



3 Questions to Start the Day is part of the *Abundant Grace Daily* series of devotionals. Since God's grace is so bountiful, how do you access it daily?

This devotional unpacks the first three of Jesus' Beatitudes. From each Beatitude arises a vital question for you to ask yourself at the beginning of each day, and to keep in mind at pivotal moments during the day.

This is a free resource. It may be copied or shared without charge. I count it an honour to give back a little from what God has given me.

As a courtesy, please email me (roform@gmail.com) if you plan to use this with groups or in a mentoring friendship. It would be motivational and spur me on to create more devotionals. I would also update you straight away if new resources become available.

Please contact me if you wish to translate this into another language.

Day 1: Three Primary Attitudes

What are some of your waking thoughts? Do you have an early morning prayer rhythm? The first three Beatitudes are the front door to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and offer a rhythm of grace at pivotal points throughout each day.

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.

(Matthew 5:3-5)

The Beatitudes spell out attitudes of authentic spirituality in our relationships—to God, ourselves, and others. Consider these words of Jesus to his disciples in the form of three questions to kick off the day, and to keep in mind at key moments throughout the day. They don't represent a sure-fire formula for instant holiness. Rather, as you pull up the blinds on a new day, there are three primary attitudes to adopt, if you want to experience the blessedness of the Beatitudes. ***Blessed*** is the most repeated word in the Beatitudes. It means that if you want to put yourself in the place of God's blessing, or if you wish to meet with God's approval, you need to be a person who adopts the attitudes of the Beatitudes

Among other questions that you ask yourself each day, this first one is crucial to your spiritual well-being.

Question 1: Will I be Depending on God Today?

Attitude: Humility

Blessed are the poor in spirit. The word used for ***poor*** in Matthew 5:3 is the word for absolute, grinding poverty. For this person, every day is a rainy day.

Notice that Jesus said, ***poor in spirit***. He didn't say, "Blessed are the poor spirited," or "Blessed are the wimps." To be poor in spirit means to be utterly dependent on God for everything. It is the attitude of spiritual brokenness.

This notion of spiritual poverty would have been countercultural to those to whom Jesus spoke. The Pharisees would have said, “Blessed are the confident and proud” (Luke 18:9-12). In our day, people would say, “Blessed are the self-assertive, blessed are the independent, or blessed are the rich in spirit.” It still doesn’t sit well to think of ourselves as helpless in God’s hands. We much prefer to be in control, thinking that we surely must be able to work ourselves out of difficulties. I know that I do.

This first question, “Will I be depending on God?” is one I need to return to daily, sometimes hourly. I find it helpful to list the main activities of the day each morning in my prayer journal, and to tell God I am completely dependent on his Spirit, if the tasks of the day are going to amount to anything worthwhile.

Psalm 127:1 is a Bible verse that both haunts and inspires me. It starts, “Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.” Too often I find myself building the house. I am trying to be both builder and architect. The attitude Jesus is encouraging in this first Beatitude is reliance on the Builder. One of the attitudes of the virtuous, according to our Lord Jesus, is that of brokenness, or spiritual bankruptcy. It means living in a posture of humble dependence.

This first question implies that we see ourselves in front of a holy God in complete poverty of spirit. We come to his table with nothing to offer.

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

The entry point to Christ’s kingdom is poverty of spirit. Jesus once told a story about a Pharisee who stood in God’s presence and told him how impressive he was, and a Publican who bowed his head and said, “God be merciful to me, sinner that I am.” That’s how the Publican entered the kingdom of heaven. It’s the beginning of the Christian life, as well as the whole journey. To access God’s abundant grace, we need to come, with the words of the old hymn, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling.”

This first Beatitude is like the soil in which every other Christian virtue grows.

Every day we need to ask, “To what extent will I be acknowledging God’s sufficiency and depending on him today?”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, these words are for me today. I confess my pride and unwillingness to depend fully on you. My need for you is total not partial. Lead me by your Spirit into an attitude of humble dependence hour by hour I pray. I’m so grateful to experience life in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Reflection:

- Why is it so difficult to admit daily that you are “poor in spirit”?
- Review the events on your calendar for the last week. What are some examples of your depending on God, or acting independent of him?
- What has the Holy Spirit said to you through this first Beatitude?

Practice:

- What are some practical ways that you could make poverty of spirit a habit, rather than something you admit only when you are desperate?
- Daniel prayed three times a day. How might you start the day with question one, and fold it into morning, midday and evening?

Related Scriptures for Meditation:

- Isaiah 57:15
- Luke 18:9-14
- Psalm 34:18-22
- James 4:10

Day 2

Question 2: Will I Mourn over Sin Today?

Attitude: Sensitivity to Sin

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

The word translated ***mourn*** is one of the strongest Greek words for grief that Jesus could have chosen. It is the word for wailing, like the sort of passionate lament you hear at a Tangi (a Māori funeral in New Zealand).

