

6-SESSION
BIBLE STUDY

BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE

Session 1: Leader's Guide

DISTINCT

LIVING ABOVE THE NORM



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Biblical Solutions for Life

In order to make the most of this study and to ensure a richer group experience, it's recommended that all group participants read through the teaching and discussion content in full before each group meeting. As a leader, it is also a good idea for you to be familiar with this content and prepared to summarize it for your group members as you move through the material each week. Each session of the Bible study is made up of three sections:

1. THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE.

An introduction to the theme of the session and its connection to everyday life, along with a brief overview of the primary Scripture text. This section also includes an icebreaker question or activity.

2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

This comprises the bulk of each session and includes the primary Scripture text along with explanations for key words and ideas within that text. This section also includes most of the content designed to produce and maintain discussion within the group.

3. LIVE IT OUT.

The final section focuses on application, using bulleted summary statements to answer the question, So what? As the leader, be prepared to challenge the group to apply what they learned during the discussion by transforming it into action throughout the week.

For group leaders, the Distinct Leader Guide contains several features and tools designed to help you lead participants through the material provided.

QUESTION 1—ICEBREAKER

These opening questions and/or activities are designed to help participants transition into the study and begin engaging the primary themes to be discussed. Be sure everyone has a chance to speak, but maintain a low-pressure environment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each "What Does the Bible Say?" section features six questions designed to spark discussion and interaction within your group. These questions encourage critical thinking, so be sure to allow a period of silence for participants to process the question and form an answer.

The Distinct Leader Guide also contains follow-up questions and optional activities that may be helpful to your group, if time permits.

DVD CONTENT

Each video features Michael Kelley discussing the primary themes found in the session. We recommend you show this video in one of three places: (1) At the beginning of the group time, (2) After the icebreaker, or (3) After a quick review and/or summary of "What Does the Bible Say?" A video summary is included as well. You may choose to use this summary as background preparation to help you guide the group.

The Leader Guide contains additional questions to help unpack the video and transition into the discussion. For a digital Leader Guide with commentary, see the "Leader Tools" folder on the DVD-ROM in your Leader Kit.

SESSION 1

DISTINCT IN MY CHARACTER

The Point: Choose actions and attitudes that are blessed by God.

The Passage: Matthew 5:1-12

The Setting: Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus gathered His disciples around Him and began to teach them the differences between commonly accepted religious truths and the fuller truth from God's perspective. Though He taught His disciples, crowds gathered around to hear Him teach. He began with what we call the Beatitudes, a series of blessings on people most would not have considered blessed.

QUESTION #1

What was the happiest time in your life?



Optional activity: Supplement “The Bible Meets Life” by playing several popular commercials on a laptop or tablet—or by instructing group members to search for and play specific commercials using their phones. As you watch each commercial, encourage group members to consider the following questions: 1) What product is being sold? 2) How does the commercial connect this product to your desire for happiness?

Note: Be sure to select commercials that are appropriate for the members of your specific group. Lean toward commercials that are humorous rather than commercials focused on sexuality or exploitation.

Video Summary: Jesus is calling us to live a life that stands out, that is distinct. Yet many of us grow up fearing that very thing—that we will stand out. There is a desire in us to fit in, to be just like everyone else. But God's desire for us isn't that we would blend in. He desires that we live differently. As believers, when we live truly distinct lives, our character reflects our identity in Christ.

- WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 1. THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

THE POINT

Choose actions and attitudes that are blessed by God.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

You are being manipulated hundreds of times every day.

We typically don't use that label, but that's exactly what happens every time you watch a commercial, read a billboard, or get an Internet pop-up ad. Each and every one of those messages is trying to convince your subconscious mind of two things:

1. You are not as happy as you could be (or should be).
2. You will be happier if you drive this car, watch this show, buy this product, and so on.

It makes sense that marketers and advertisers go after our happiness. Who doesn't want to be happy? But what if being "happy" isn't the ultimate goal? What if there's something better?

