

BEATITUDES – ADULT/SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

I Need You – Matthew 5:3

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"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3 NIV)

Matthew wants his readers to understand that there is a new king and a new kingdom. After introducing Jesus, the new king, he draws our attention to the core teaching of the kingdom. Crowds are following Jesus, so Jesus goes up on a mountainside, gathers the disciples close, and begins to teach all of them. If the crowd is typical of other times it will contain Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, religious purists and sinners. Jesus looks out on this crowd and He begins His teaching with a blessing.

Happy are the people who recognize that they **NEED** the Spirit of God within them. They will trust God as their King and get to be subjects in His kingdom. This is the good news of God's grace. God recognizes that I am a spiritual pauper. I cannot be the kind of person God wants me to be without God's help. All God asks of me is to recognize that this is the situation.

This is harder than it appears. My pride wants to compare my condition with the condition of someone else. It isn't difficult to find someone who appears to be in much worse condition than me. They may or may not be, but that isn't the issue. The comparison is all wrong and leads me to look at me rather than at Jesus. One glance at Jesus and I will know that I am far worse than I think I am and hopelessly unable to resolve this situation on my own. I need help. Fortunately, help is available, and God is anxiously waiting to provide it.

Here are some scripture passages to read and reflect on or discuss with your family or small group. The questions following the scriptures are intended to challenge you to apply Jesus' words to your life today.

Scripture Readings:

Psalms 42:1-11

Isaiah 41:17-20

Matthew 5:3

Matthew 26:37-45

Luke 11:9-13

Luke 18:9-14

Philippians 4:12-13

2 Corinthians 12:6-10

Study Questions:

How does what you want compare with what you need?

How would God answer this question for you?

In what areas of your life do you consider yourself rich?

In what areas of your life do you consider yourself poor?

What is your attitude toward the areas of your life where you are rich?

What is your attitude toward the areas of your life where you are poor?

What circumstances lead you to forget about God?

What circumstances cause you to cry out to God, "I need you!"?

Who or what encourages you when you reach this point?

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Personal application:

Who do you know who could use some encouragement today?

What does God want to do through you to help someone experience the kingdom of heaven today?

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I'm Sorry – Matthew 5:4

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Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4 NIV)

This beatitude presents us with a paradox. One fruit of the Spirit is joy and Paul spends the entire letter to the Philippians challenging us to rejoice always. Yet here Jesus proclaims that happy are those who mourn. In His typical fashion Jesus provides no explanation for the cause of the mourning that will result in comfort. This is good. I would not like to live in a world where God's comfort was only available for certain kinds of grief.

William Barclay identifies three different sources of grief. The first is the person who is experiencing grief and sorrow over a personal loss. We have recently been loosely connected with two deaths, one in the family and the other in our neighborhood. Those who are closely connected to the people who have died will certainly experience grief. Death sometimes seems very distant, but it certainly wasn't in Jesus' day. Jesus had compassion on those who had experienced loss and, in several cases, restored their loved ones to life.

Where does our comfort come from when we experience personal loss? If the person is a believer, then we are comforted by the resurrection and the promise that we will see them again someday. What if the person who dies is not a believer? This is harder, but I think Jesus' blessing here still applies even as it challenges us. Jesus consistently challenges us to make our relationship with Him the most important relationship in our lives. From this side of eternity this might sound harsh, but when you arrive in the presence of Jesus, how much significance will your earthly relationships have?

Barclay ended his discussion of the first option with this poem:

"I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way;
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow;
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her,
When Sorrow walked with me."

— Robert Browning Hamilton

The second option for the cause of mourning is mourning that flows from compassion for the sorrow and suffering of the world. The phrase that has almost become cliché is, "God, break my heart for what breaks yours." I believe that God wants us to be a feeling people. It is appropriate to weep over the evil in our world that is destroying lives every day. It is reasonable to mourn with those whose lives have been turned upside down by natural disasters. If Jesus had said only, "Blessed are those who mourn," and stopped there we would be crushed by the magnitude of suffering that exists in our world.

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I'm Sorry – Matthew 5:4

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Fortunately, we are not a people without hope. We are comforted and the compassion that we feel moves us to act. When we are comforted by Jesus and look to Him, He will open our eyes to opportunities to make His comfort real in the lives of those who are hurting.

