



**Let's
begin
here**

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We know you hate directions. But you can always tear out this page and find your own way through the book.

It's plain and simple.

- 1 Read and discuss a chapter.**
- 2 Each person chooses one of eight experiments to carry out . . . or make up some of your own.**
- 3 Journal your thoughts on our pages. (Why else would we give you so much white space?)**
- 4 Share your stories with the group next week and on thekingdomexperiment.com.**

The point of *The Kingdom Experiment* is intentional living. To work things out in community. To share life and stories while we're at it. To grapple with what good news means in the context of this specific time and place.

We'd love to know that once you're done with this book it will be impossible to read the Beatitudes without understanding them as a present reality. The kingdom is here *now*. And the blessings Christ promises are just icing on the cake when we make a commitment to living his way.

And if this book helps you turn this way of living into a habit, we wouldn't complain about that either.

It's like unpacking. And boy is this suitcase big.

The eight Beatitudes are found at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. They aren't catchphrases or proverbs meant to stand alone . . . so don't even try the esoteric thing and Scripture-drop these on an unsuspecting brother—you know, to gain super-Christian points or something.

By opening his teaching with these counter-intuitive statements, Jesus was creating some tension that he resolved throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. That's why we can—and should—draw liberally from the whole passage as a way to contextualize what the Beatitudes look like when they are lived out. It might give us a more holistic picture of kingdom living.

Things to think about:

This particular sermon mattered for some reason. Both Matthew and Luke chose to write it down, though it's believed that Jesus would

have given hundreds of similar messages during his three-year ministry. Judging by its length, this was no small hand cramp.

Also, the folks who were listening would have understood the significance of *how* and *where* Jesus delivered this sermon. You see, Jesus was constantly fulfilling the prophecy of Old Testament Scriptures, which is why the Pharisees could never quite write him off.

Here's some context from where the people stood. Israel's entire existence is shaped around one epic event: their exodus out of Egypt. While in the desert, the prophet Moses climbed up a mountain and received a word from God. He called it the law, which represented ways they could please God and learn about his heart.

The chance to know this previously-abstract God got them real excited. For like a minute. And then they spent the rest of their lives breaking all the laws and trying to clean up after themselves.

Thus began a vicious cycle of elected priests who went around policing the Ten Commandments (and some of their own laws) with the belief that if all of Israel could go one day without sinning, God would come to earth in the form of a king . . . flowing robe, long gray beard, and lots of perks to pass around. Right?

Wrong.

Israel's attempt at perfection is unsuccessful to say the least.

Fast-forward a good thousand years, give or take some change. Now Jesus climbs up a different mountain and says he has an updated word from God. Mainly, that he is the new word. A living embodiment of God's new law.

He even proclaims, “You have heard that the law of Moses says . . . But I say” (Matt. 5:21-22).

Like we said, prophecy fulfilled. Only this isn’t the kind of Savior everyone has been dreaming up.

Right away Jesus begins asking the people to repent, which really just means to rethink . . . everything. He says there is a different kingdom at hand, and that this kingdom will be counter to everything they’ve known. Which gets them awfully excited considering their current economic, social, and spiritual conditions are less than par. And we’re talking way less. Let’s just say between Caesar and the Jewish priests, it seemed pointless to even suit up.

Jesus’ main intention for speaking a blessing over the disenfranchised was to assign them worth in a way no one had before. He was flipping things upside down. Establishing his kingdom in the margins. More than that, he was entering into a covenant with the people—promising to actively fulfill that declaration of blessing in their lives.

Often when we read the Beatitudes out of context, we turn them into conditional statements. *If I want God’s blessing, then I better seek after persecution or petition tragedy.* But that’s missing the point. These blessings aren’t necessarily mandates, but rather natural manifestations of kingdom living.

There’s something else we’ve got to know. What’s the deal with the two separate, slightly differing accounts of this sermon?

Couldn’t Matthew and Luke have compared notes or something? Meaning, Luke was short and to the point, always including woes that make us kind of sad. He also concentrated heavily on physical trials. Matthew, on the other hand, left out the woes and seemed to embrace

spiritual trials alongside the physical kind.

Like authors these days, each had a unique purpose for his message. Something specific he was trying to get across. Matthew wanted to give people a picture of the new kingdom—the good things God was up to. Luke was more concerned with showing people the problems with the old kingdom and the things Christ came to alleviate.

Regardless of the writers’ differences, the message is the same. The kingdom has come. It’s *already* here because Jesus brought it with him. But it’s *not yet* complete until he returns to perfect it. It’s the kingdom of the *already* and the *not yet*. Which is where we live—between the tension. And it’s a messy place to be.