

# KINGDOM LIVING

A Study of the Sermon on the Mount

By Kay Daigle

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## A STUDY OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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### Appreciation

I owe many thanks to Deborah Herring who designed the beautiful cover.

I'm also once again grateful for Irish Kinney and Evelyn Babcock whose input on the consistency of the message and their eye for detail have been essential to the editing process of this and all my studies.

### Bible Translations Quoted

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# What to Know About This Study Guide

## Its Format

This study is written with few questions, but they're thought-provoking questions. It requires listening to God through his Word, being directed by open questions, and responding to what you've read and heard by writing down your thoughts.

Each week's study has three parts to make it easy to split it up or do at once, depending on your preference.

See [beyondordinarywomen.org](http://beyondordinarywomen.org) for previews of other studies or information about group purchases.

## Simple doesn't equate to shallow.

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deeply you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the verses. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but ask God to clarify and guide. The time you spend in the Scriptures with God gives him space to speak. Listen well, note your thoughts (simple journaling), share them with your small group and glean from one another's insights.

## Studying through three sections a week

If you like doing a little study at a time, each week's lesson is set up in three parts, but feel free to go through it in any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, consider spending two days on each part, writing on the optional starred section the second day. You may be amazed at what you see by reading the same passage twice. If you prefer to do the entire study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages first and then answer the questions at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. Stick to what works for your schedule.

## Additional reading and background information

The lesson provides background information pertinent to your understanding. Feel free to do your own research when you have interest or questions, but the group conversation will be focused on the passages studied by everyone.



A star identifies optional verses or suggested study for those with time and interest. The additional reading will help you wrestle with deeper insights into the passages.

## Words to Live By

The verses that begin each week's lesson are great choices for memorization.

## What you need

- A quiet place, if possible.
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don't have one, ask your group leader for suggestions, or email us at [info@beyondordinarywomen.org](mailto:info@beyondordinarywomen.org). Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using the NET Bible at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org), a free online Bible translation with study helps that is also available in print.)
- A notebook, laptop, or tablet to record your insights and answers which can easily be taken to your group meetings. If you're using a printed copy of this study, you can add a piece of paper after each lesson. (See Journaling 101 on p. 79 in the Appendix.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear as you read and pray.
- Someone, or even better a group, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge.

## Best practices for group get-togethers (For more detail see the Appendix & BOW small group leader videos.)

Plan a regular place, time, and leader.

The leader should—

- read the section "Tips for Leaders" in the Appendix.
- watch BOW's free, short videos: "Tips for Leading a Journaling Study" (<https://vimeo.com/album/4256789>) and the series "Listening Well" (<https://vimeo.com/album/4065298>). If your group includes Millennials, watch the series "Millennials: The Good, the Bad, and the Ministry" at <https://vimeo.com/album/5118401>.
- start on time, not waiting for late arrivals.
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit.
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it.
- be a great encourager.
- avoid dominating the conversation.
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own thoughts.
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals.
- contact absent group members to encourage them.
- email the group weekly to remind them of the upcoming meeting, and share her excitement.

As a group—

- encourage one another.
- don't interrupt the speaker.
- love one another.
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice.
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God.
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share personally.
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement.
- come prepared and on time with your study, notebook (journal), and Bible.
- share freely and honestly.

### If your group meets within a larger group in a church setting

- Look for a woman gifted in teaching God's Word to teach a short lesson after the small group discussion. Watch BOW's short, free video "Why Use Live Teachers, not Video?" at <https://vimeo.com/209323216>. (For help in preparing to teach, see our collection of videos at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/resources/#biblestudies> or contact us at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>.)
- Because educators say that we learn best when we focus in a group on the members' personal study rather than the teacher's comments, the discussion should precede the teaching time.
- The teacher may spend 15-25 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time frame. The majority of the time together should be invested in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell what they have discussed.

### Schedule Suggestions

As you work to both connect those in your group and study the scriptures well, it's great to begin with an introductory meeting. That means that this study will require ten weeks to complete. Look at your church calendar and try to fit it into a block of weeks with no more than one break for the sake of consistency.

Each week set aside 50-60 minutes for small group and more if there's no teacher.

# Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is the most famous of Jesus' discourses recorded in Scripture. Even people outside the church are often familiar with several of its verses. In it Jesus provides some hard teaching for us as Americans, just as it has for other cultures throughout the ages. That's why many teachers have disavowed any application of Jesus' words to the present but suggest it's only for his coming earthly kingdom. And yet everything here is taught elsewhere in the New Testament to believers in the First Century.

As the author of Hebrews says, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13, ESV).

We're going to believe Jesus when he suggested that we ignore his teaching in this sermon at our own peril, so we'll be applying it to our lives as individuals and to the church at large.

"Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, but it did not collapse because its foundation had been laid on rock. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the flood came, and the winds beat against that house, and it collapsed—it was utterly destroyed!" (Matthew 7:24-27).

I've struggled with this Sermon for months now as I've participated in a different study on it at my church because it's a very convicting section of the Bible for me personally. But my purpose in studying the Bible isn't to feel good about myself but to know Jesus better and become more like him as his disciple.

If this is your heart as you open God's Word, the Sermon on the Mount is a great place to be. I look forward to sharing this great discourse with you over the next nine weeks.

Kay Daigle

June 2021





# KINGDOM LIVING

## Week One: Humility

### WORDS TO LIVE BY

*Flourishing are the poor in spirit because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

*Flourishing are the mourners because they will be comforted.*

*Flourishing are the humble because they will inherit the earth.<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus in Matthew 5:3-5

We often equate blessing with positive things. When good things happen, we say that we are blessed. We Americans often identify blessings with wealth, status, celebrity, power, education and/or material goods. The Jews of Jesus' day weren't much different in that regard. Jesus lets them know, however, that his kingdom is an upside-down kingdom, and those who don't look blessed in the eyes of the culture may be the very people who are.

Today Jesus speaks through the Sermon to us and our Christian culture, asking us to turn our thinking upside down to understand what it means to be truly blessed—or as we'll see as we investigate the meaning of the Greek word, if we want to have lives that flourish. Jesus considers the things that the rich and powerful often disdain to be the very things that produce a life that thrives.

The Sermon on the Mount speaks truthfully to our hearts and lives. This year I've been studying it in-depth for the first time in many years, and I've been convicted of how far I am from Jesus' description of the ethics of the kingdom.

Will you join me in prayerfully considering his message for each of us as his people? Let's listen to the Sermon as if we are part of the crowd gathered on that hillside as Jesus spoke at a time and in a place where the religious elite were men educated at religious schools who focused on many rules for living. And yet, here was the rabbi Jesus breaking all the molds. What is he saying to you, and to us as people of his kingdom? Or are we of his kingdom at all?

### Part One Study

The theme or major idea of this great sermon is kingdom living. In it Jesus provides an ethic, or way of living, for his followers, the citizens of God's kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by Jonathan T. Pennington in Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), xv.

It begins with what we call the Beatitudes. Each of nine statements starts with the Greek word *makarios*, meaning “happy, blissful, fortunate, or flourishing.”<sup>2</sup> Many scholars count eight beatitudes because the last two statements develop the same subject, but we'll consider there to be nine beatitudes (all begin with *makarios*) and study them in threes, as Scot McKnight suggests. “The three central moral themes of the Beatitudes are humility (of the poor), justice, and peace.”<sup>3</sup>

To warn you, this part of this week’s study is longer than the other two because it’s important to set the context before we dig into the passage. It may help some of you to divide it into two parts. Either way, expect shorter assignments from here on.

**Read the “Background of the Sermon” in the Appendix on p. 71, and write down what you find interesting, new to you or difficult. Note any questions you have.**

**Read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12, and the entire Sermon as you have time, either in the Appendix (NET Bible) on p. 65 or in your favorite version. As you go, highlight in yellow all references to the kingdom since that is a major theme. If you don’t want to mark in your Bible, use or even print the Appendix version. Go back and note what is said about the kingdom.**

- In light of the Sermon’s theme, kingdom living or the ethic of the kingdom, what thoughts do you have after your initial reading?

Dr. Jonathan Pennington explains that the term macarism is used in literary circles for pronouncements that “a certain way of being in the world produces human flourishing and felicity.”<sup>4</sup> He goes on to specify that “Jesus’ macarisms are grace-based wisdom invitations to human flourishing in God’s coming kingdom.”<sup>5</sup> Generally macarisms are contrasted with woes, but in this case those come later in Matthew 23:13-36.<sup>6</sup>

I love this explanation of *makarios* by English writer Elizabeth Rundle Charles: “a heart in harmony with itself, at rest, content, satisfied, full of all the music of which human hearts are capable, from the soft murmurs of content to the thunder of the

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<sup>2</sup> Pennington, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount, The Story of God Bible Commentary*. Zondervan Academic, 2013, Kindle Edition, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Pennington, 42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

many waters of ecstatic rapture: all that is involved in all the words expressive of human bliss, reaching up to Divine creative joy.”<sup>7</sup>

The translation of the Old Testament to Greek called the Septuagint was the Bible used in Jesus’ time. There was no New Testament yet. According to Dr. Pennington’s study of it, *makarios* wasn’t used for statements of divine blessing in the Septuagint. The idea of God bestowing a blessing utilized a different Greek word. Instead, *makarios* centers on the idea of human flourishing: “Jesus begins his public ministry by painting a picture of what the state of true God-centered human flourishing looks like.”<sup>8</sup>

I found that it helped my understanding of the Beatitudes to substitute the word “flourishing” for the word “blessed” that begins each of the nine statements in most translations. Some translators use the word happy, but that often leads us to an incorrect understanding or expectation from the saying. Flourishing is more specific and helps prevent an interpretation that such people feel good all the time.

