



Culture Shock:
Countercultural Living through the Sermon on the Mount
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“The Good Life”
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Key Verses: Matthew 5:1-5

Key Thought: According to the culture of the kingdom, it is those who are powerless and marginalized who are in a good position— because they are prime to respond to and receive from God.

Points to Consider:

- “Culture” refers to the way of life of a particular group of people. Entering a different culture, we might experience “culture shock” when their beliefs, values, and customs differ greatly from our own. → Throughout “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus immerses us into a culture that tends to be counterintuitive and disorienting for most people: the culture of the kingdom of the heavens.
- What does Jesus mean by “blessed”? Jesus is describing those who are in a good position— from the perspective of the culture of the kingdom. That is to say, these people have “the good life.”
- Jesus applied His knowledge of the good life (recounted in Matthew 4:1-11) when He resisted Satan’s temptations for Him to become “relevant, spectacular, and powerful” (Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*). Instead, Jesus remained utterly dependent on and surrendered to the Father.
- This week, we meditate on the first three “beatitudes” in Matthew 5:3-5:
 - 3: “Poor in spirit” refers to “poverty of life-energy,” or “powerlessness.” Jesus implies that these people are in a good position because they are not entrenched in earthly kingdoms. ← The hands of the helpless and hopeless are often empty and open, whereas the hands of the powerful are often full and closed. ||| Contra the kingdom, our culture coaches us to always pursue more.
 - 4: “Mourning” refers to grieving over the literal death of someone. Those who value the lives of others to their own hurt share the heart of Jesus and will be comforted by the death-defeating power of the kingdom.
 - 5: “Meek” refers to “unimportance” (whether an assumed attitude or a genuine social reality). Whereas many Jews had lost their land to Roman occupants, which was the greatest source of economic security, Jesus implies that these marginalized people will one day be given what will enable their prosperity.
- The good life according to Jesus is: radically different— even reversed, revolutionary, restorative, a reality of the present and future, and requires surrender to the reign of Jesus.

Discussion Prompts:

- Who do you think of as someone who has “the good life”? Explain.
- How does Jesus’ vision of “the good life” in Matthew 5:3-5 differ from your own?
- What deeper wisdom might Jesus want to show you about “the good life”?
- How would it look for you to start walking in that deeper wisdom?
- Which of the “R-statements” (in the final bullet point) means the most to you right now? Explain.
- Close with prayer for one another, based on your discussion.