 12? Jesus' response was to sum up *all* the laws into two - love God, love others (sometimes referred to as the Jesus Creed)

Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>and he began to teach them.

He said:

<sup>3</sup> 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NIV)

Matthew and Luke both give us a version of the Sermon on the Mount, and as with many examples within the Bible there are times where similar verses are found in both (not all in the same place) and some only to be found in Matthew's gospel.

William Barclay in his commentary tells us there are 107 verses in Matthew's account, with only 29 of these found together in Luke 6:20-49. There are 47 verses which are not found at all in Luke's version, and 34 can be found elsewhere in different contexts.

Why might this be?

Well, each gospel writer had their particular emphasis and crafted their work in order to

present Jesus to a slightly differing readership, and this helps us in getting a more rounded impression of who Jesus was.

Matthew's gospel is essentially a teaching gospel and in carefully putting together his text, he chose to put Jesus' teaching under certain headings, of which the Sermon on the Mount is one.

It has been suggested that after Jesus chose the Twelve, he may well have taken them away on the first century equivalent of a retreat, where he could spend time teaching them, and what we have here is a distillation of that knowledge - Teacher's notes, if you like!

## On a Practical note

The studies have been designed to be printed double-sided on A4 paper. If you are using a different size of paper then chose the print option to 'fit to size' and all should be well!

At the back of this study you will find some suggestions for prayers to begin and end a meeting.

If you like this study and find it helpful, there are others available on [www.faithandworship.com](http://www.faithandworship.com)

# Study One - How did we get here?



Matthew 5:1-3 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup>Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup>and he began to teach them.

He said: <sup>3</sup> 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

You might also like to read:

Psalm 51:16,17

Isaiah 61:1

Psalm 34:6

'The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known part of the teaching of Jesus, though arguably it is the least understood, and certainly it is the least obeyed'

(John Stott, The Message of the Sermon on the Mount, InterVarsity Press, 1978, )

## Starting points



You have a vision of a new and radical way of life that could transform humanity, but only a limited time frame in which to work and no financial backers. What means are available today to spread the word?



If we read the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel we find Jesus and family spending a short period of exile in Egypt (Matt 2:13-23) before moving back to their homeland (Matt 4:14-16).

A few years later we have Jesus going through the water of baptism (Matt 3:13-16) and enduring a period in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11) before introducing his teaching to us. Does this pattern remind you of anything, and why might Matthew have included these points?<sup>1</sup>

## A new manifesto

By this point Matthew has followed Jesus from Bethlehem to Egypt, onward to Nazareth and then to Galilee, a place where the prophets said 'The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.' (Matthew 4:16)

Now, on a mountainside, Jesus begins to illuminate the minds of his disciples.

Deuteronomy has the people coming through a wilderness and arriving on the borders of what was to be their promised land, where God gives them a covenant, listing blessings and curses that await them dependent upon their behavior.

Jesus announces a new covenant, but this seems more like a call to a radical, and at times counter-intuitive new lifestyle - doesn't experience tells us that the meek generally get trampled on, rather than expecting to inherit the earth?

Jesus sits, which was the way that any Jewish Rabbi began a teaching session. This tells us immediately that the words that follow are important.

The tense used indicates that this is not teaching that Jesus gave just once, but here is the essence, the distillation of all he was *continually* sharing with his disciples.

This is Jesus' manifesto for life in God's kingdom, on earth and in heaven!



Is a wilderness experience sometimes useful to put life in perspective?

## A different kind of poverty?

When we read the Beatitudes it seems as if they are a call to future action, to try harder in imitating these role models, but that's not the real meaning. It's those who are living the life *now* who are *already* being Blessed.

So the poor in spirit *are being* blessed.

There are two words in Greek for 'poor'. One describes the normal working person who has to go out and use their hands to obtain the essentials needed to live. They are not rich in worldly terms, but neither are they living in penury. The other word describes someone who is driven to their knees in despair over their condition. That's the meaning here.