As we'll see in today's Scripture focus, Jesus told His followers what life in His kingdom will be like. Will it be "happy"? Not exactly. It will be something far better. It will be "blessed."

- Think of how you typically use the word blessed in normal conversation. How has your definition differed from that of Matthew 5:1-12?
- In what ways do you believe others would say your "fruit displays your root"?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD MATTHEW 5:1-12.

Matthew 5:1-12

¹ When He saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain, and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him.² Then He began to teach them, saying:³ "The poor in spirit are

blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.⁴ Those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted.⁵ The gentle are blessed, for they will inherit the earth.⁶ Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed, for they will be filled.⁷ The merciful are blessed, for they will be shown mercy.⁸ The pure in heart are blessed, for they will see God.⁹ The peacemakers are blessed, for they will be called sons of God.¹⁰ Those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.¹¹ “You are blessed when they insult and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of Me.¹² Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Blessed (v. 3)—The word “blessed” literally meant to be fortunate, happy, or joyful as a result of circumstances, or even more significantly here, as a result of and with emphasis on divine favor.

Poor in spirit (v. 3)—“Poor” primarily meant economically disadvantaged; symbolically, it meant lacking in spiritual significance or being inferior. Combined with “in spirit,” the phrase is synonymous with being humble.

Matthew 5:1-6

This sermon is like a grenade tossed into the bunker of what we think it means to be happy in today’s culture. The poor in spirit are blessed. Those who mourn are blessed. The gentle are blessed. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed.

According to Jesus, being blessed is more than just happiness; it goes deeper than ordinary emotion and it’s driven by more than mere circumstance. While the people in Jesus’ day—like people in our own day—might have thought blessing came from being healthy, wealthy, and wise, understanding what true blessing means is one of the things that makes Christians distinct. Enduring happiness, or blessedness, comes with a life lived in a way that pleases God.

These first four qualities have to do more with a person’s character than with his circumstances:

- ***The poor in spirit.*** These individuals know they are dependent on God for everything; they trust Him to provide what they need—even the grace they need to stand before Him.

- ***Those who mourn.*** Mourning can be done for all kinds of reasons. We might mourn over the state of the world or over the sin we see in our own lives. When we look around us—and within us—and mourn, we are blessed because we look to the comfort only God can bring.

- ***The gentle.*** In the kingdom of the world, the people who appear to inherit the earth are the go-getters and the ladder-climbers. But in God’s kingdom, the gentle—those who submit themselves before God—inherit the whole earth.

- ***Those who hunger and thirst.*** These people are longing for righteousness. They look to God to satisfy their need, knowing true righteousness only comes from Him.

The blessed people Jesus described are those who know they need God and depend on Him; they are not satisfied with the temporary blessings of the world. The blessed Christian stands apart and distinct as he or she finds true satisfaction in what only God can provide.

- ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD MATTHEW 5:1-12.
 - What do you like about the text?
 - What questions do you have about these verses?
- TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO MATTHEW 5:1-6.

QUESTION #2

What is your understanding of what it means to be blessed?

This question requires that group members interpret this passage for themselves as a way to move toward life application. Encourage them to also examine their own definition beside that of Matthew 5:1-6. If you took part in the video discussion, you may have started this conversation there.

Optional follow-up: What do Jesus' teachings in this passage reveal about the kingdom of God?

FEELING BLESSED

What are the major blessings in your life? Use your journal to record as many blessings as you can think of in a couple of minutes.

What does your list of blessings communicate about your life?

Matthew 5:7-9

The cross on the right illustrates life in the kingdom of God. The vertical bar reflects our relationship with God. When we recognize our spiritual poverty, mourn over our sin, gently submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and hunger and thirst for His righteousness—our vertical relationship with God is realigned, and all is well between God and us. But it doesn't stop there.

Our vertical relationship with God impacts our horizontal relationships with others. If we truly experience the blessing of finding God's love and acceptance through Jesus, then that blessing is naturally reflected in our horizontal relationships.

