



# Blessed For Life: A Bible Study

## Matthew 5:12

“Count your blessings” can come across as callous. To a hurting person it sounds like, “Looking on the bright side magically makes everything better,” or, “You have no right to complain.” “Count your blessings” commands me to do another thing when I already feel I have not done enough and yet can do no more. “Count your blessings” seems condescending and oblivious when the one who suggests it has no clue what you are going through and does not really care to find out. “Count your blessings” sometimes implies the only real problem lies in one’s frame of mind or lack of effort and faith.

But being “blessed” does not always or automatically mean feeling “blessed.” And “count your blessings” does not have to communicate “just get over it.” The cliched phrase also carries sage counsel, encouragement, and assurance. It can bring a compassionate invitation instead of barking a dismissive platitude. “Blessed” expresses a special gift and relationship. “Blessed” belongs to a distinctively Gospel-motivated vocabulary.

Counting blessings notices how much God does. It locates how close God comes. It does not have to belittle anyone’s current condition or compare to some who have less and others who have more. And the Scriptures connect blessing directly to life: This specifically Christian term defines the purpose and nature and duration of life. God’s blessing activities make every human life special, precious, priceless, and irreplaceable.

Read Matthew 5:1-12. What primary action do these verses describe? What grammatical form does this verb take? Who performs the decisive action? What does this indicate about where human worth comes from?

What experiences have you had of poverty, hunger or thirst, mourning, showing mercy, making peace, or the others? Would you characterize these circumstances as feeling cheerful or comfortable or anything approaching “blessed” or “bliss”? What about these teachings of Jesus seems paradoxical? What might this suggest about the sanctity of human life?

Why do you think these words focus primarily on the future rather than the present? What does a blessing have in common with a promise? How do these blessings both perform and anticipate activities? What makes human life like a promise, especially when it is just developing, enduring difficulty, or already declining?



Look at Genesis 27:1-4 and Luke 2:25-28. How does God's Word explicitly associate blessing with both embryonic and elderly lives? Who does Revelation 1:17-18 say commences and concludes these blessings? What scope and scale does John 10:10 envision and intend for them? At what point do these blessings begin, according to Psalm 22:9-10? And at what point do these blessings end, according to Revelation 14:13?

Consult Matthew 4:2, 8:20, 9:27, 11:29, 23:37, 26:39, and 27:28-31. For whom do these blessings seem to be a biography? Who may we expect to treat us like this person, and why does this constitute blessedness? How does this identification sanctify even unborn human beings and incapacitated bodies, in the view of Philippians 2:6-11 and Hebrews 2:17?

What alternatives does Luke's recollection of these statements make available (Luke 6:20-26)? In other words, if not blessing, then what? What might this imply for us about advocating for the sanctity of life or ignoring our endangered neighbor's needs?

Does blessing communicate anger and fear or joy and hope? What implications does this have for our attitudes about surprise pregnancy and terminal diagnosis? How does this affect the tones with which we address abortion access or physician-assisted suicide? What tangible and practical acts do "poor in spirit," "mourning," "merciful," "pure in heart," and "peacemaker" bring to mind?



## NOTES

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Counting blessings notices how much God does. It locates how close God comes. It does not have to belittle anyone’s current condition or compare to some who have less and others who have more. And the Scriptures connect blessing directly to life: This specifically Christian term defines the purpose and nature and duration of life. God’s blessing activities make every human life special, precious, priceless, and irreplaceable.

Read Matthew 5:1-12. What primary action do these verses describe? What grammatical form does this verb take? Who performs the decisive action? What does this indicate about where human worth comes from?

**These words of Jesus inventory several behaviors that “the blessed” undertake (or refrain from): mourn, hunger and thirst, make peace, remain humble, forego retribution, and more. And Jesus also sketches actions “the blessed” will encounter: inheriting, calling, comforting, persecuting. But the predominant focus lies upon the “bless”-ing. This passive verb has God as its agent; He does the blessing and the blessed are blessed by Him. Its past tense also demonstrates that, for example, they are not blessed because they are poor in spirit, but rather they are poor in spirit because they are blessed. Likewise, theirs is the kingdom of heaven not because they are poor in spirit but because they are blessed by God. The blessedness happens by grace, as a gift that they – and we – receive rather than deserve or earn. So the dignity of any human being does not derive from one’s abilities or another’s appraisal but from the Almighty’s relationship to each as Maker and Savior and Lord – whether anyone else acknowledges it or not.**

What experiences have you had of poverty, hunger or thirst, mourning, showing mercy, making peace, or the others? Would you characterize these circumstances as feeling cheerful or comfortable or anything approaching “blessed” or “bliss”? What about these teachings of Jesus seems paradoxical? What might this suggest about the sanctity of human life?



**The situations to which Jesus refers here do not strike one as pleasant. “Blessed” suggests something considerably positive, while “poor in spirit,” “those who mourn,” “meek,” and the rest involve different kinds of distress, self-denial, or at least delayed gratification. “Blessed” signifies an inconspicuous quality and a hidden dimension that does not appear as the world and the flesh have conditioned us to expect. Since “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) and “faith is the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), the “blessedness,” sanctity and significance, or worth and purpose of a particular human being must consist in invisible attributes as well. So size, appearance, and age can neither improve nor impair it.**

Why do you think these words focus primarily on the future rather than the present? What does a blessing have in common with a promise? How do these blessings both perform and anticipate activities? What makes human life like a promise, especially when it is just developing, enduring difficulty, or already declining?