In Hebrew the word 'poor' came to mean the humble person who had put their whole trust in God, as in Psalm 34:6, 'This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles'

Think of it this way. The world looks to find happiness through the possession of things, be it money or objects. Jesus is not talking about material poverty here, rather that God's kingdom is populated by those who in all humility are able to come before God and admit that without Him they are helpless, those who have realized that there is nothing physical, no 'thing' that can ultimately bring them happiness.

This is a spiritual rather than material poverty.

As with much of Jesus' teaching, it turns the wisdom of the world upside down. The blessed are those who trust the word of God over the wisdom of this world, looking to Him alone for strength, hope and joy.

And that, says Jesus is the life choice of those who are already citizens of God's kingdom here on earth, and ultimately in heaven.

## Talking it through

'Surrender your own poverty and acknowledge your nothingness to the Lord. Whether you understand it or not, God loves you, is present in you, lives in you, dwells in you, calls you, saves you and offers you an understanding and compassion which are like nothing you have ever found in a book or heard in a sermon.'

(Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground Of Love: The Letters Of Thomas Merton On Religious Experience And Social Concerns*)

'The deeper we grow in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the poorer we become - the more we realize that everything in life is a gift. The tenor of our lives becomes one of humble and joyful thanksgiving. Awareness of our poverty and ineptitude causes us to rejoice in the gift of being called out of darkness into wondrous light and translated into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.'

(Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out*, Multnomah Books, 2005)



Dictionaries use words like 'happiness' and 'contentment' to define 'blessed'. How would you explain it to someone?



The disciples dropped everything when Jesus called them. Others were told to be willing to do the same. What's the group's experience of 'calling'?



What are the barriers to finding a point where we can trust in God alone and not in the things that surround us?



Can we see God's kingdom in action in our churches?



Read 1 John 2:15-17. Does this reflect the words of the beatitude or does it seem too hard-line?

<sup>1</sup> Check out Israel's story through Leviticus Chapters 1, 12, 14, 16, 19-24.)



# Study Two - The meek and the mourner

Matthew 5:4,5 (NIV)



<sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

You might also like to read:

Genesis 37:34-35

Job 2:12-13

'We find there is very little difference in ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously...The levels of lying, cheating, and stealing are remarkable similar in both groups. Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount...'

(George Gallup, addressing a national seminar of Southern Baptist leaders)

## Starting points



Think of a one or two well-known national leaders and discuss what might be their lasting legacy, along with any obvious strengths and weaknesses.

As leaders how would you rate them?



Nudge theory is a concept which argues that positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions can change behavior without requiring new legislation.

Not heard of it? As an example, to solve a litter problem in Copenhagen green footprints were painted on the pavement leading to garbage bins. Within a month, littering fell by 46 per cent.

No restrictive new law, just a nudge!

Jesus is not laying down the law in the Beatitudes, but could it be said that he pioneered nudge theory?

## A way of mourning

Tisha B'Av is a traditional and annual fast day in Judaism, a day of remembrance and mourning when Jewish communities recall some of the saddest episodes in the nation's long history.

The name refers to the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, a day traditionally associated with the destruction of the original temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC and the second in 70 AD, the exile of the Jews, a massacre of over 100,000 Jews at Betar in 132 AD, and more recently the start of two world wars and the Holocaust.

Tisha B'Av is often thought of as a Jewish 'Friday the Thirteenth', a day of bad fortune. It is observed by an outward show of deep sadness and mourning for all the tragedies that have occurred throughout Jewish history. Many observe it as a day of fasting, preceded by a supper of hard-boiled eggs and lentils, the egg being a symbol of rebirth. Strict observance involves refraining from some of the normal pleasures of life, including marriage, on Tisha B'Av.

In the synagogue people sit on the floor or low stools while the Book of Lamentations is read, and prayers of mourning recited.

Tisha B'Av is followed by seven Sabbaths of comfort, accompanied by readings bringing hope and consolation.



