



The Sacred Journey

Small Group Study Guide

The following study guide is offered free of charge as an aide to walking through The Sacred Journey as a small group study or as points for personal reflection during your study of the book. My suggestion would be to use the book as guide for an 8 week study, including the introduction and a complete reading of the Beatitudes in the first session, or offer it as a 9 week study, with the introduction and complete reading of the Beatitudes in the first session.

It is my sincere hope that The Sacred Journey will offer encouragement, challenging, and ultimately lead to increased spiritual growth. Many blessings, fellow pilgrim on this, our Christian sojourn!

Pastor Chris Surber

“Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "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 5:1-12 NIV)

Chapter 1: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
(Matthew 5:3 NIV)

Discussion Questions:

1. Proverbs 12:15 says that “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.” Can you think of a time in your life when you did something the hard way only to later realize that you could have sought advice and saved much unneeded toil?
2. What can we do, in light of Jesus words that the poor in spirit will be blessed, to learn the pathway of humility?
3. What practical things can be done to learn humility?
4. Sometimes people think that to be humble means to be weak. Is humility only for those who are weak?
5. What does the Apostle Paul mean when he writes that “...God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” (1 Corinthians 1:27 NIV)
6. What about the Apostle’s words in 2 Corinthians 12:10, where he writes, “That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (NIV)
7. What present weaknesses exist in your life, your body, or the circumstances of your church that are opportunities to celebrate our weakness in order to allow God’s strength to shine through?
8. What does it mean to depend upon God daily?
9. How important is it to practice the spiritual discipline of sacrifice, giving to the poor for example, to be reminded of our spiritual poverty?
10. What is more important in the eyes of God; Success or obedience?

Chapter 2: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4 NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be happy?
2. Is there any significant difference between being happy and being joyful?
3. In Psalms 28:7 the Bible says that “The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.” (NIV)
4. What does it mean that He is our strength?
5. In what ways is He our shield? Is this purely a metaphor or does the Lord actually guard us?
6. Perhaps it is possible to have a measure of happiness in this life when we constantly pursue things to please us for the time being. Is it possible to have lasting joy apart from God?
7. Have there been times in your life when you knew the joy of the Lord even though you traveled a very hard road?
8. The Bible tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7 NIV)
9. What are some ways that we can practice this principal?
10. The author says that shame enslaves but guilt offers the hope of finding healing as it leads us to repentance. Is there a difference between shame and guilt?

Chapter 3: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5 NIV)

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be successful in our culture?
2. What does it mean to be successful as a Christian? Is there a difference?
3. There is a thread of thought throughout the Bible of God blessing His servants. What is the nature of God’s blessing?
4. Is God’s blessing primarily temporal (earthly) or eternal (spiritual)?
5. The makes the statement that material wealth is not inherently evil but that it can, and often is, a major stumbling block for spiritual growth and dependence upon God. Do you agree with this assessment?
6. What does it mean to die to self and live for Christ?
7. What can we do, in concrete terms, to engage a culture where earthly prosperity is often looked at as the highest end of living?
8. How can we reflect the radical beauty of the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ in our homes, in our churches, in our communities, and beyond?
9. In what ways can we practice submission to the will of God in our lives?
10. In what ways have you seen the Gospel message complicated and convoluted away from the simple message of receiving the love of God in Christ as a little child receives his father’s love? How can we simplify our faith without dumbing down our devotion?

Chapter 4: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” (Matthew 5:6 NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. The author shares the story of attempting to offer a cold bottle of water to an obviously thirsty man in the desert of Arizona. The man refused to take the water. Has there ever been a time when you remember refusing the help of a friend or of the Lord when it would have been good for you?
2. It has been said that change is what happens when the pain of holding on becomes greater than our fear of letting go. Why do people so often struggle to leave behind hungers and thirst for destructive things, knowing that God’s way is better?
3. Have you ever struggled with letting go of destructive habits, sinful lifestyles that you knew you were better off without?
4. How do we “retrain” our appetites and thirsts?
5. What does it mean to hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness?
6. Often people experience a deep desire for the things of God initially when they become a follower of Jesus. How do we maintain a hunger for God?
7. What practical and daily exercises and disciplines can a believer employ in order to starve bad hungers and build their appetite for good things?
8. Does anyone in the group have an example of practices that have helped to build and maintain a healthy appetite for the things of God?
9. Does our appetite for the Bible grow or diminish the more often that we read it?
10. Is there a point when we have prayed enough and no longer have a need for regular prayer and devotion?

