

How can we experience God's blessing in our lives?

Time and again I've heard people cry, "God hasn't blessed me. I ask Him for good things, but it doesn't help."

Or they complain, "I try so hard to do the right things and to be a good Christian, but it just doesn't work for me."

Others have tasted God's goodness and want more.

We all long for God's favor, don't we? And yet it often seems elusive.

What's the secret? *How can we experience God's blessing in our lives?*

The Beatitudes

Jesus answered our question in the "Beatitudes."

Each Beatitude begins with "Blessed are those who..."

Jesus makes it clear that *God wants to bless us!*

But he also makes it clear that the life of being blessed by God is not what you think.

For instance, Jesus says that God's blessing comes to those who are poor, grieving, shy, unfulfilled, and enduring mistreatment. Huh?

What's good about these struggles? Nothing!

We want wealth, happiness, popularity, success, and rewards for doing good, it's natural to want things to go well in our lives,

but these are not the deep blessings that God most wants to give us.

God wants to give us *Himself*
His governance of our lives,
His abundant and eternal life,
His holy and loving presence with us

He is so wonderful to us that we can be happy in Him no matter what our circumstances.

We got it backwards.

We approach God with our problems and say, "Please make my life better."

It's much the way a young child looks to mom and dad to take care of him or her.

We all begin our relationship with God like this.

It's where we start.

But it's not the way to live the life of blessing that Jesus offers.

He has so much more to give us and we need to grow into it!

Jesus is offering us the supreme blessing of God's presence right now, right here, whatever we're going through, whatever problems or pains are afflicting us, whatever failures or frustrations we're up against so let's look up to heaven and open up our hearts to God.

Jacob shows us how to be blessed

Living a truly God-blessed life isn't easy for most people to come to.

Like Jacob of old, you have to wrestle with God in the dark and keep struggling even though you're exhausted, until finally you prevail and are able to take a hold of God's blessings.

- Your faith will be tested.
- You'll have to take risks.
- You'll have to give up things that used to be important to you.
- You'll have to think and act and relate in ways that are unappealing and unpopular.

And like Jacob you may end up walking with a limp because God's blessings are received best by the wounded. (Genesis 32:22-32)

Jacob prevailed and received God's blessing, **but not in the way he expected.**

It wasn't like it was in his dream where the stairway to heaven was let down before him and angels were descending to escort him.

He had to fight.

And he had to let go of what he initially wanted from God.

Jacob didn't want to have to face his murderously angry brother Esau, but God didn't take that problem away from him.

Instead, God gave Jacob his presence to be with him as he faced his problem.

And Jacob made the blessing of God's favor the most important thing in his life.

He was given the new name of "Israel," which means, "He struggles with God and prevails."

And he named the place in the desert where he wrestled with the angel, "Peniel," or "face of God," saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Is it worth it?

Are you willing to wrestle with God for his blessing?

Many are not.

What they want most in life are things like health, wealth, success, popularity, and pleasures.

But the true blessings of God that Jesus is speaking of in the Beatitudes are all matters of the soul - emotional well-being, loving relationships, godly character, and, most of all, *God Himself*.

It's the blessing of God's presence is what brings eternal joy and meaning.

If more of God's presence is what you want and you're willing to wrestle for it then you'll appreciate the beatitudes.

Think of them as eight steps on the path to God's blessing.

The Path to God's Blessing

1. Entrust Your Life to Jesus.

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule." (Matthew 5:3, the Message)

No matter how hard we try we just can't be good enough to be acceptable to God.

For instance, how many of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-7) have you violated?

Have you.

- Looked to someone or something other than the Lord as your top priority?
- Given your heart to something you've made or bought?
- Disrespected God's holy character with unholy words?
- Neglected to set aside time each week to worship God?
- Neglected to honor your parents for the good they gave you?
- Attacked anyone with your anger?
- Lusted after anyone who is not your spouse?
- Taken something that doesn't belong to you?
- Been dishonest with someone?
- Coveted what someone else has?

We've all violated many of these commandments! So the starting point in your journey to God and his blessings is to admit to your moral bankruptcy and to ask God to forgive you.

Instead of relying on your own attempts to be good and trying to manage your life yourself turn your life over to Jesus.

Jesus alone satisfied God's law by living a perfect life, sacrificed his holy life on the cross for us, and then rose from the dead to conquer sin and death.

He alone can take away your badness and shame and give to you his goodness and wholeness - now and forever!

What greater gift could we receive than this?

Nothing!

The greatest blessing in the world is to live with the awareness that we are forgiven loved as children of God.

Reflect on this: *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*

(John 14:6, NIV)

Apply: Ask God to forgive you for your specific sins and shortcomings and confess these not only to God but also to someone you trust. Do this regularly.