Compare this with acts of remembrance you are familiar with. Is remembrance done well in this country, or could we learn anything from this Jewish example?

## Humanity and humility

The word used for 'to mourn' is the strongest possible in Greek. This is serious mourning. We read that 'The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.' (Deut 34:8)

Three ways to think of this beatitude:

- 1) It is often when we're grieving at the loss of a loved one that we find, within the compassion and love of God and our close friends, the inner strength needed to carry on.
- 2) We can see this as mourning for the world and the state that it is in. There are many notable people who have been driven to action by compassion for those who suffer.
- 3) Lastly, it can mean blessed are those who are deeply aware of their own sinfulness. Remember, Jesus' first recorded words were all about the need for repentance. Faith begins with knowledge of our sinfulness. Forgiveness brings comfort and peace.

'We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, 'Blessed are they that mourn,' and I accept it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not imagination.'

(C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed)

'It doesn't really matter whether you grip the arms of the dentist's chair or let your hands lie in your lap. The drill drills on.'

(C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed)

'The least known among the virtues and also the most misunderstood is the virtue of humility. Yet, it is the very groundwork of Christianity. Humility is a grace of the soul that cannot be expressed in words and is only known by experience. It is an unspeakable treasure of God, and only can be called the gift of God. "Learn," He said, not from angels, not from men, not from books; but learn from My presence, light, and action within you, "that I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls."'

(William Bernard Ullathorne)

In Greek the word 'meek' means anything but weak. Aristotle defined meekness as a happy medium between getting angry at the right time, and not getting angry at the wrong time.

The root of 'meek' in English has a meaning including gentle, unaggressive, humble and courteous. Someone completely in control of their emotions, unlike Alexander the Great, who might have been a conqueror of nations, but in a fit of drunken temper hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him.

William Barclay says, 'No man can lead others until he has mastered himself; no man can serve others until he has subjected himself; no man can be in control of others until he has learned to control himself. But the man who gives himself into the complete control of God will gain this meekness which will indeed enable him to inherit the earth.'<sup>2</sup>

## Talking it through



'Grief is a path but not a destination'. Discuss this in the group, adding your own experiences if possible.



Apart from offering the facilities of the church for funerals, and associated pastoral visits to the relatives, can you think of ways in which churches might better serve the needs of the grieving?



Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth, but how might this actually be achieved?



Does humility come easy, or is an aggressive nature considered a virtue today in order to achieve success?



How do we see Jesus demonstrating the quality of meekness?

<sup>(2)</sup> Barclay W, The Gospel of Matthew Vol 1, St Andrews Press, 1956)

# Study Three - Giving & receiving



Matthew 5:6,7 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

You might also like to read:

Matthew 12:7

Colossians 3:12

Proverbs 14:31

'What is less often noticed is that it is precisely the kind of moral instruction that parents are constantly trying to give their children — concrete, imaginative, teaching general principles from particular instances, and seeking all the time to bring the children to appreciate and share the parent's own attitudes and view of life... The all-embracing principles of conduct'

(J.I. Packer, Knowing God)

## Starting points



Righteousness has within it the meaning of integrity, morality, equality and justice. How does the church in general do when it comes to tackling these kinds of issues in society?



What are the biggest concerns you have for the well-being of the society in which you live. Is there anything that a local or national church can do to address these concerns?



With so many desperate situations in the world, caused either by natural disaster or human behavior, is compassion fatigue a growing, and perhaps worrying problem?

## Of mercy and justice

The Old Testament prophets might despair at the waywardness of the people they spoke to, but their faith was in a God who was consistent. Micah was a simple man with a passion for social justice, who was disturbed to see the corruption and immorality in Jerusalem spreading out to the poorer region from where he came.

Micah had a vision of God's justice coming down hard upon the people, particularly those who exploited the weak, and those responsible for the spiritual decline and decay that surrounded him.