The final option for the cause of mourning ties directly into the first beatitude. We mourn because we have sinned and recognize that there is nothing we can do to heal the wound that has been created. We say, 'I'm sorry,' but it still hurts to realize that we harmed someone else. We say "I'm sorry" to God because our sin breaks His heart. Just as the sin and suffering of others should motivate us to action, the Bible teaches us that sorrow over our own sin is a good thing when it leads to repentance.

Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Numbers 14:36-40

How had the Israelites sinned?

Why do you think they mourned bitterly?

What didn't the Israelites understand about God?

How long would it take the Israelites to learn about the significance of their sin?

James 4:4-10

What do you learn about God from this passage in James?

How seriously do you take your sin?

How are these instructions similar to the beatitude we're looking at?

What state of mind is appropriate when you're saying, "I'm sorry" to God?

2 Corinthians 7:6-11

What does repentance mean?

Why is Godly sorrow essential for true repentance?

Personal application:

When was the last time someone corrected you for a sin in your life? How did you respond?

When was the last time you said "I'm sorry" to God? If it has been a long time, why has it been so long?

Scripture examples of mourning:

Someone who is experiencing grief and sorrow over a personal loss.

Genesis 37:31-35

Luke 7:11-16

Luke 8:49-56

Mourning that flows from compassion for the sorrow and suffering of the world.

Nehemiah 1:2-11

2 Corinthians 12:20-21

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AFTER YOU - Matthew 5:5

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Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5 NIV)

There was a time when it was easy to find modern day illustrations of meekness. One illustration I can think of comes from one of my favorite television shows, *Due South*. The hero of the show is a Canadian Mountie named Benton Fraser. He is a modern-day Superman who routinely puts other people before himself. In the opening credits for the first season of shows, Fraser drives his partner crazy by letting an older person get onto an elevator before them. His partner assumes that because they have badges and uniforms they should go first.



There are two characters in the Bible who personify meekness. The first is Moses and the second is Jesus. William Barclay has this to say about Moses:

"Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3). Moses was no milk and water character; he was no spineless creature; he could be blazingly angry; but he was a man whose anger was on the leash, only to be released when the time was right. The writer of Proverbs has it: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32). – William Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible*

This is the core idea behind the word meek, power under control. I have the power, position, or the right to go to the front of the line, but instead I choose to let you go first. This is Jesus turning the natural order of things upside down and it only works because we're not in control. God is in control. We don't have to strive or fight to get our way because the God who loves us will always get His way. Those who submit to the upside-down ways of His kingdom will inherit the earth. God has promised, and He is faithful.

Jesus lived this out. The gospels are filled with examples of Jesus putting others first. The most obvious examples are the washing of the disciple's feet and His sacrifice on the cross.

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Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Psalm 37

What is the situation that faces God's people?

What does David tell us about God?

There are two groups of people in this psalm: the wicked and the righteous. What is the temptation for the wicked? What is the temptation for the righteous?

What will eliminate the temptation for the righteous?

Why can the righteous practice meekness and generosity?

How does this Psalm expand on what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount?

Numbers 12

What seems to be inevitable for those in leadership?

How were Miriam and Aaron responding to Moses? What attitude is at the core of their response?

How does God feel about them and their behavior?

How does Moses demonstrate his meekness?

What do you learn from this encounter?

Philippians 2:1-11

What do verses 3 and 4 share with Matthew 5:5?

Jesus is the definition of meekness. How would you define the word meek based on the example provided in this passage?

How does this passage impact your understanding of Matthew 5:5?

Personal application:

Who will you have the opportunity to serve today? How will you serve them?

Other Resources:

A good article on the definition of meekness with some additional examples:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/10/07/what-does-the-word-meek-mean-in-the-bible-bible-definition-of-meekness/>

An excellent article by John Piper that looks at what the concept of meekness teaches us about God:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/blessed-are-the-meek>

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I Will Do What's Right – Matthew 5:6

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Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Matthew 5:6 NIV)

My first thought as I was studying this beatitude was that we cannot look to Jesus to find an example of what hungering and thirsting look like. Then I thought about the temptations in the wilderness and realized that, once again, Jesus is the best example and the fulfillment of this blessing. He fully realized and lived out a deep desire to be filled with righteousness. The simple reason that He seems a poor example is that He was successful.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, "They might have been good, even great in goodness, but for the malady of not wanting". We desire all sorts of things. What we desire is an expression of worship. Our desires dictate what we pursue, what we are willing to sacrifice for, and what we are willing to submit to. The challenge Jesus presents in this beatitude is one of priority. Where does being good and wanting to always do what is right fit on our list of wants? Stevenson seems to be saying that many don't want to be good, so they aren't.

