

How does the concept of Jesus' kingdom being 'upside down' challenge your current priorities and values in daily life?

What does it mean to come to Jesus with 'empty hands' rather than relying on self-sufficiency, and where do you struggle most to depend fully on God?

In what ways have you been more focused on being amazed by Jesus' teachings rather than actually obeying them?

How does viewing the Beatitudes as a portrait of Jesus himself, rather than a checklist of behaviors, change your approach to spiritual growth?

What would it look like practically for you to live as a citizen of heaven's kingdom while still residing in your current circumstances?

Why do you think Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount by describing who his followers are before telling them what to do?

How does the promise that the kingdom of heaven is both a present reality and a future hope affect the way you make decisions today?

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to follow the world's definition of blessing rather than Jesus' definition?

What does it mean that real strength comes through surrender, and where in your life is God calling you to demonstrate meekness rather than self-promotion?

Are you currently living for the kingdom of self or the kingdom of heaven, and what specific evidence supports your answer?

Small Group Guide: Summer on the Mount

Week 1 - The Beatitudes: Life in an Upside-Down Kingdom

Matthew 5:1-12

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to open hearts and minds to understand what it means to live with Jesus as King.

Ice Breaker

Share a "full circle moment" from your life—a time when you saw something come back around in a way that reminded you of God's faithfulness.

Key Takeaways

1. **The Kingdom of Heaven is Upside-Down:** Jesus' kingdom operates on completely different values than the world's kingdom.
 2. **The Great Commission is for All Disciples:** Making disciples isn't just for professional ministers—it's for every follower of Jesus.
 3. **The Beatitudes Describe Kingdom Citizens:** These aren't eight things to try harder at; they're a portrait of who we're becoming in Christ.
 4. **Jesus Embodies the Beatitudes:** These characteristics perfectly describe Jesus himself—we become like Him by following Him.
 5. **The Kingdom Begins Now:** Kingdom citizenship isn't just about heaven later; it's about Jesus' reign in our lives today.
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Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. What stood out to you most from this sermon? Why?

2. The pastor mentioned that Jesus' kingdom is "upside-down" compared to the world. What are some specific examples of this from the Beatitudes?
3. Look at the structure of the Beatitudes (blessing + characteristic + promise). Why do you think Jesus organized His teaching this way?
4. Why do the first and last beatitudes both promise "the kingdom of heaven" while the others have future promises?

Personal Reflection

5. Which of the eight beatitudes feels most challenging or counter-cultural to you personally? Why?
6. The sermon grouped the Beatitudes into four categories:
 - Empty hands (poor in spirit, those who mourn)
 - Reshaped living (meek, hunger for righteousness, merciful)
 - Transformed heart (pure in heart, peacemakers)
 - Kingdom cost (persecuted)

Which category do you find yourself most drawn to? Which feels most difficult?

7. The pastor said, "Real strength comes through surrender." When have you experienced this truth in your own life?
8. In what areas of your life are you most tempted to live according to the world's kingdom rather than Jesus' kingdom?

Application

9. The sermon mentioned that two-thirds of the baptisms at Spencer Christian in three years were done by non-ministers (parents, group leaders, friends). How does this challenge your understanding of your role in making disciples?
10. What does it practically look like for Jesus to be King over:
 - Your finances?
 - Your relationships?
 - Your career?
 - Your time?
 - Your social media presence?
11. The challenge was to read Matthew 5-7 once a week throughout this series. What time and place will you commit to doing this?
12. Jesus perfectly embodied all eight beatitudes. Which characteristic of Jesus do you most need to focus on following this week?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge

Daily: Read Matthew 5-7 at least once this week (takes about 20 minutes). As you read, ask the Lord to show you what in your heart or life needs to shift to become more like kingdom people.

Personal Reflection: Complete this sentence in your journal each day: "If Jesus is truly King of my life, then I need to..."

Group Accountability: Share one specific area where you're struggling to let Jesus be King. Ask for prayer and accountability.

Kingdom Living: Identify one relationship where you can extend mercy, make peace, or show meekness this week. Report back to the group next time.

Going Deeper

For Further Study

- Read Philippians 2:1-11 (Jesus' humility and kingdom mindset)
- Read Ephesians 2:1-10 (saved by grace, not works)
- Compare the Beatitudes with Luke 6:20-26 (Luke's version with both blessings and woes)
- Study Old Testament passages about mourning, meekness, and righteousness (Psalm 37, Isaiah 61)

Reflection Questions for Personal Devotion

1. How does Jesus being King change my perspective on success?
 2. What would it look like to be "poor in spirit" in my current circumstances?
 3. Where am I seeking satisfaction apart from Jesus?
 4. What is persecution costing me right now for following Jesus? If nothing, why not?
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Closing Exercise

Kingdom Declaration: Go around the circle and have each person complete this statement:

"Because Jesus is my King, this week I will trust Him with..."

