



BLESSED

8 steps to wholeness

Tom Smilovitis
ROAMING CHAPLAIN

Blessed is dedicated to Sofia Smilovitis

“My whole life has been like a rose—thorns all the way up, but in the end, God gave me the rosebud.”

~ Sofia Smilovitis

“My mother was the most inspiring person in my life. Her unwavering dedication to her faith, family, and integrity became even more evident in her final years, leaving me in awe of her strength and grace.”

~ Tom Smilovitis

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Why *BLESSED*?

This booklet is written for both new believers in Jesus Christ and those who feel burnt out, seeking renewal. Take time to contemplate each section—don't rush the process.

At the very beginning of the greatest message ever preached—the Sermon on the Mount—Jesus declares eight promises before inviting us to join His spiritual journey. These promises, known as the Beatitudes, reveal a vision of true blessing—one that transcends worldly success.

In 1981, my faith journey began when I made a conscious decision to follow Jesus. For a few years, I experienced a deep sense of spiritual joy, but eventually, I swapped that bliss for what became a religious addiction. For eighteen years, I served as a full-time pastor and evangelist, yet I only scratched the surface of what it truly means to be blessed. Like many Christians, I was rich beyond measure in Christ, but I had been taught to live by religious rituals, constantly striving to earn blessings. This mindset led me to what I now recognise as decision fatigue.

It took another twenty years of searching, striving, and ultimately surrendering before I fully grasped the depth of God's grace. The success I had once pursued proved to be a relentless taskmaster, never delivering what it promised. But Jesus' promises are different—faithful, unwavering, and life-giving. Through all my pursuits, God's love never left me. Now, in my sixties, I am more in awe of His grace than ever before.

This is my hope for you.

This simple booklet is for those seeking a peace that this world cannot offer. Whether you are coming to the Christian faith for the first time or have wandered through the desert for decades, know this: God is faithful.

Written in the simplest way possible, this book invites you to experience the most profound message of hope—the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Tom Smilovitis
Roaming Chaplain

Prepare for blessings Before embracing the full Blessings of a Spiritual Life offered by our Lord Jesus let's prepare the heart.

We all yearn for connection, purpose, and a sense of belonging. Deep within, a quiet whisper reminds us that there's more to life than the everyday hustle. This whisper is the call to a spiritual life, a journey of discovery and relationship with the divine. This book explores the profound and transformative power of that journey, focusing on eight key blessings that unfold as we draw closer to God.

From the moment of our conception, God knew us. **As Jeremiah 1:5 beautifully states, "Before you were formed in the womb I knew you."** This intimate knowledge is the foundation upon which our spiritual lives are built. Through Jesus, we are invited into a personal relationship with this God who has always known us, a relationship that offers solace, guidance, and unwavering love. This connection is what truly answers the fundamental questions of life: "Who am I?" and "What is life all about?"

But before we can fully embrace these blessings, we must acknowledge our current state of heart and mind. Many of us suffer from a pervasive condition that hinders our ability to truly connect with God and experience the fullness of His presence. It's a condition that creates 'Decision Fatigue'.

We all have our limits. We live in a world that constantly demands our attention and our choices. From

the mundane to the monumental, we are bombarded with decisions, big and small, every single day. This constant barrage can lead to a state of mental and emotional exhaustion, where even the simplest choices become overwhelming. Don't be flattered that you are called upon to make decisions. True leadership empowers others to think for themselves, rather than fostering dependence. Bullies and underdeveloped leaders cultivate Decision Fatigue, creating an environment of fear and vulnerability.

Decision Fatigue can manifest in many ways. We may find ourselves dwelling on past mistakes, replaying them endlessly in our minds. We may become overly critical of ourselves and others, unable to offer grace or find solutions. We may isolate ourselves, fearing that we will react negatively to those we love. We may even forget why we do what we do, losing sight of our values and priorities. It can lead to broken relationships, missed opportunities, and a general sense of disconnection from us and the world around us. It can even make us mean-spirited or dismissive, acting against our better judgment without understanding why.

Overcoming Decision Fatigue requires conscious effort. It starts with recognising the condition and acknowledging its impact on our lives. We must stop pretending that every decision needs to be predetermined. We must learn to limit the number of decisions we make daily, freeing up mental space for creative thinking and reflection.