A person who mourns in this way, is in deep soul anguish and contrition. Paul captured something of the desperation of a true mourner when he said, *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?* (Romans 7:24). To mourn over sin means to be sensitive to sin, and to feel the pain. Jesus' words include sensitivity to the pain of my sin, as well as the ability to feel the pain of the sin around us.

Notice though that Jesus calls these mourners ***blessed***. Sounds strange? Yet it is one of the upside-down values in his kingdom. This sorrow is sacred. It is sorrow over our sin and the sin all around us. When we get a glimpse of the way sin wounds us, damages others, and grieves the Holy Spirit, we experience holy sorrow. And our hearts soften. In King David's words, it is crying out to God, *My sin is always before me. Against you and you only have I sinned* (Psalm 51:3-4).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the moaners," nor "To be congratulated are the complainers." He was saying that the people who meet with God's approval come to terms with their own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of people around them.

To ***mourn*** is to acknowledge how sinful we are at the core of our being. It's avoiding any attempts to rationalize our wrongdoing. Those who mourn over their sin, Jesus promises, are truly blessed.

This second question, "Will I mourn over sin today?" highlights a growth area for me. The culture of our day conspires against any sort of sensitivity toward sin. Once, in a family discussion, we reflected on how we can become desensitized to sin. Coarse language, that once made us recoil,

was now tolerated without a flicker. Violence, that once offended us to the core of our being, had become imperceptibly acceptable. Sexual impropriety, that once shocked us, had become the new norm.

One of my hobbies is to collect significant questions. I have added four recently: 1. Are you growing? 2. Do you want to change? 3. Is your desire for holiness greater? 4. Has your hatred for sin increased? Questions 3 and 4 capture the spirit of the second Beatitude.

If the attitude behind the first Beatitude is that of humility, the attitude of the virtuous in this second Beatitude is contrition or sensitivity to sin. In the first question to open the day, “Will I be depending on God today?” the focus is on the greatness and glory of God. As we look at him, the only right response is poverty of spirit.

When we ask ourselves the second question at the start of the day, “Will I mourn over my sin today?” we look at ourselves and the world around us with God’s great holiness in mind.

... for they shall be comforted.

As we grieve over our sin and the spiritually broken world around us, God pours out his comfort. He refashions our hearts to reflect his purity. Our tears turn into prayers. Having received God’s comfort, we become more compassionate and more attune to the needs in the broken world around us.

Reflection:

- Why is it so easy to gloss over our sins, instead of practicing this second Beatitude?

Practice:

- Start the day with question one and two, and fold them into midday and evening.
- Instead of just skimming over news of violence and other forms of evil, pause and grieve.

Prayer:

Father of all comfort, please burn such an awareness of your holiness into my mind that I will be quick to confess the deceitfulness of my heart and mourn over my sin. Make me more sensitive to the injustice and pain around me. And as I am, pour your comfort into my needy soul. Amen.

Related Scriptures for Meditation:

- Isaiah 6:1-8
- Psalm 51:1-12
- James 4:8-9
- Romans 7:21-25

Day 3

Question 3: Will I Be Gentle with Fellow Sinners Today?

Attitude: Gentleness

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:5

When Jesus said ***blessed are the meek***, the attitude he addressed was gentleness toward people. In Jesus' day, the word ***meek*** in Matthew 5:5 was used of a wild stallion that had been broken in. The horse had become "meek or gentle." Also, those who were polite, courteous, and considerate in the First Century were often called, "meek."

To many, meek sounds like weak. But Jesus was referring to strength under control. Meekness is having the power or authority but refusing to use it.

This Beatitude reminds me of a story Jesus told about a servant who was forgiven a debt of millions of dollars. When the man met a fellow servant who owed him a few dollars, he was unwilling to forgive the paltry debt. The first servant showed lack of meekness or gentleness to a fellow sinner (Matthew 18:21-35).

When we are truly gentle, we remember that greatly forgiven people forgive greatly. How do you relate to this third question? Are you gentle with sinners, even those who sin repeatedly against you? Or are you far too often harsh and hard like the unforgiving servant?

The Lord Jesus is not calling for a group of insipid, milquetoast followers. Meek Christ-followers are not doormats. They are those who keep their strength in check. Most importantly, they are people who extend graciousness to less-than-perfect fellow pilgrims.

Stop and review your relationship with those closest to you: your spouse, your son or daughter, your parents. If I interviewed them, would they say you were treating them gently? If I asked the people at work whether they considered you a gentle person, what would they say? When you bump into people who irritate you, how do you react? Do you insist on your own

rights? Do you act as if you are perfect? Or do you treat people who annoy you or disappoint you with grace—better than they deserve?