Dr. Pennington also points out that the “for” in each beatitude means “because.” He explains: “This translation makes sense of the whole of each Beatitude and communicates the paradoxical nature of the content.”<sup>9</sup> So we’ll quote his translation as we study through the Beatitudes.

His translation of the first beatitude is “Flourishing are the poor in spirit because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.”<sup>10</sup>

**Write down your insights about this first beatitude based on the following questions. (Please stay away from Bible notes or commentaries as you do this study, so you can allow God’s Word to speak. After you’ve answered all the questions for this lesson, discuss it with a group and only then listen to teaching or read notes.)**

- Meditate on the word poor or the concept of poverty. How does a state of poverty express the kind of spirit that fits a kingdom person? (Note that Luke’s version of this beatitude omits the word spirit.)
- Look up these verses and then write a definition of what it might mean to be poor in spirit: Psalm 34:18; 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; 66:2c.



<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021), 48.

<sup>8</sup> Pennington, 47.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

In regard to the previous question, also read Psalm 138:6; Proverbs 29:23; Luke 18:9-14. Journal your thoughts.

- Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is theirs—the poor in spirit. It’s present tense—in their present reality it belonged to them. Journal any thoughts you have about how this affects your view of poor in spirit, if at all.
- How is God using this first beatitude to encourage and/or challenge you today?

## Part Two Study

In this section we’ll look at the second beatitude as translated by Dr. Pennington: “Flourishing are the mourners because they will be comforted.”<sup>11</sup>

**Reread all the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 and journal as you focus on this second one, considering the following verses and questions:**

- The Scriptures include a literary form called lament, especially in the Psalms and of course Lamentations, as a form of mourning. Read Psalm 51 (a psalm of lament written by King David after confronted with his sin by the prophet Nathan). But mourning over sin isn’t the only subject of lament. Read Isaiah 61:1-4 and consider the source of mourning here in light of the context, especially v. 4. Read also Daniel 9:3-19; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 4:8-10 and Revelation 21:4. What kinds of mourning are reflected in these passages?
- How would you connect the first beatitude (poor in spirit) with this one? In other words, what relationship do you see between them? (This isn’t a trick question. There is no right answer when I ask such questions. I’m not looking for anything specific. Just write down your thoughts. Don’t look it up in a commentary or your footnotes, but do ask God for insight.)
- How is God using this second beatitude to encourage and/or challenge you today?



Read the story of David’s repentance in 2 Samuel 12:1-24. (If you’re unfamiliar with his sin, read also 2 Samuel 11.) Write down your thoughts in light of this beatitude.

## Part Three Study

Now we’ll consider the third beatitude in Pennington’s translation: “Flourishing are the humble because they will inherit the earth.”<sup>12</sup> The Greek word for humble here is often translated meek.

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<sup>11</sup> Pennington, xv.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xv.

We often misunderstand the word meek or gentle in some translations. It's generally assumed to mean a weak person with no backbone—someone like Marty McFly's dad George in "Back to the Future" for you fans of the 80's movie. However, that's not the traditional understanding of the word. In fact, it wasn't until the 1700's that such a definition arose.<sup>13</sup>

"For many of our predecessors, meekness was a form of power, not of weakness. It referred not to those who never get angry but to those who never lose their temper. The meek are not the weak but the self-controlled, not those who shrink back but those who willingly choose to yield. We might paraphrase the beatitude, 'Blessed are those who yield'—to others and to God."<sup>14</sup>

D.A. Carson defines it this way: "Meekness is a controlled desire to see the other's interests advance ahead of one's own."<sup>15</sup>

**Journal your thoughts as you answer the following questions (FYI: Most of today's translations translate the Greek word as "gentle."):**

- Jesus says that it's the meek (gentle) who will inherit the earth. How does that fly in the face of what our culture teaches is necessary to win or thrive in a career, a disagreement, politics or even as the church?
- Jesus described himself as meek in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry." Jesus invites us to learn from his meekness. From what you know of his life, how do you see this character trait in action?
- The Sermon isn't the only place God prioritizes meekness. Read the following verses, jotting down your thoughts: Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 3:14-16; James 1:19-21.
- How do the first three beatitudes connect with humility, which we've called the theme of this lesson?
- How is God using this beatitude to encourage and/or challenge you today?



Read the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 12:7 and 13:1-12, considering how Abraham illustrates meekness. Write down your insights.

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<sup>13</sup> Eklund, 155.

<sup>14</sup> Eklund, 156-157.

<sup>15</sup> D.A. Carson, *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount And His Confrontation with the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 20.