Here are some ways to combat Decision Fatigue:

1. **Self-Awareness:** If you find yourself constantly critical and lacking gracious solutions, you may be experiencing Decision Fatigue.
2. **Relationship Awareness:** If you are withdrawing from loved ones for fear of reacting negatively, you may be experiencing Decision Fatigue.

3. **Open Communication:** Talking about your condition with a trusted friend or mentor can be incredibly helpful.
4. **Wise Counsel:** Choose your confidants carefully. Seek out those who will challenge your thinking and offer honest feedback, not just those who will agree with you to avoid conflict.

Decision Fatigue is real, and it affects us all. By exposing it, we can bring light into the areas of our lives that have been clouded for so long. The benefits of fewer decisions, more creative thinking, and focusing on our strengths are immense. Like a farmer who prepares the soil, sows the seeds, waters occasionally, and trusts the process, we can learn to let go of the need to control every little detail and allow life to unfold naturally.

The dark side of Decision Fatigue is that it can be exploited. Cults, manipulative organisations, and even some corporations use it to control and manipulate individuals. By keeping people busy with rituals and focused on obedience, they prevent them from thinking critically and exercising their freedom. Even social media can contribute to this, keeping us in a constant state of Decision Fatigue while subtly influencing our thoughts and behaviours. Taking breaks from these distractions can be a powerful first step toward reclaiming our mental and spiritual clarity.

Many try to answer the questions of life through various means – positive thinking, mindfulness, self-improvement – and while these pursuits can have value, they often fall short. They address the symptoms but not the root. Like trying to fix a broken bone with a bandage, these approaches often fail to address the deeper spiritual longing within us. We can strive to be “good,” but what does “good” even mean? Our understanding of goodness varies from person to person, culture to culture. By whose standard do we measure ourselves? This pursuit of self-defined goodness can become an unbearable burden, leading to either despair at our failures or pride in our perceived successes, both of which are

ultimately destructive.

The truth is, we are born spiritually incomplete. We exist in a two-dimensional world, focused on our physical bodies and minds, but our spirits are dormant. It's like a radio that's not tuned to the right frequency – the music is there, but we can't hear it. Jesus came to tune that radio, to awaken our spirits to the reality of God's love and presence.

As Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). He claimed to be the Son of God, and through belief in Him, we receive the keys to our identity and unlock our destiny. **John 3:16 encapsulates the heart of this message: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

This verse reveals three profound truths:

1. **God's Unconditional Love:** The driving force behind Jesus' sacrifice is God's immense love for us. He sees our brokenness, our spiritual incompleteness, and He reaches out to us with grace and mercy.
2. **Spiritual Awakening:** Belief in Jesus is the catalyst for spiritual awakening. It's the moment our spirits come alive, and we begin to experience the fullness of God's presence. This is the miracle of salvation – being brought from spiritual death to life.
3. **The Promise of Eternal Life:** This isn't just about life after death; it's about a transformed life now, a life lived in connection with God, a life filled with purpose and hope.

This transformation is beautifully symbolised by baptism, a public declaration of leaving the old life behind and embracing this new spiritual reality. It's not just a ritual; it's a symbol of resurrection, of

rising from spiritual death to new life in Christ.

And this love extends even to those who have wandered away. The Bible tells a beautiful story of God's unwavering love for His people, even when they turn away from Him. He is, in a sense, married to the backslider. **As Jeremiah 3:14-15 declares, "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband."** Just as Jesus is the bridegroom of the church, God's love for us is steadfast and persistent. He never gives up on us.

A "backslider" is simply someone who was once faithful but has strayed from the path. If we live long enough in the faith, we will likely experience moments or seasons where our hearts backslide. Like the prodigal son in Jesus' **parable (Luke 15:11-32)**, we may wander away, waste our inheritance, and find ourselves in a "pigpen" of our own making. But God, like the father in the parable, rejoices when we return to Him. He doesn't condemn us; He embraces us with open arms.

There's also the "older brother" backslider, who stays within the church but harbours resentment, pride, and judgment. He may appear faithful outwardly, but his heart is far from God. Both the prodigal and the older brother needed to understand the unconditional love of the father.