If your reaction to this review is the same as mine, you'll know that this is an area for growth. Allow this response to drive you to your knees in dependence on God (back to your first question for the day). Remember that you are never more like your Heavenly Father than when you treat a sinner with great grace.

The Gentle and Lowly One

When Jesus described who he really was (and is), he said to his disciples, *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls* (Matthew 11:29). You will never be more like Jesus than when, like him, you gently treat fellow sinners better than they deserve, and take the humble place.

Asking the three questions from the first three Beatitudes will start you on a journey to an authentic spirituality that pleases God. You will inherit the earth.

Reflection:

- Why is it so difficult to be gentle with people who offend us?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, gentle and humble in heart, teach me Your way of meekness. Help me to yield control, to trust Your justice, and to walk in quiet strength. May I inherit not the fleeting power of this world, but the eternal peace of Your kingdom. Amen.

Related Scriptures for Meditation:

- Numbers 12:1-9
- Psalm 37:10-11
- Isaiah 29:17-19
- Matthew 11:28-30

Colossians 3:12-17

Day 4

Living the First Three Beatitudes Every Day

I've completed many devotionals and am incredibly grateful to God for them. However, I often engage in what might be called, "Bible skimming." This feeds my desire for a sense of accomplishment, and my skimming makes me feel good momentarily, but it often results in shallow discipleship.

Day 4 in this plan on the first three Beatitudes is a call to linger over them again by reading Jesus' words slowly and meditatively. Please use this devotion to engage in spiritual slowing. Allow the Holy Spirit to do a deeper work.

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.

(Matthew 5:3-5)

There's a lovely cadence about these Beatitudes.

- Humility before God
- Sorrow over sin
- Gentleness toward fellow sinners.

This is more than a mere template. Rather it is kingdom members engaging in a gospel rhythm of grace: dependence, repentance, and graciousness.

Where does it start? On our knees.

1. Living Dependently: "Blessed are the Poor in Spirit"

It's the admission, moment by moment, that our need for God is not partial, it's total. Every day we whisper, "Lord Jesus, without you, I'm sunk."

Living this first Beatitude is more than quickly assenting to this truth at the start of the day. It is reminding ourselves repeatedly and prayerfully throughout each day, that we need Jesus.

One practical way of doing that is to pray before, during, and after each daily event. If it's an appointment, pause before you drive to it. Express your dependence on the Lord. Ask for a fresh filling of his Spirit. During the appointment, send prayer-grams to heaven. As you drive away, thank him for his help.

The attitude behind Beatitude One is humility. When we live like this, pride loses its grip. It's living in God's presence. Entering his kingdom daily.

What is the outcome? Sensitivity to sin.

2. Living Sensitively: “Blessed are Those who Mourn”

When we realize our spiritual poverty, we become sensitive to our sin and the world's. It's so easy to become desensitized to the evil that lurks in our heart—excusing sin rather than confessing it and repenting of it.

Instead, as we mourn over our sin and brokenness, our hearts become tender. We feel the pain of evil and injustice around us. We notice the pain of the world and bring it to God in prayer.

And as we practice this second Beatitude, paradoxically we don't become morbid. We experience a comfort and joy that flows from Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, who knew grief in a way we never will, and who prayed that we would know his joy in us and that our joy would overflow (John 15:11; 17:13).

How does our behaviour change? We treat fellow sinners graciously.

3. Living Gently: “Blessed are the Meek”

When we are truly poor in spirit, and mourn over our sinfulness, meekness begins to flow. No longer do we need to explode in anger; we choose a calm response. No longer do we need to be always right; we humbly listen and learn. No longer do we try to fix things; we ask God to change us first.

Every single day offers opportunities to practice meekness: in disagreements, in traffic, and in disappointing circumstances.

As you slow down and practice these three beatitudes, they will become your daily rhythm of grace:

- humbly depending on God for everything
- grieving over your sin and resonating with the world's pain
- treating others gently and humbly.

As you do, you will change, and a watching world will catch the fragrance of a Christlike life.

These first three Beatitudes are like a doorway into all eight Beatitudes and the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Reflection:

- What are some of the connections you note between these first three Beatitudes and the other five?
- How are these first three Beatitudes—poverty of spirit, mourning over our sins, and meekness—developed throughout the rest of Jesus' Sermon?
- What are some of the main things the Holy Spirit has put his finger on in your life throughout this devotional?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I long to fold these Beatitudes into every day of my life. Teach me daily what it really means to enter your kingdom through the 'poverty of spirit' gate. I long to grieve over what breaks your heart, and to experience your comfort and joy as I do. Teach me also to be gentle and lowly like you. May your kingdom come and your will be done as I do. Amen

Related Scriptures for Meditation:

- 1 Peter 5:6-7
- Galatians 6:1
- John 15:1-11



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