**Blessings consist initially only in words, but their words do things, instantly and eventually. They connect and commit in a relationship, they designate as special and precious, they advocate and defend. Yet they possess and impart such magnitude and might that one cannot encompass or apprehend it in the current moment alone. Blessing plunges and explodes into the forthcoming and forevermore. Jesus refers both to present realities (“theirs is the kingdom,” “your reward is great”) and future ones (“they shall”). Every human life redefines identities and brings into relationships, no matter where that body comes from or what that body calls for, looks like, or can do. And rarely can we immediately recognize the effects we will ultimately appreciate with the benefit of repeated experience and lengthy reflection. We believe it even when we do not behold it.**

Look at Genesis 27:1-4 and Luke 2:25-28. How does God’s Word explicitly associate blessing with both embryonic and elderly lives? Who does Revelation 1:17-18 say commences and concludes these blessings? What scope and scale does John 10:10 envision and intend for them? At what point do these blessings begin, according to Psalm 22:9-10? And at what point do these blessings end, according to Revelation 14:13?

**The Scriptures record several instances of blessings both given to and given by persons of advanced age. Many of these blessings involve conception and childbirth, including the first blessing of Israel’s history (Genesis 1:28) and the most important one (Genesis 12:1-3). In fact, every offspring embodies heaven’s blessing (Psalm 127:3). The authority for beginning and finishing the blessings of life lies in the hands of Jesus, who swallowed up death in crucifixion and brought life and immortality to light by resurrection. He means to make these blessings abundant and everlasting. So His blessings start well before birth, from**



**the moment He calls us into being, and they last long after death and the moment He calls us into the beyond. Neither gestation nor ailment excludes anyone from the privileges of humankind's existence in the image of God.**

Consult Matthew 4:2, 8:20, 9:27, 11:29, 23:37, 26:39, and 27:28-31. For whom do these blessings seem to be a biography? Who may we expect to treat us like this person, and why does this constitute blessedness? How does this identification sanctify even unborn human beings and incapacitated bodies, in the view of Philippians 2:6-11 and Hebrews 2:17?

**Matthew takes care to recount how the descriptions in this first sermon of Jesus apply originally to the Son of God Himself. He comes to us poor, mourning, humble, hungry, merciful, pure-hearted, peacemaking, and persecuted. Almighty God our Heavenly Father in His grace receives us and deals with us in the same beloved devotion He has for our Savior as His only-begotten one. This means He invites us into all the rights and privileges pertaining unto this status. Even the world regards us as children of God, because it hates us in the same way it hates Him and indeed for His sake (Matthew 24:9). This helps explain the contempt the devil and the culture have for unborn babies and incapacitated patients (Revelation 12:12-13), directing their anger with Jesus toward anyone who resembles Him in His cradle or His cross. But by incarnating Himself specifically into these situations, He has consecrated our race's experiences with them as well.**

What alternatives does Luke's recollection of these statements make available (Luke 6:20-26)? In other words, if not blessing, then what? What might this imply for us about advocating for the sanctity of life or ignoring our endangered neighbor's needs?

**Jesus leaves no neutral territory between blessing and curse. Whatever does not actively advance life, survival, and salvation contributes to death, division, and destruction (compare with Matthew 12:30 and Deuteronomy 30:19). Promoting or permitting one or the other amounts to participation in the same (see James 2:15-17). If we neglect or decline to speak God's truth and show Christ's love to or for a neighbor when we have opportunity (Proverbs 31:9), we become not disinterested bystanders but instruments and agents of the evil one. On the other hand, any word or deed offered to aid the vulnerable, however foolish or futile it may seem, through this God guarantees to work His will through (Isaiah 55:10-11; Philippians 2:13).**



Does blessing communicate anger and fear or joy and hope? What implications does this have for our attitudes about surprise pregnancy and terminal diagnosis? How does this affect the tones with which we address abortion access or physician-assisted suicide? What tangible and practical acts do “poor in spirit,” “mourning,” “merciful,” “pure in heart,” and “peacemaker” bring to mind?

**Blessing carries a message of joy and hope, often spoken directly into an atmosphere of anger and fear. While we courageously declare that viewing or using death as a solution engages in a wrong and wickedness, we do so in order to warn a neighbor about its harms and spare him from them. And we compassionately proclaim that the Lord God says “No” because He is saying “Yes!” to something greater (2 Corinthians 1:19-20) and that the Christian faith and community has a better way. So we remain humble, gentle, cheerful, patient, and persistent in dialogue about these matters. We give voice above all to our Savior’s grace and our Father’s forgiveness, especially toward everyone targeted by practices such as abortion and euthanasia and toward anyone with hearts broken by taking part in them. We notice and listen to, we accompany and learn with, we pray and apologize, we feed and clothe and shelter, we surround and incorporate, and we appeal and persuade.**



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