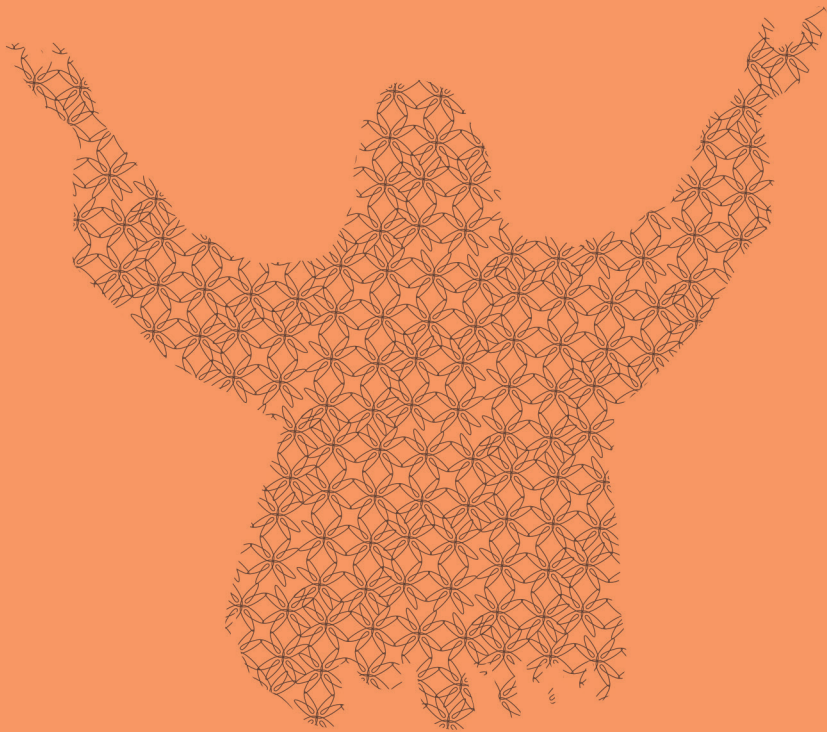


DIALOG

The Beatitudes

LIVING A BLESSED LIFE



Facilitator's Guide

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SESSION

I

THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Focus Scriptures: Matthew 5:1-3; James 4:1-8

Session Goal: To help group members understand what it means to be “poor in spirit.”

OPENING OUR MINDS

Option 1

Begin by asking your group if they would rather...

- *Be tall or short?*
- *Be an athlete or musician?*
- *Go 50 years in the past or 50 years in the future?*
- *Be invisible or read minds?*
- *Age from the neck up only or age from the neck down only?*
- *Have super speed or super strength?*
- *Be able to fly or swim under water without having to hold your breath?*
- *Be rich or poor?*

Option 2

Invite your group to think about what it means to be rich. Then ask,

- **How do you know if you are rich?**
- **What are the ways you know other people are rich?**
- **Is there anything wrong with being rich? Why or why not?**

Invite your group to think about what it means to be poor. Then ask,

- **How do you know if you are poor?**
- **What are the ways you know other people are poor?**
- **Is there anything wrong with being poor? Why or why not?**

OPENING THE WORD

Understanding Matthew 5:1–3 and James 4:1–8

Matthew 5:1–3

Jesus chose His words carefully as He began His Sermon on the Mount. He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (5:3). But how can anyone who can claim the kingdom of heaven be “poor” in anything? The first Beatitude signals a radical departure. If being poor meant having no resources to help one’s self, then being poor in spirit would include people who recognize that they are spiritually helpless. They have no way to save themselves. Only those who recognize that they are poor in spirit will realize that they are totally dependent on God.

James 4:1–8

In chapter four, James warns his fellow believers to submit to God and not the influences of the world (v. 4). There were quarrels in the church and people were seeking their own way instead of seeking godly wisdom. They were friends with the world, which is in opposition to God. These believers were followers of God and at the same time captivated by the ways of the world—values and desires. Pride leads us down a path of self-centeredness; however, God “favors the humble.” The remedy for pride is submitting to God—turning our focus off self and, in humility, surrendering our wills to God.