If you have strayed from God, know that He has never strayed from you. He is waiting for your return. The whole Bible is a love story of God's desire to restore us to full dignity. **As John 3:16 reminds us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that everyone who believes will not perish but have everlasting life."**

If you are new to the Christian faith and want to accept Jesus as your Saviour, you can pray this prayer:

"Dear Jesus, I believe I am a sinner. I am lost, and I ask you to come into my heart. I believe you died on the cross for my sins and the sins of humanity. I ask for your forgiveness and for a new spiritual life

through the power of the Holy Spirit. I believe you rose from the dead, and I thank you for this precious gift of hope. In Jesus' name, Amen."

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God! The eight blessings of a spiritual life start here. Let's begin with the first:

First Blessing: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *(Matthew 5:3)*

Jesus' very first beatitude, the opening statement of His Sermon on the Mount, points to a fundamental truth: true blessedness, the fullness of joy and life, begins with recognising our spiritual poverty. It's a concept that can be difficult to grasp in our modern, often materialistic world. We're constantly told to strive, to achieve, to accumulate. But Jesus turns this worldly wisdom on its head. He says that the path to the kingdom of heaven starts not with what we *have*, but with what we *lack*.

Think of the truly poor in developing nations. They often lack necessities like food, shelter, and healthcare. They may have no advocate to speak for them, no resources to draw upon. They are at the mercy of their circumstances, vulnerable and dependent. This physical poverty can give us a glimpse into what it means to be "poor in spirit."

Being "poor in spirit" isn't about being destitute or miserable. It's about recognising our utter dependence on God. It's acknowledging that we are spiritually bankrupt without Him. Just as the physically poor have no one to turn to for their basic needs, the spiritually poor recognise that they cannot meet their own deepest needs. We may try to fill the void in our souls with material possessions, fleeting relationships, addictive substances, or worldly achievements, but these are merely temporary fixes. They can't satisfy the deep longing for connection with the divine.

It's easy to live in denial of our spiritual poverty. We build our lives on the illusion of self-sufficiency, thinking we have it all figured out. But the truth is, we are all at the mercy of God for our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. We need His grace, His forgiveness, His love. It's when we come to the end of ourselves, when we realise we can't do it on our own, that we are finally ready to receive the true riches of the kingdom of heaven.

The “poor in spirit” are those who recognise their need for a Saviour. They are the ones who come to God with humility, acknowledging their brokenness and asking for His help. And Jesus promises them: theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. This isn't just a promise for the afterlife; it's a promise for *now*. When we surrender our pride and self-reliance, we open ourselves to the peace, joy, and love that God offers. We begin to experience the kingdom of heaven within our hearts.

Unlike the physically poor, we have an advocate in Jesus Christ. He bridges the gap between us and God. He intercedes for us, offering us forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in John 14:26, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The Holy Spirit empowers us, guides us, and reveals the truths of God's love.

It's time to empty our hearts of pride and self-reliance and surrender everything to the One who can make us truly rich. It's time to avail ourselves of all the resources of the kingdom of heaven, which are freely offered to those who are poor in spirit.

Dear Lord, I pray for every person who reads this book to be humble and open to the riches of your wisdom. Open their hearts to change and renew their minds, bringing glory to the name of Jesus. I pray for miracles of healing where there is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual sickness. Make them whole, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Second Blessing: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. *(Matthew 5:4)*

Jesus' second beatitude speaks to a powerful and often misunderstood truth: blessing comes through mourning. In a world that prizes happiness and avoids pain at all costs, this can seem counterintuitive. But Jesus reveals a profound spiritual principle: it's in our sorrow, in our acknowledgment of loss and brokenness, that we open ourselves to true comfort.

This blessing builds upon the first. Just as the "poor in spirit" recognise their spiritual emptiness, those who mourn are aware of the pain and brokenness in their lives. This mourning can take many forms. It can be grief over the loss of a loved one, regret for past mistakes, sorrow for the state of the world, or even a deep sense of longing for God's presence.

Psalm 126:5-6 beautifully captures this connection between sorrow and joy: "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will surely return with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves." This verse speaks to the idea that even in times of hardship and sorrow, there is the promise of future joy. It suggests that the seeds we sow in tears, the efforts we make even when we are hurting, will eventually yield a harvest of joy.