It was not good news that Micah brought, and it was a difficult burden for him to carry. But there was still hope, all was not lost, God's kingdom would be established - familiar words from Micah 5:2-5, a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus' birth, and looking forward to his second coming.

In Micah 7:18-20 the prophet remembers God's love, mercy and compassion from the past, and in faith sees this as hope for the future, when God will rule in power and bring his sheep back into the fold.

Turn back a page to Micah 6:6-8 and we see that we are to be imitators of the character of God in the way we interact with others and in our walk with Him.

'He has shown you, O man, what is Good... to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'



Micah prophesied around 735 BC, but we can perhaps see echoes today. What should our response be?

## Humanity and humility

Hunger and thirst were familiar to many in Jesus' time. Wages were low, drinking water had to be found, starvation was not uncommon. These are challenges that many in the world still endure every day of their lives.

This first beatitude is a stronger challenge than it might appear. It asks, 'Do you want to see right and justice prevail as much as someone dying of thirst desires water?'

This is about wanting with a passion!

Of course, not all who hunger in this way for injustices to be righted are going to see their goals fully achieved, so where is their blessing?

You might like to discuss this point.

Maybe the blessing comes in part from belonging to a community of like-minded individuals, with the knowledge that this is an offering acceptable to God, looking forward as it does to God's kingdom being seen on earth as it is in heaven (The Lord's Prayer).

The Lord's Prayer, given in Matthew 6, ends with these words 'For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.'

It is common sense really, isn't it? You can't expect mercy to be given if you're not prepared to offer it yourself.

But there's more in the original meaning of 'mercy' as Jesus used it. In this context the word means getting inside the mind of the other person and seeing the situation from their point of view. When things go wrong in our relationships, or we find ourselves in a long-running argument, how many of us can truthfully say that we try and do this?

It can make forgiveness so much easier when we understand the reason why, and help facilitate reconciliation.

## Talking it through



Another translation of 'righteousness' in v.5 might be 'God's justice'. What does this term mean to you?



How often do we pray for justice and righteousness in church? Are we hungry enough to want this in the world?



How easy do you find it to forgive someone who has wronged or offended you? Are there limits?



David Pawson\* says 'Justice and mercy... travel the same road together. The difference is that justice can only go so far, but mercy takes over and goes further, and God is the supreme master of both.' How much should mercy figure in our justice system?

'All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope.'

(Winston Churchill)

'The militancy of men, through all the centuries, has drenched the world with blood. The militancy of women has harmed no human life save the lives of those who fought the battle of righteousness.'

(Emmeline Pankhurst)

'While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight; I'll fight to the very end!'

(General William Booth)

\*Pawson D, Unlocking the Bible, Collins, 2003

# Study Four - Shalom bringers



Matthew 5:8,9 (NIV)

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

You might also like to read:

Psalms 24:3-4

Titus 2:11-13

Proverbs 12:20

'I do not believe there is a problem in this country or the world today which could not be settled if approached through the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.'

(Harry S. Truman)

'We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the sermon on the mount.'

(Omar N. Bradley)

## Starting points



We can be sure of the purity of some precious metals if they are hallmarked, a system dating back to the fourth century. Gold of 24 carats is 100% pure gold. But what's the measure of a pure heart?



Over the past few decades there seems to have been a rise in individuals offering counseling services - for employment issues, relationships, grief, stress etc. Has anything changed in society for this growth industry to be so necessary?



Who are the peacemakers in the world at the moment - politicians, the UN, church or individual citizens?



A big question, but why do you think this might be such a rare conclusion to a conflict in Old Testament times?

## A way of peace

Read 2 Kings 6:8-23

This is possibly a passage few have read, but it is a fascinating story about the prophet Elisha - if for no other reason than it may be the only time in the Old Testament that a conflict ended without the slaughter of thousands!

Elisha is called 'the man of God' and it is his intimacy with God which gives him the wisdom and vision to foresee time and again where the Aramaean forces are going to gather, allowing the king of Israel to take evasive action.