For almost everyone who lives in the United States, the experience of hungering and thirsting for food and water is rare. We have sufficient food in the refrigerator and pantry to last weeks if not months. We turn on the tap and out flows a seemingly unlimited supply of water. Many of the people Jesus spoke to were not so blessed. It is not hard to imagine that many listening to Jesus on this day were listening with empty stomachs and dry mouths.

Have you ever desired something so much that you would do anything to get it? Unfortunately, when we think about this question the images that come to mind are of addicts pursuing their next fix. I just finished reading The Wright Brothers by David McCullough. Wilbur and Orville Wright had an insatiable desire to fly. They gave up just about everything that didn't move them toward that goal. While the book is worth reading, why aren't there more examples of men and women who have this kind of single-minded focus on pursuing righteousness?

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Psalm 19:7-11 and Psalm 119:97-104

Do you have a sweet tooth? What is your favorite sweet treat?

How strong is your desire for this treat? Have you ever given up something else to get it?

What does David say is of greatest value?

What would David give up to possess these things?

How are these things acquired?

What would you give up to possess these things?

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Matthew 4:1-4

What is the longest you have gone without eating?

Was Jesus able to turn the stones to bread? If He was, then why didn't He?

Which is more important to Jesus: physical food or spiritual food? Why?

Which is more important to you: physical food or spiritual food? Why?

What would you need to change in your life to shift this priority?

What do you desire that isn't as essential as food and water that still takes priority over the pursuit of righteousness?

Luke 19:1-10

What's the most embarrassing thing you've ever done to get something you really wanted?

How unusual was it for a wealthy and powerful man to climb a tree?

What did Jesus ask of Zacchaeus? How did Zacchaeus respond?

What is Jesus asking of you? How should you be responding?

James 1:13-15

This passage describes the cycle of temptation. Where does temptation begin?

How are your desires connected to your actions?

How would your desires change if you pursued different ways of acting and developed new habits?

What is the opposite of what James is describing?

Personal application:

Here is an attempt to write out the opposite of what James has written:

When you are called to pursue God you should say, "God loves me." For God is love and goodness. He is always right. You are drawn to Him when you get a taste of Him and discover that He is the sweetest thing you have ever experienced. This taste conceives a deep desire within you and that desire gives birth to worship which, when it is full-grown, gives birth to life.

Has this been your experience? What action could you take today to increase your desire for God?

Other Resources:

This is the best book that I have read on this topic and I think it directly addresses the challenge of this beatitude: [You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit](#) by James K. A. Smith

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I Forgive You – Matthew 5:7

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Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matthew 5:7 NIV)

We live in a world where the predominant cry is for justice. Of course, this perspective almost always goes only one way. We want those who have hurt us or taken from us to pay us back. Rarely does it enter our minds how much we owe others, much less how much we owe God.

I think this beatitude is at the core of what Jesus wants us to understand about God. He wants us to understand that we have a loving and merciful God. We can know this and say this, but until we act out mercy toward someone else our understanding is limited.

When we first moved into our neighborhood we were blessed to discover that there were several other Christian families on the court. One family demonstrated that they understood God's mercy. One of their sons was killed by a drunk driver and the other was severely disabled. They experienced grief at the losses and still reached out to the man who had killed their son. They did the best they could to extend mercy. As confirmation of how difficult giving and receiving mercy is, the drunk driver rejected their efforts.

Maybe because genuine mercy is so rare, this issue is very important to Jesus. It is so important that this principle is repeated several times in the New Testament. Look at these verses and determine what action you need to take based on the mercy God has you.

Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Psalm 103:1-22

What does David want us to understand about God?

How well does this Psalm fit with your understanding of the God of the Old Testament?