The mourning Jesus speaks of is not simply wallowing in despair. It's a process of acknowledging our pain, facing our shortcomings, and turning to God for comfort and healing. It's about recognising our

need for redemption and grace.

The story of the “sinful woman” in Luke 7:36-50 provides a powerful example of this blessing in action. This woman, burdened by the weight of her past, came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of perfume. She didn’t try to hide her brokenness; instead, she wept openly at his feet, washing them with her tears and wiping them with her hair. She poured out her heart to Jesus, acknowledging her sinfulness and expressing her love and devotion.

The Pharisees, blinded by their self-righteousness, judged her harshly. But Jesus saw her heart. He recognised her genuine repentance and her deep faith. He forgave her sins and offered her peace. “Your faith has saved you,” he said. “Go in peace.”

This woman’s tears were not a sign of weakness; they were a sign of strength. She was willing to be vulnerable, to acknowledge her need for forgiveness and grace. And in her mourning, she found comfort, healing, and redemption.

Just as this woman recognised her spiritual bankruptcy and found solace in Jesus, we too can find comfort in our mourning. When we acknowledge our pain, when we confess our sins, when we turn to God with a humble heart, He promises to comfort us. He offers us His grace, His forgiveness, and His love.

It’s important to take time to reflect on what we are mourning. What losses, what regrets, what hurts are we carrying? Are we willing to bring those burdens to Jesus, to pour out our hearts to Him? He is waiting to offer us His comfort, His healing, and His peace.

I, too, have experienced seasons of deep sorrow, times when tears seemed to be my only companion. But I can testify to the truth of Jesus’ promise. Even in the midst of pain, God’s comfort is real. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. And He brings joy even after the deepest sorrow.

Third Blessing: Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. *(Matthew 5:5)*

After acknowledging our spiritual poverty and experiencing the comfort of mourning, Jesus introduces us to another essential quality for spiritual growth: meekness. This word often gets misunderstood. In our culture, “meek” is sometimes equated with “weak” or “timid.” But the meekness Jesus speaks of is not about being a doormat or lacking assertiveness. It’s a strength under control, a gentleness of spirit that flows from a deep trust in God.

Think of a wild horse that has been tamed. It still possesses its power and strength, but that power is now disciplined and directed. It’s no longer running wild, driven by its own impulses. Instead, it responds to the guidance of its rider. In the same way, meekness is about surrendering our will to God’s will. It’s about recognising that He is in control, not us.

The “meek” are those who are humble and teachable. They are willing to submit to God’s authority, even when it’s difficult. They don’t need to be right all the time. They are open to correction and willing to learn. They are not arrogant or boastful, but gentle and compassionate.

This meekness is not something we can conjure up on our own. It’s a fruit of the Holy Spirit, a quality that develops as we grow closer to God. As we spend time in His presence, as we meditate on His Word, as we experience His love and grace, we begin to become more like Him. Our rough edges are

smoothed out, our pride is softened, and we become more gentle and humble in our interactions with others.

Jesus promises that the meek “will inherit the earth.” This is a profound statement. It suggests that true dominion, true power, comes not through force or aggression, but through humility and gentleness. The meek are not trying to grasp control; they trust that God will provide for them and guide them. And in that trust, they inherit all that truly matters.

This inheritance is not just about material possessions or worldly power. It’s about inheriting the kingdom of God, experiencing the fullness of His blessings. It’s about having a deep sense of peace and contentment, knowing that we are loved and cared for by our Heavenly Father.

Meekness is also essential for building healthy relationships. When we are meek, we are less likely to be defensive or argumentative. We are more willing to listen to others, to understand their perspectives, and to forgive their shortcomings. Meekness allows us to create an atmosphere of love and acceptance, where others feel safe and valued.

It’s a challenging virtue to cultivate in our world, which often rewards aggression and self-promotion. But it’s a quality that is essential for true spiritual growth. As we surrender our will to God, as we learn to trust in His sovereignty, we begin to experience the power of meekness. We discover that true strength lies not in our own efforts, but in our dependence on Him.