2. Grieve Your Losses.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you." (Matthew 5:4, the Message)

We all want to be happy.

Yet striving to be happy eventually leaves us perpetually unhappy!

That's because if we try to be happy all the time then we cover up our pain.

And hiding our hurts will leave us unknown and unloved.

It's no wonder that the most common cause of depression is what we call *"ungrieved grief."*

- Death of a loved one
- Health problems
- Failures
- Disappointments
- Injuries
- Unmet childhood needs
- Abuse
- Life transitions

Each of these difficulties includes loss.

To deny this sadness and isolate it from caring people causes it to back up and form hurt that manifests as depression.

Especially if one loss after another is not grieved and soothed.

Of course, none of us want to feel pain and sadness. And yet *when we're honest about our sadness and reach out for care*

from others then we experience the comfort and renewing that our souls need.

Then we will be truly happy!

Reflect on this: *"You have collected all my tears and preserved them in your bottle! You have recorded everyone in your book."* (Psalm 56:8, TLB)

Apply: Release your tears, your sighs, and your sadness with an Ambassador for Christ (spiritual friend) and with God and take in the comfort and care that you need. In time you'll feel more alive and closer to God than ever before.

3. Be Yourself.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are - no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought." (Matthew 5:5, The Message)

The most destructive of all emotions is shame, feeling that you're bad - all bad.

Perhaps nothing keeps us from God more than shame.

You feel shame;

- When you *continually* do things that are wrong or harmful;
- When you've been *repeatedly* violated, rejected, or judged;
- When you turn your anger inward against yourself;

- When you see the bad in you (your sin or other's sin or your false guilt) and think the bad *is* you, rather than a part of you.

The instinctive and destructive response to shame is to hide your true self.

There are many ways that people hide the parts of themselves they're ashamed of:

- Pushing them down into their unconscious
- Projecting them onto others via faultfinding.
- Covering them up with alcohol, drugs, sex, food, work, shopping, gambling, or another compulsion.
- Whitewashing them with an external "ideal self."

Hiding in shame is hiding from love and forgiveness.

It means missing out on God's blessings!

We all long to have our bad parts forgiven, our hurt parts healed, and our good parts celebrated.

And this is what God offers us! Our role is simply to be ourselves - expressing our true, inner selves - to God and other grace-givers.

And then to take in the gracious acceptance that we need.

This is the secret to true self-esteem.

Reflect on this: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."* (Psalm 139: 23-24, NIV)

Apply: Join God in celebrating your good points and forgiving your bad points.

4. Feed on God.

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat."
(Matthew 5:6, The Message)

Money. Pleasure. Success. Notoriety. Power. Knowledge. Self-righteousness.

These are all ways that we may try to fill the emptiness inside. But God alone fills the deep hunger of our souls.

How?

How do you connect with God and take His goodness in?

There are so many ways.

- Pray
- Read the Bible as God's words to you today
- Confess your sins and thank God for his forgiveness
- Praise and worship God for his goodness
- Write a psalm to God, expressing your praise, thanks, requests, or feelings
- Appreciate God in nature

- Thank God for the ways He's blessed you
- Trust someone to be the body of Christ to you
- Partake of Holy Communion
- Invite God into whatever you're doing right now
- Be silent and alone and listen for God's voice
- Care for others in Jesus' name

Continually feeding on God in these ways - both in quiet times and in spontaneous moments during the day is how we satisfy the longing of our souls.

Reflect on this: *"O God, you are my God. My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Because your love is better than life. I will praise you as long as I live. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods."* (Psalm 63:1-5)

Apply: Every day feed your soul with God by connecting with Him in one or more of these ways.

5. Care for Others.

"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for." (Matthew 5:7, The Message)

What a blessing it is to reach inside your heart and find care for others.

Caring means stepping outside of your comfort zone and reaching out to offer *compassion*.

It means resisting selfishness and self-pity and considering others.

It means sharing what you can to help someone in need.

It means giving because you want to, not because you should or because you need something yourself.

There are so many ways that we can care:

- Listen to a hurting heart
- Offer a meal to the hungry
- Visit the elderly
- Play with a child
- Smile at a stranger
- Welcome visitors into your home
- Give directions to someone who is lost
- Help a friend in need
- Love a family member
- Pray for an enemy

When we express care and kindness to others often they return care and kindness to us!

But even if they don't return the favor we're blessed by giving. We receive the joy of connecting with someone in need, the wisdom gained from stepping in another's shoes, the meaning of making a difference for someone, and the honor of being

used by God to help another - these are blessings that enrich our lives.