Option 1

Share with the group that material wealth was often viewed as a sign of God’s blessing. The reverse of this belief was that the poor deserved their poverty. Viewing poverty as divine punishment for wrongdoing was comforting to people with great wealth and they viewed their wealth as a sign

of God's approval. Jesus did not say the kingdom of heaven belonged to the poor; it belonged to "the poor in spirit." If being poor meant having no resources to help one's self, then being poor in spirit would include people who recognize that they are spiritually helpless. They have no way to save themselves. Only those who recognize that they are poor in spirit will realize that they are totally dependent on God.

Read Matthew 5:1-3.

- **What do you think it means to be poor in spirit?**
- **What is the attitude of those who are "poor in spirit"?**
- **In what ways do pride and self-focus keep us from being "poor in spirit"?**

Read James 4:1-8.

- **According to verses 2-3, how important is our motives when we pray?**
- **How important is to pray with a true dependence on God?**
- **In what ways is the world opposed to the ways of God?**
- **What does it mean for someone to be a friend with the world? Can a follower of God still be a friend of the world? If not, why?**
- **How is pride a barrier to our relationship with God? What are the spiritual benefits of a humble spirit?**
- **What is the message of verses 7-8?**

Option 2

Divide your group in half. Assign one group Matthew 5:1-3 and the other group James 4:1-8. Give each group a pen/pencil and piece of paper. Ask each group to read their passage and write down 5 key thoughts from the meaning and message of their passage. Allow sufficient time for discussion, then bring the groups together. Give each group an opportunity to share their key thoughts. Follow up by asking,

- **How does the message of Matthew 5:1-3 and the message of James 4:1-8 work together?**

- **In what ways does an attitude of humility and submission create a life that is “poor in spirit”?**

OPENING OUR HEARTS

Option 1

Share with the group that Jesus told His followers that the kingdom of heaven belonged to those who recognize their complete poverty before God. Only by recognizing our total dependence on God and His grace could anyone hope to be part of the kingdom of heaven. For Jesus, the good news was that the new kingdom was for those who recognized that they needed God and could do nothing to save themselves. The kingdom of heaven was a kingdom built on God’s grace.

- **In what ways do acknowledging God’s authority and recognizing our dependence on Him foster a “poor in spirit” attitude?**
- **Why is it necessary to submit our lives totally to God—not holding back areas of our lives we want to control ourselves?**
- **How can we foster a “poor in spirit” attitude this week?**

Close in prayer.

Option 2

Being “poor in spirit” means that nothing we can do ourselves can please God. It means that we are “poor” inwardly and must depend on God’s grace and mercy. Those who humbly seek God and depend on Him will enter the kingdom of heaven.

- **How does a spirit of pride hinder a “poor in spirit” attitude?**
- **Is it possible for a person to be spiritually proud? If so, how could this hinder a “poor in spirit” attitude?**
- **Why is a submissive and humble spirit toward God important to our spiritual growth?**

- **How is understanding our utter dependence on God related to having a “poor in spirit” attitude?**

Invite your group to get silent before God. Ask them to prayerfully seek God with a humble and dependent spirit.

Imaginative Option

Close your time by asking your group to reflect on what it means to be “poor in spirit” and recognizing our need for God’s presence in our lives. As group members are in prayerful reflection, play the song *Bow the Knee* in the background.

Connect

WEEK I

the poor in spirit

THIS WEEK: We will begin our discussion on the Beatitudes. During this session we will focus on what it means to be “poor in spirit.”

THINK ABOUT THIS: What does it mean to seek God with a submissive and humble attitude?

PRAYER CONCERNS:

The Beatitudes

LIVING A BLESSED LIFE

Topics in this 7-week study include:

Session 1: *the poor in spirit*

Session 2: *those who mourn*

Session 3: *the meek*

Session 4: *the righteous and merciful*

Session 5: *the pure in heart*

Session 6: *the peacemakers*

Session 7: *the persecuted*

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