Dear Lord, I pray for every person who reads this book to be humble and open to the riches of your wisdom. Open their hearts to change and renew their minds, bringing glory to the name of Jesus. I pray for miracles of healing where there is physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual sickness. Make them whole, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Fourth Blessing: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. *(Matthew 5:6)*

Jesus' fourth beatitude speaks to a deep and transformative desire: a hunger and thirst for righteousness. This isn't just a passing interest or a superficial wish; it's a profound longing, a spiritual craving that consumes us, a yearning for God's will to be done in our lives. It's a desire that grows as we experience the first three blessings – recognising our spiritual poverty, experiencing the comfort of mourning, and embracing the power of meekness.

This hunger and thirst is a sign of spiritual life. Just as physical hunger and thirst are essential for our physical survival, this spiritual craving is essential for our spiritual growth. It's a sign that our souls are alive and longing for connection with God.

As we progress in our spiritual journey, we begin to develop new appetites. The things that once satisfied us – worldly pleasures, fleeting achievements, superficial relationships – no longer hold the same appeal. We begin to crave something deeper, something more lasting: righteousness.

This righteousness is not about self-righteousness or legalistic adherence to rules. It's not about trying to earn God's approval through our own efforts. As Paul makes clear in Romans 3:10-12, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." We

are all lost without God.

True righteousness is a gift from God, offered to us through Jesus Christ. As 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 says, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus, who was perfect and sinless, took our sin upon himself so that we could receive His righteousness. It’s an exchange of unimaginable grace.

This understanding is crucial because it sets the stage for the fourth blessing. We don’t hunger and thirst for righteousness so that we can earn God’s favour; we hunger and thirst for it because we have already received it as a gift. It’s a desire that springs from a grateful heart, a heart that has been touched by God’s love and grace.

This hunger and thirst for righteousness manifests itself in a desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. It’s a desire to walk in His ways, to obey His commands, and to reflect His love to the world. It’s a desire for inner transformation, a longing to be more like Christ.

This desire is not always easy to fulfil. We live in a world that often tempts us to compromise our values, to stray from the path of righteousness. That’s why this hunger and thirst is so important. It keeps us focused on God, it motivates us to resist temptation, and it drives us to seek His help daily.

Jesus promises that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness “will be filled.” This is a promise of complete satisfaction. God will fill us with His presence, His grace, and His power to live a righteous life. This filling is not a one-time event; it’s an ongoing process. As we continue to seek God, He continues to fill us.

This righteousness becomes our protection, like an armour that covers our heart, the very center of our soul’s command center. As Ephesians 6:14 says, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled

around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.” Righteousness guards our hearts and minds, enabling us to live a life of integrity and purpose. As Proverbs 4:23 wisely says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

As Christians, Jesus offers us this fourth blessing of righteousness and promises to fulfil our heart’s desire to do right. It’s a journey of continual growth, a process of being conformed to the image of Christ. It’s a journey that begins with acknowledging our need for God’s grace and surrendering our lives to His control.





Fifth Blessing: Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. *(Matthew 5:7)*

As we continue our journey through Jesus' beatitudes, we arrive at a powerful and transformative principle: mercy. After recognising our spiritual poverty, experiencing the comfort of mourning, embracing the power of meekness, and hungering and thirsting for righteousness, we are now ready to extend that same compassion and forgiveness to others.

This blessing builds upon the previous ones. It's a natural outflow of a heart that has been touched by God's grace. We cannot give what we do not possess. It's only as we experience God's mercy towards us that we are empowered to be merciful to others.

Mercy is not just a feeling; it's an action. It's kindness, forgiveness, and compassion in tangible form. It's going beyond simply tolerating others; it's actively seeking their well-being, even when they have wronged us.

Jesus illustrates the importance of mercy in a powerful parable, the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35). Peter asks Jesus how many times we should forgive someone who sins against us. Jesus' response is not a number, but a principle: "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In other words, forgiveness should be limitless.

The parable tells of a servant who owed his master a vast sum of money. Unable to pay, he begged for mercy, and the master, in an act of incredible grace, forgave the entire debt. But the same servant, upon encountering a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller amount, refused to show the same compassion. He had the man thrown into prison until he could repay the debt. The master, upon hearing this, was furious. He revoked his forgiveness and punished the unmerciful servant.

This parable highlights a crucial truth: mercy is a two-way street. We receive mercy from God so that we can extend it to others. If we refuse to show mercy, we forfeit the mercy we have received. “For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2).