Aram's king becomes so fed up with this cat and mouse game that he plans to capture Elisha and thus remove Israel's spiritual advantage.

The story that follows is all about wrong perceptions. The servant sees nothing but the immediate threat, but Elisha reveals to him in a vision that God is stronger.

Elisha prays, 'Lord, strike this people...' but not with death, or even real blindness, for the better translation would be confusion of sight. It allows a defenseless man to lead an unsuspecting army straight into the hands of their enemy where, contrary to the way of the world, Elisha pleads for peace, hands are shaken and the outcome is an end to years of conflict.

Elisha - a man who is tuned into the heart of God. Elisha - a peacemaker!

## Wanting nothing but the best!

The pure in heart are those who live lives that are God-centered and God-controlled, who want nothing but the best for others, live out their faith day by day and are moved to action when they see injustice.

These are the ones who have taken up Jesus' challenge to 'Follow me!' in the truest sense of the calling, and know his presence in their daily lives - which is indeed a blessing.

As for the word 'blessed' there is a tendency to try and replace it with 'happy' but that does not give full value to the meaning, which is an expression of the inner joy and peace that comes from being in the right place with God.

Contrast this with Jesus' words to the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Matthew 23, or at Proverbs 6:16-19, both of which could be seen as the opposite side of the coin - if we're looking at the way of life which brings God's blessing.

At the heart of the Bible's Big Picture is humankind at peace with their creator and each other - within God's kingdom. That of course is not the reality that we see today!

In the Middle East you will hear the greeting 'Shalom!' - a word meaning 'peace' but with a fuller meaning than the English word can express. This is more than just a lack of conflict. If you wish someone 'shalom' then you are wishing nothing but the very best for them - wholeness, peace and prosperity.

But this beatitude is about those who are doing, not just saying, those people actively trying to bring about shalom in the world.

Being a 'shalom-maker' means knowing what true peace is, and having a passion for sharing it with others.

Jesus came as Prince of Peace, and God's children should be bearers of peace!

'I do not want the peace which passeth understanding, I want the understanding which bringeth peace.'

(Helen Keller)

'When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.'

(Jimmy Hendrix)

'If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.'

(Mother Teresa)

'O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent intention and impure heart: for the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.'

(T S Elliot)

## Talking it through



Our first beatitude says that the pure in heart will see God - How can we 'see' God?



Jesus is talking about a relationship with God, and later in Matthew 23 we can see what happens when this goes wrong, but how do you see your relationship with God?



Are our political leaders sometimes too quick to dismiss the peace process, embracing conflict instead?



Where are the opportunities for the church to be 'shalom-makers' in this country?



Discuss the Jimmy Hendrix quote.

# Study Five - Rejoice and be glad!

Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV)



<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You might also like to read:

Isaiah 53: 2-5

Col 1:9-13

Romans 8:35-39

'If it weren't for the message of mercy and pity in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, I wouldn't want to be a human being. I would just as soon be a rattlesnake.'

(Kurt Vonnegut , God Bless You Dr. Kevorkian )

## Starting points



Have any group members experience of any form of persecution? This could include bullying at school or work, or taking a stand on a particular issue.



How easy is it to 'toe the line' on important decisions at work or within our families to avoid conflict or potential problems, even when our conscience urges us to speak out?



How many countries are you aware of today where life can be difficult for those known as Christians



How difficult is it to be a prophet in the present generation?

## An unwelcome message

We know that many of the early disciples of Jesus faced torture and death for their faith, but throughout the Bible we see instances of those who are close to God, including the prophets facing opposition.

Amos, a shepherd given God's word of judgment for Israel, is told in no uncertain terms to stop prophesying by the chief priest of Bethel (Amos 7:10ff)

God's message was not welcome! Yet if it had been listened to, the Northern Kingdom might well have been saved from destruction by the Assyrians in 722BC!