Pray for each person specifically based on what they shared.

Prayer Focus

- Pray for hearts that truly surrender to Jesus as King, not just advisor
 - Pray for those who haven't yet made Jesus King of their lives
 - Pray for courage to live according to kingdom values even when it costs something
 - Pray for opportunities to make disciples and help others follow Jesus
 - Pray for transformation to become more like Jesus in character
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Next Week Preview

Continue reading Matthew 5-7 daily. We'll be diving deeper into what it means to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

Leader Notes

- Be prepared to share your own struggles with surrendering areas of your life to Jesus' kingship
- Create a safe space for honest conversation about the cost of following Jesus
- Celebrate any stories of discipleship or baptism within your group
- Consider having someone share their baptism story if applicable
- Remember: the goal isn't to create a checklist but to point people to Jesus

Summer on the Mount: A 5-Day Devotional Journey

Day 1: Empty Hands, Full Hearts

Reading: Matthew 5:3-4; Ephesians 2:8-9

Devotional: The kingdom of heaven begins with empty hands. In a world that celebrates self-sufficiency and strength, Jesus invites us to acknowledge our spiritual poverty and our desperate need for Him. When we come before God with nothing to offer but our brokenness, we position ourselves to receive everything He offers. The poor in spirit recognize they cannot earn salvation or manufacture righteousness. They mourn over sin and depend wholly on God's grace. This posture isn't weakness—it's wisdom. Today, examine what you're still trying to bring to the table. What accomplishments or goodness are you clinging to? Release them. Come to Jesus with empty hands, and discover the blessing of receiving what only He can give.

Day 2: Strength Through Surrender

Reading: Matthew 5:5-7; Philippians 2:5-8

Devotional: True strength doesn't come from climbing over others or promoting ourselves—it comes through surrender to Christ. Jesus embodied perfect meekness, possessing all authority yet choosing restraint and humility. He hungered for righteousness like a starving man seeks food and extended mercy to the undeserving. This upside-down kingdom challenges everything our culture teaches about success. The meek inherit the earth not by force but by trust. Those who hunger for righteousness find satisfaction not in worldly achievement but in God Himself. The merciful receive mercy because they've experienced it first. Today, identify one area where you're striving in your own strength. What would it look like to surrender that to Jesus and trust His way instead?

Day 3: Heart Transformation

Reading: Matthew 5:8-9; Psalm 51:10-12

Devotional: Jesus doesn't want to improve your behavior—He wants to transform your heart. The pure in heart see God because their inner life matches their outer life. No hypocrisy. No hidden sin. No selfish ambition. Peacemakers don't just desire peace; they actively create it because they've received God's peace through Christ. This isn't about trying harder to be nice; it's about becoming genuinely changed from the inside out. God focuses on what others cannot see—the motivations, desires, and intentions of your heart. When your heart is pure, your actions naturally follow. When you've received peace from God, you extend it to others. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart today. What needs cleansing? Where is there discord that needs God's peace?

Day 4: The Cost of Citizenship

Reading: Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:12-16

Devotional: Following Jesus costs something. In a world that measures success by popularity and approval, Jesus promises that faithfulness will sometimes lead to suffering. Persecution, rejection, and insults await those who live by kingdom values rather than cultural expectations. Yet Jesus calls this blessed. Why? Because suffering for righteousness proves our citizenship belongs to another kingdom. The world's rejection confirms heaven's acceptance. When we're insulted for Jesus' sake, we join the prophets who went before us. This isn't masochism—it's reality. Kingdom citizens live by different values, and that creates friction. Today, consider what following Jesus has cost you. Have you compromised to avoid conflict? Ask God for courage to remain faithful regardless of the price, knowing your reward is secure in heaven.

Day 5: Portrait of the King

Reading: Matthew 5:3-12; Hebrews 12:1-3

Devotional: The Beatitudes aren't just a checklist for Christians—they're a portrait of Jesus Himself. He was perfectly poor in spirit, depending completely on the Father. He mourned over sin to the point of death. He embodied meekness, possessed pure motives, made peace between God and humanity, and endured persecution without retaliation. When we try to live these blessings in our own strength, we fail. But when we fix our eyes on Jesus and follow Him, we become like Him. Transformation happens not through striving but through surrender. The longer you walk with Jesus, the more His character shapes yours. Today, stop trying harder and start following closer. Choose one characteristic from the Beatitudes and study how Jesus lived it. Then ask Him to form that same quality in you as you follow His example.