Mercy is not weakness; it’s a strength that comes from a deep understanding of God’s grace. It’s the ability to forgive, not because someone deserves it, but because we have been forgiven. It’s the ability to show compassion, not because someone is worthy, but because we are recipients of God’s undeserved kindness.

Mercy is a gift that keeps on giving. It’s what we continue to give because it’s what we continue to receive from heaven. It’s a flow of grace that passes through us, touching the lives of others. As Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” It’s a promise that when we extend mercy, we open ourselves to receive even more of God’s grace in our own lives.

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes this principle even further, challenging us to love our enemies and do good to those who harm us (Matthew 5:44). This kind of radical love and forgiveness is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s a love that transcends human nature, a love that reflects the very character of God.

When we are merciful, even to those who don’t deserve it, we demonstrate the true power of God’s grace. We become channels of His love, instruments of His peace, and reflections of His character.

Sixth Blessing: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. *(Matthew 5:8)*

As we continue our journey through the beatitudes, we arrive at a profound and essential quality: purity of heart. After experiencing the previous blessings – recognising our spiritual poverty, mourning our brokenness, embracing meekness, hungering for righteousness, and extending mercy – we are now ready to cultivate a heart that is pure and undivided.

Jesus promises that “the pure in heart...will see God.” This is a powerful statement. It suggests that purity of heart is essential for truly experiencing God’s presence and understanding His will. But what does it mean to have a pure heart?

King David, a man after God’s own heart, understood the importance of purity. His greatest victories, like defeating Goliath and sparing King Saul, flowed from his devotion to God and a heart that sought to walk in innocence. But even David stumbled, falling into sin with Bathsheba. In Psalm 51:10, he cries out to God, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” David knew that purity was not something he could achieve on his own; it was a gift from God, a work of grace within the soul.

The purity of heart is not just about outward actions; it’s about inner transformation. It affects our thoughts, motives, and intentions. It’s about having a heart that is free from deceit, malice, and selfish

ambition. It's about having a heart that is focused on God and His will.

This purity is a process, a journey of continual growth and sanctification. It's not something we achieve overnight; it's something we cultivate over time, through prayer, study of God's Word, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Matthew chapter 5 suggests, purity flows from the previous blessings. It's when we recognise our spiritual poverty, mourn our sins, embrace meekness, hunger for righteousness, and extend mercy that our hearts begin to be purified.

A pure heart doesn't mix with unclean things. It's discerning, it's able to distinguish between what is holy and what is unholy. In today's world, it can be increasingly difficult to maintain purity of heart. We are constantly bombarded with messages and influences that contradict God's Word and tempt us to compromise our values. It's tempting to try to fit in with the world, to avoid being seen as judgmental or narrow-minded.

But the pure in heart sees things differently. They love those who are for them and those who are against them. They are not called to fit in; they are called to stand firm in their faith. As Jesus said, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). 1 We must be wise and discerning, but also gentle and loving.

The pure heart has nothing to hide. It's open and honest before God and others. It knows that true hope is found only in Jesus. "I am the way and the truth and the life," Jesus said. "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The pure heart is not swayed by popular opinion or worldly philosophies. It's anchored in the truth of God's Word.

The pure heart is impartial to worldly divisions and dogmas. It's focused on what the Master Shepherd has to say. It's answerable to its conscience, which is guided by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promises that the pure in heart "will see God." This is the ultimate reward. It's not just about

seeing God in the afterlife; it's about experiencing His presence and His love in this life. It's about having a deep and intimate relationship with Him. This promise is motivation enough to strive for purity of heart, to turn away from anything that would hinder our relationship with God.





Seventh Blessing: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. *(Matthew 5:9)*

As we continue our exploration of Jesus' beatitudes, we arrive at a powerful and transformative calling: peacemaking. Having journeyed through the previous blessings – recognising our spiritual poverty, mourning our brokenness, embracing meekness, hungering for righteousness, cultivating purity of heart, and extending mercy – we are now equipped to become agents of peace in a world that desperately needs it.

Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are the peaceful," but "Blessed are the peacemakers." There's a crucial difference. Being peaceful implies a passive state, an absence of conflict. Being a peacemaker, on the other hand, is an active pursuit, a deliberate effort to bring peace to situations of conflict and division.