In verses 3-6, Jesus described the kind of person who is blessed vertically—in his or her relationship with God. These next attributes show us what happens in horizontal relationships as a result:

- ***The merciful.*** The merciful don't seek revenge. Instead, they operate with a forgiving and gracious spirit. Human hurts pale in comparison to all that God has forgiven us.
- ***The pure in heart.*** The temptation is to act one way at home, a different way at work, and still another way at church. The blessed, however, are pure in heart. Every aspect of their lives displays steadfast purity and integrity.
- ***The peacemakers.*** Peacemaking takes a willingness to admit when you're wrong. It takes a humble spirit and the confidence to let things go—even when you might be right.

QUESTION #3

When have you felt the cost of choosing to show mercy, be pure, or make peace?

This question will allow group members an opportunity to share personal stories as well as acknowledge and reflect on how their lives have been affected by choosing to live in sharp distinction to the world.

Optional activity: Direct group members to complete the activity "Feeling Blessed" on page 11. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share some of the major blessings in their lives.

Optional follow-up: Which of the attributes in these verses do you find easiest to live out?

When we choose these attitudes toward other people, we stand in sharp distinction to the world. While so many are chasing their own happiness at the expense of others, true blessing is found in giving ourselves for the sake of others.

QUESTION #4

What are some ways Christians experience persecution in today's world?



Direct group member to consider examples from their day to day experiences as well as stories we hear through the media. This question will help group members consider obstacles that can distract us from living in a way that is counterintuitive to what society expects.

Optional follow-up: What are some ways you have experienced persecution on a personal level?

Matthew 5:10-12

This is the first time in these verses that Jesus gave a command. That's because all of these characteristics are representative of something that's happened inside us. When we come to Christ, we are fundamentally changed at the deepest level imaginable. We are citizens in a new kingdom, and in that kingdom we have new values and new definitions.

In other words, we are citizens in God's kingdom, but we still live in this world. So Jesus commanded us in verse 12: "Be glad and rejoice."

We can't always control how we feel. We become angry, sad, or nervous, but we don't have to stay mired in those emotions. We can make the choice—no matter what the circumstances are—to rejoice and be glad. We must remind ourselves of the truth despite what we might feel. That's why "rejoice" is a command instead of a feeling.

Tell yourself who's Boss. Jesus is Lord of my life, and He is Lord over all. Because of that truth, we can choose to rejoice and be glad despite the tough stuff of life. We make an active choice to stand against the current of our circumstances and choose joy.

Jesus also gave us a check to make sure we're rejoicing in the right thing. He reminded us that we can choose to rejoice about what really matters. Those who go against the world's current stand out clearly. They are distinct from the world. They are more than happy—they are blessed.

QUESTION #5

How do we help one another choose joy when others mistreat us because of our faith?

This is an application question included to encourage group members to create steps they will take as a group to act on the biblical principles presented in this session.

Optional follow-up: What are some ways you have seen others choose joy that have inspired you to do the same?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: How have you experienced a blessing after choosing to go against the flow?

LIVE IT OUT

What steps will you take this week to seek our blessing rather than mere happiness? Consider the following suggestions:

- ***Allow God's Word to bless you.*** Memorize Matthew 5:3-6 and pray through Jesus' words every day.
- ***Bless someone else by serving them.*** Choose one relationship this week in which you want to model what it means to be blessed. Serve that person in a tangible way.
- ***Allow someone else to bless you.*** Share with someone you trust about a tough situation you are walking through. Ask him or her to help you choose to be glad and rejoice in the middle of that situation.

Christians are different; they are distinct. They display that distinction in their dependence on God, their actions toward others, and the way they respond to difficulties.

So, are you ready to find something bigger than happiness?

Challenge: Christians are different; they are distinct. They display that distinction in their dependence on God, their actions toward others, and the way they respond to difficulties. Spend some time this week watching other Christians, maybe at church or in your small group. Pay attention to the ways they bless others through their actions.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to help each of you remember to seek God's blessings rather than happiness. Conclude by verbally submitting yourself to the principles Jesus taught in the Beatitudes. Confess your desire to live distinctly as a member of God's kingdom in this world.

My Thoughts