Jeremiah, one of the greatest of the Old Testament's prophets, struggled with the task of proclaiming God's impending judgment on the people, and speaking harsh words to those who called themselves religious. (Jeremiah 7:1ff)

A nervous prophet from the start, he had to move away from his family, persuade the people to surrender to the hated Babylonians, and died alone in Egypt.

At one point Jeremiah cries out with frustration, 'Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying "A child is born to you - a son!"'

## The walk of faith

The first to respond to Jesus' call stepped out into the unknown. Gradually they began to realize the difficulties this new life would bring. Some gave up jobs, others faced difficult decisions when asked to do work conflicting with their conscience. There were times when they had to cut themselves off from aspects of their old life in order to follow the new.

Relationships could also be affected, particularly if other members of the family did not become Christians. It has always been true that Christianity has both divided and brought together family members.

Christians were persecuted for their faith in terrible ways, particularly in Nero's time. They died horrific deaths for taking a stand for Christ rather than worship the Emperor.

Jesus never promised that our walk of faith would be an easy one, but he does promise that the ultimate reward will be the glory of the life to come, our ultimate blessing.

'Our wretched species is so made that those who walk on the well-trodden path always throw stones at those who are showing a new road.'

(Voltaire)

'Let us not forget: we are a pilgrim church, subject to misunderstanding, to persecution, but a church that walks serene, because it bears the force of love.'

(Oscar A. Romero, The Violence of Love)

'If the Tiber rises too high, or the Nile too low, the remedy is always feeding Christians to the lions.'

(Tertullian)

'Religious persecution may shield itself under the guise of a mistaken and over-zealous piety.'

(Edmund Burke)

The Beatitudes present us with a bit of a paradox, in that they seem to suggest that those things which should bring us down are in fact the key to God's blessing.

It's a call to a lifestyle which bears little resemblance to that blazoned on billboards or in magazines - the way of the world.

Jesus said that the greatest human who ever lived was a very eccentric insect-eating hermit called John the Baptist, but adds that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than him! (Matthew 11:11)

The world might say 'Be the big shot, push yourself forward, stick up for your rights, hold on to your pride.' But Jesus gives us the Beatitudes and asks us to walk together where the saints have trod.

## Talking it through



Why should we expect persecution as Christians, even if this is not our current experience? (After discussion, look at John 15:18-24)



What should our response be if persecution comes knocking at our door? (After discussion, look at 1 Peter 4:12-17)



How can the church best respond to the persecution of Christians around the world?



Having looked at the Beatitudes, what do you see as Jesus' purpose in these few words?



What do they have to say to a non-Christian?



# Prayers

## Starting a meeting

Gracious Father,  
be the blessing  
that warms us.

Precious Son,  
be the passion  
that moves us.

Holy Spirit,  
be the power  
that enables us

Three in One  
be our unity,  
that which joins us

We are your body,  
your Church,  
your witness in this world,  
a fact we sometimes forget.  
When your love is not seen,  
compassion not shown,  
grace not revealed,  
a need unmet,  
forgive us.

Enable our hearts  
to reflect your love.

Enable our hands  
to respond to need.

Enable our voices  
to bring your peace,  
that through our lives  
others may be drawn  
into your kingdom  
and your name lifted high.

Amen

## Before we leave

We share together in the Lord's Prayer  
Our Father...

If our minds are set  
on Jesus Christ,  
our desire  
to know him more,  
feel his presence,  
experience life  
in all its fullness,  
then we are blessed indeed.

For the God who raised  
Christ from the grave  
will give us life  
who once were dead,  
and by his Spirit  
live in us.

If our minds are set  
on Jesus Christ  
then we are blessed indeed.

We have gathered here today and fed upon  
your Word, been refreshed through your living  
water, felt the encircling of your Spirit around  
this fellowship and our individual lives.

As we go from this place may we continue to  
know your presence and power in the very  
different lives that we lead, to your praise and  
glory. Amen

More resources at [www.faithandworship.com](http://www.faithandworship.com)