This blessing builds upon the previous ones. It's the natural outflow of a heart that has been transformed by God's grace. We cannot create peace if we haven't first experienced it ourselves. As we grow in our relationship with God, as we learn to surrender our own will to His, we begin to experience a deep and abiding peace within our own souls. And it's from this wellspring of inner peace that we can then bring peace to others.

The first four beatitudes focus on God's work in us, while the last four, including peacemaking, focus on our impact on the world around us. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation, bringing the

peace of Christ to a world that is fractured and hurting.

True peace is not simply the absence of conflict; it's the presence of wholeness, healing, and restoration. It's about bridging divides, fostering understanding, and promoting reconciliation. It's about creating an environment where love and compassion can flourish.

Jesus offers a peace that transcends circumstances. "Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). This is the peace that sustains us during trials, the peace that enables us to be peacemakers in a world of conflict.

A peacemaker is not someone who avoids conflict; they are someone who enters conflict with the intention of bringing resolution and healing. They are spiritual diplomats, representing the kingdom of God and its values. They are not afraid to confront injustice, but they do so with gentleness and humility.

A peacemaker has a deep personal relationship with Jesus. They understand their own strengths and weaknesses and rely on God's wisdom and guidance. They don't take the path of least resistance but are willing to go the extra mile to bring peace.

A peacemaker is self-controlled, humble, and quick to forgive. They give others the benefit of the doubt, reflecting the mercy they themselves have received. They work hard to keep their own hearts pure, knowing that true peace begins within. They speak softly, the stronger they become.

The world is in desperate need of peacemakers. People who are willing to step into the messiness of conflict and bring the healing balm of Christ's love. People who are willing to listen, to understand, and to bridge the gaps that divide us.

Jesus promises that peacemakers “will be called children of God.” This is a profound honour. It means that we will reflect God’s character, His love, and His desire for peace. It means that we will be part of His family, heirs to His kingdom. It means that others will see God through us.





Eighth Blessing: Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *(Matthew 5:10-12)*

As we conclude our journey through the beatitudes, we arrive at a challenging and often misunderstood blessing: persecution. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This isn’t a call to seek out suffering, but a realistic acknowledgment that following Christ may lead to opposition and misunderstanding.

It’s important to distinguish between two types of persecution. The first is the natural consequence of wrongdoing. If we break the law, harm others, or act unjustly, we can expect to face consequences. This is not the kind of persecution Jesus is talking about. He’s referring to persecution that arises because of righteousness, because of our commitment to living according to God’s will.

This kind of persecution comes from a world that often doesn’t understand or appreciate the values of the kingdom of God. It comes from those who are uncomfortable with our changed lives, our unwavering faith, and our commitment to truth and justice. It can come from those who feel threatened by our beliefs or those who simply misunderstand our motives.

It’s easy to feel discouraged or disheartened when we face opposition for our faith. We may be tempted to compromise our values, to water down our beliefs, to avoid conflict. But Jesus tells us that even in the face of persecution, we can rejoice. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and

falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Why should we rejoice in persecution? Because it’s a sign that we are standing firm in our faith. It’s a confirmation that we are living a life that is pleasing to God. It’s a reminder that our true reward is not in this world, but in the kingdom of heaven.

The Apostle Paul, who was himself a great persecutor before his conversion, understood this truth firsthand. He experienced intense persecution for his faith, but he also knew the incredible joy and reward that came from following Christ. He taught believers to confess their sins and let their good works speak for themselves, knowing that God sees everything and will ultimately reward us.

As believers, our validation comes from the Lord, not from the approval of the world. We don’t need to prove ourselves to anyone. We simply need to be faithful to God and trust that He will work all things for our good.

Jesus taught that when we do good, we should do it quietly, letting our actions speak for themselves. And when we make mistakes, we should confess them openly, seeking forgiveness and restoration. In a world that often glorifies outward appearances and hides inner flaws, this kind of honesty and humility can be seen as weakness. But it’s in this vulnerability that we find true strength.

Expect misunderstandings as you grow deeper in your faith. Expect to be challenged, questioned, and even ridiculed for your beliefs. But remember that Jesus has promised: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is a promise worth enduring any hardship for.