Chapter 5: *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” (Matthew 5:7 NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. Some misunderstand the relationship between showing and receiving mercy. Does God show mercy to us on the basis of how much mercy we show to other people?
2. Why does the Bible compel us to be a people who show mercy?
3. What does it mean in concrete terms to show mercy?
4. Can you think of a specific example in recent memory when you showed mercy when to do otherwise would have been appropriate in the world's eyes?
5. What are some ways that we can grow in our ability to practice mercy?
6. What does it mean to you that since God has showered mercy upon us we should shower it upon others?
7. The author makes the claim that there is a difference between mercy and grace. He says that grace is loving forbearance of wrath rightly incurred, while mercy is the continual love of God in our lives. Grace is how God handles sin while mercy is how God handles us. How do you understand the difference between grace and mercy? Is there a difference?
8. Do you find it helpful in your ability to show mercy to others when you consider that we are all imperfect and broken?
9. Do you find it helpful to consider that since God loved you enough to show you mercy in spite of your imperfection then you should remember that God also loves other imperfect people?
10. What are some specific examples where you have received mercy, either from God or another person in your life?

Chapter 6: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” (Matthew 5:8 NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be pure in heart?
2. Is it possible to please God apart from the right attitude of the heart?
3. The Bible says that God judges the heart. “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7 NIV) Is there a difference between heart devotion and outward signs of devotion?
4. Which pleases God?
5. Which brings lasting joy in the lives of followers of Jesus?
6. The author uses the analogy of jumping off of a cliff in relation to embarking on the life of faith in Christ. Does this analogy hold true in your own life? Has trusting God ever felt like jumping off of a cliff?
7. What are some specific ways that you have had to trust God and jump off of the cliffs in your life?
8. Share some specific examples of God’s faithfulness in those times?
9. Have there been disappointments where it was hard to see the hand of God, though you trust Him? Be honest. This passage of Scripture tells us that God honors purity of the heart. He is not pained by our pain. He is not shamed by our shame. His love is complete and unfailing.
10. What are cliffs that remain in your life from which you need to trust God and leap?

Chapter 7: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*
(Matthew 5:9 NIV)

Discussion Questions:

1. There are many debates and discussions in the modern Church over what the right role of Christians is in the public square. What does it mean to be a peacemaker?
2. Is it primarily the exercise of political rights, such as voting?
3. Is it primarily the feeding of the poor and seeking justice for those who are oppressed?
4. Is peacemaking primarily about evangelism and bringing people into a life of peace with God?
5. Is it all of these things? Is it any of these things?
6. At the Cross Jesus bore a violent death for the sake of securing peace for mankind through faith in Him. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24 NIV) What is our right response to the world in light of the violence He endured for our salvation?
7. What are some ways that we can be sacrificial in light of the sacrifice of Jesus in order to share the peacemaking ministry of Jesus with the world around us?
8. Ephesians 4:15 says, “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” (NIV) What does it mean to speak the truth in love?
9. Share examples of when you have failed to speak the truth in love. Be honest.
10. What are some ways that we can remember to speak the truth in love and share the sacrificial example of Jesus to the world around us?

Chapter 8: *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10 NIV)*

Discussion Questions:

1. The author seems to imply that much of what passes for Christian persecution in our culture is a lot of “sanctified whining.” Is the Church in our land persecuted?
2. Given our relative comfort and freedom to worship, is it difficult for you to identify on any deep level with the suffering of the early Church?
3. There are many Christians around the world who suffer terribly for their faith. Ask someone in the group to lead a prayer for those who suffer for their faith around the world. What can we do to support those brothers and sister in Christ who suffer? Look for specific ways.
4. Many in our day are rightly concerned with protecting freedom of public worship and religious expression. However, in this politically charged religious climate, is it possible that some have allowed their faith to become too consumed with fighting political battles and less consumed with spiritual warfare and spiritual disciplines than they should?
5. How can we identify with the suffering spoken of by Jesus in this section of the Beatitudes?
6. Is there room in your life to find ways to go out of your way to encounter suffering?
7. What looks more like Jesus, writing a check to a soup kitchen or serving soup to a homeless man or woman?
8. Is it possible to find an opportunity to do just that?
9. Is there value in doing just that? Why or why not?
10. God is calling us to identify with those who suffer. The Sacred Journey is a lifelong journey of identification with the suffering of Jesus, the beauty of God’s grace, basking in that and sharing it with the world. In what ways is it helpful to view the Christian life as a pilgrim’s journey rather than a onetime destination of faith?