Reflect on this: *"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."* (2 Corinthians 9:7-8, NKJV)

Apply: Take inventory of your gifts, personality, time, heart, and money and then look for a job, volunteer ministry, or other opportunity to offer what you have to those in need in Jesus' name.

6. Worship God, Inside-Out.

"You're blessed when you get your inside world - your mind and heart - put right. Then you can see God in the outside world." (Matthew 5:8, The Message)

If God's blessings are elusive to you then probably you have a distorted image of God.

You may have projected onto God unresolved painful characteristics of your father or mother, or someone else you looked up to, or your own self.

Here are a few examples:

- *Statue God:* you feel detached from God and on your own.

- *Perfectionist Parent*: you can't be good enough for God.
- *Angry Judge*: you feel criticized and condemned by God.
- *Party Pooper*: you feel depressed and discouraged by God.
- *Heavenly Tease*: just when it seems God is blessing you it all falls apart.
- *Pushy Salesman*: you feel pressured to do God's will and it doesn't seem good for you.
- *Marshmallow God*: it seems that God lets you be mistreated.
- *Magic Genie*: you feel that God will give you what you want if you do the right things.

How can you experience the Real God who loves you?

How do you put your inside world right so that you can see God in the outside world?

By bringing your inner self and feelings into relationship with someone you trust and respect and learning to receive forgiveness for your sins, healing for your hurts, and grace for your needs.

When you experience care in these ways from someone you can see and touch and hear then it's not such a stretch of faith to experience care from the true God of love.

Reflect on this: *"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."* (1 John 4:12)

Apply: Talk to God about your struggles to feel his love and then seek him in this area. Meditate on a healing image of God from the Bible, like Forgiving Father (Luke 16), Good Shepherd (Psalm 23), or Mother Bird (Psalm 91). Or simply pray to Jesus as your Friend, Helper, Healer, Savior, or Master. Then thank God for the specific ways He shows you His love in the Bible, in Jesus, and in the people who you love and are loved by.

7. Stay in Community.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family." (Matthew 5:9, the Message)

We need each other.

Just to manage life we need at least one *soul mate* who we share our deepest needs and longings with.

To thrive we need additional friends and the opportunity to belong in a family or community in which God is present. And yet for many people anger problems, fears of intimacy or rejection, control issues, and unresolved conflicts weaken or destroy these precious relationships.

In conflicts it's so easy to lose our tempers, to find fault with others, to expect that they should change, or just to give up altogether and isolate.

But this never solves anything.

To get along with others we need to:

- Listen with compassion
- Contain our feelings and think before we speak or act
- Say we're sorry for our part in a problem
- Focus on changing our own faults and insecurities
- Offer forgiveness even when others don't deserve it
- Set boundaries on mistreatment and unfair expectations

Relationships like this provide rich opportunities to establish our self-identity and to deepen our intimacy.

Reflect on this: *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."* (Colossians 3:12-13)

Apply: Whenever you're angry with someone don't react angrily by saying or doing something that is hurtful and intensifies the conflict. Instead, stop and think so that you can calmly verbalize your feelings (not your perceptions of the other) and ask for what you need. Then try to understand the other's feelings and apologize for any wrong on your part.

8. Persevere in Hard Times.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom." (Matthew 5:10, the Message)

Even when we're committed to God and we're doing what's right we will experience pain, injustice, and hardship. Often, it's because of our Christian faith that we suffer! In these times we're prone to develop a negative attitude and get angry with God or turn away from Him altogether. Life seems so unfair! God seems far away and his blessings seem unreachable. Instead, we need to persevere through these hard times, maintaining a positive attitude and trust in God. Persecution and suffering are opportunities to find our well-being in God alone.

Our response in times of suffering and persecution is what defines our faith.

The challenges are many. Do you.

- Express your faith and values even when it means being criticized or ridiculed?
- Identify yourself as a Christian even when it means losing an opportunity?
- Do you decline financial or personal gain if it means compromising your values?
- Stand up for what is right in a group that's doing what is wrong?
- Continue to love God and do good even though you're suffering?

If we persevere in these difficult times as Jacob did (the one who wrestled with God until he prevailed) and we keep working these beatitudes into our hearts and lives then God's blessings will come our way. We'll stand tall as children of the King!

Reflect on this: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything"* (James 1:2-4, NIV).

Apply: Discipline yourself to thank God in the midst of difficult times. Renew your trust in the Lord and ask Him to work good in you through this struggle.

So you want God's blessing in your life?

Then experience His power by receiving His Holy Spirit.

Without the Holy Spirit you will find it hard to live up to the points made today.

Amen

Source: Adapted from William Gaultiere, Ph.D.