The other seven blessings build towards this point. It is in the crucible of facing opposition for righteousness that our faith is truly tested and refined. It is here that we learn to lean fully on God, to trust in His promises, and to experience the fullness of His presence.

Jesus Without the Religious and Political Stuff

When we read the Gospels, we see a Jesus who operated outside the confines of religious and political control. He wasn't bound by their agendas or limited by their expectations. He was focused on His mission, on loving God and loving people.

Jesus moved freely in time and space, unconstrained by the limitations that others tried to impose. He had no time for the political machinations of the Roman Empire or the empty rituals of the religious leaders. He saw through their hypocrisy and challenged their authority.

In our own spiritual journeys, we can learn from Jesus' example. We can choose to operate in the freedom that comes from surrendering our lives to God. We can resist the pressure to conform to the world's standards and instead focus on living a life of authenticity and integrity.

Just as Jesus kept clear of the political and religious establishments of his day, we too must be wary of allowing worldly powers to dictate our spiritual lives. We must be in the world but not of it, maintaining our focus on God and His kingdom.

Ultimately, Jesus' life and teachings challenge us to live authentically, to embrace the eight blessings, and to trust in God's unwavering love. It's a call to be still, to connect with God, and to live each day to the fullest. It's a call to be peacemakers, to show mercy, to hunger for righteousness, and to live with a pure heart. It's a call to be ourselves, our true selves, the selves God created us to be.



The Ongoing Impact of a Renewed Life: The Power of Social Capital

Growing up as a migrant in Australia, I learned valuable lessons about opportunity and resilience. My parents, having fled hardship and war, instilled in me the importance of hard work and gratitude. But one of the most profound lessons came in the form of a parable, a story my father often shared.

A father gave his two sons a portion of their inheritance, instructing them to build a house that reflected who they were. The first son chose prime land and built a majestic mansion, filled with luxury and modern conveniences. It was impressive, no doubt, but as the father walked through the house, he felt a sense of coldness and emptiness. “Son,” he said, “you have built a magnificent house, but it feels cold and empty.”

The second son took a different approach. He invested his inheritance in the people of the town, supporting their businesses, offering loans, and teaching them to do the same. When the father visited, he was greeted with warmth and joy by shopkeepers and strangers alike. They invited him and his son to their homes, eager to share their lives and celebrate their successes.

“Where is the house you’ve built?” the father asked. “The house I’ve built is the people,” the son replied. “I have a bed to sleep on, food on the table, but more importantly, I have connections that can last a lifetime.”

The father was deeply moved. “Your brother built a house, as I asked,” he said. “But you built a home, a place to belong.”

This parable illustrates the power of social capital. It's a lesson about investing in people, building relationships, and creating a community of support and connection. It's about understanding that true wealth is not measured in material possessions, but in the richness of our relationships.

This concept resonates deeply with Jesus' teachings. "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it," he said, "but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:35-37).

Jesus is talking about a different kind of investment, one that yields eternal dividends. It's about investing our lives in others, about giving ourselves away for the sake of the gospel. It's about recognizing that true life is found in service, in love, and in connection with God and others.

We have all been given an inheritance, a portion of our lives to invest in this world. As stewards of our capabilities, we must ask ourselves: Where and in whom are we investing? Are we building mansions of self-interest, or are we building homes of community and love?

This principle applies to every area of our lives – marriage, family, work, community. Are we focused on accumulating wealth and power, or are we investing in the lives of those around us? Are we building walls, or are we building bridges?

Jesus' life is the ultimate example of social capital. He invested his life in his disciples, in the crowds who followed him, and in the individuals, he encountered along the way. He poured his love and his teachings into their lives, empowering them to become agents of change in the world. And though he was rejected and crucified, his investment yielded a harvest of eternal proportions.

"You may gain the whole world," Jesus said, "but you'll remain alone." And that, he suggests, is the greatest tragedy of all. To have everything the world offers, yet to have no one to share it with, no one to love, no

one to connect with.

The eight blessings we've explored in this series are not just abstract principles; they are the foundation for a life of purpose, meaning, and connection. They are the building blocks of a life that is rich in social capital, a life that makes a difference in the world. They are the path to a truly renewed and authentic self.



The beginning of everything new starts here.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that
he gave his one and only Son, that
whoever believes in him shall not
perish but have eternal life.