Who are we and what should we expect from God? From others?

What response does this Psalm call for?

Micah 6:8

What are you doing to act justly in your community?

What would it be like to live in a community where everyone loved mercy?

How much do you love mercy?

What difference does this make in the lives of the people close to you?

How important is humility when acting justly and loving mercy?

Which of the three things mentioned (justice, mercy, or humility) is most difficult for you to practice?

Matthew 6:9-15

Note: See Grandma's "anti-prayer" at"

<http://mygrandmatime.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/THE-LORDS-PRAYER.pdf>

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What is our greatest temptation?

What part does forgiveness play in defeating that temptation?

Why does Jesus choose to emphasize forgiveness after this example of how to pray?

How does an unwillingness to forgive inhibit our prayers?

Matthew 18:23-35

Have you ever seen this parable played out in real life?

How much have you been forgiven by God?

What debts do others owe you that you are hanging on to?

What do you need to do to forgive and make that forgiveness complete?

Luke 7:36-50

Describe the three main characters in this story.

Which ones demonstrate mercy? How do they do that?

What does mercy look like for the person giving it?

What does mercy look like for the person receiving it?

What is the connection between forgiveness and mercy?

How does your experience in receiving mercy impact how you give mercy?

Additional Scriptures:

James 2:12-13

Colossians 3:12-14

Other Resources:

The Cure: What if God isn't who you think He is and neither are you? by Bruce McNicol and Bill Thrall
Bold Love by Dan B Allender and Tremper Longman

References:

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount by John Stott

The Gospel of Matthew Volume I (The New Daily Study Bible) by William Barclay

Matthew: A Commentary. Volume 1: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12 by Frederick Dale Bruner

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I Will Tell the Truth – Matthew 5:8

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Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8 NIV)

Absolute purity is a rarity in our world. I once got to handle a bar of gold that was 99.9999% gold. This means that there was .0001% of something else in the gold. That bar of gold is probably the closest I've ever come to purity, but it wasn't pure.

The word translated pure in this beatitude means both clean, as in free from dirt, and unmixed, as in made from a single substance. Our hearts are neither clean, nor unmixed. There is only one way I know to deal with this condition and move toward the purity of heart that Jesus desires for us. We have to tell the truth.

1 John 1:5-10

Notice how John starts. God is pure, He is all light and no darkness. We cannot purify ourselves, but we can make a choice to be cleaned up. It is a simple choice to choose to admit we're dirty. It is simple, but not easy. It seems that everything in us wants to claim that we're clean. Maybe that is because we prefer using the "I'm cleaner than" standard. We almost always make the wrong comparison, and this is a way of lying to ourselves. If we walk into the pure light of Jesus, we would immediately see how dirty we really are. Telling the truth brings us into the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus.

There is another benefit to telling the truth. John tells us that when we tell the truth about our sin, we can have fellowship with one another. It has been said that we are only as sick as our secrets. Secrets separate, and truth confessed opens the door for intimacy. We watched the movie "Same Kind of Different as Me" yesterday. Early in the movie there is a relational crisis for the married couple at the center of the plot. The husband confesses to the wife that he has had an affair. She is devastated, but then does something very wise. She asks if there is anything else, and there is. After revealing the final secret, they can begin rebuilding their relationship. Truth often hurts, but it is the only path to healing.

Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Psalm 51:1-13

What does David know about himself?

What does David know about God?

What is David's desire?

What action flows out of his understanding of himself and God?

What is your desire?

2 Timothy 2:20-22

What might a gold or silver vessel be used for? What about a wood or clay vessel?

Which kind of vessel would you prefer to be?

What do you need to do to become this kind of vessel?

What do you need to do to remain this kind of vessel?

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I Will Tell the Truth – Matthew 5:8

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1 John 1:5-10

What is necessary to have fellowship, an intimate relationship, with God?

What does God provide to make this relationship possible?

What do you need to provide?

In what areas of your life are you not telling God the truth?

How are secrets or lies impacting your relationships?

What do you need to help you change this?

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Cool It – Matthew 5:9

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Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Peace to Jesus was not simply the absence of conflict. Peace to Jesus and the Jews of His day was an overwhelming sense of well-being that extends through the family and to the community around it. People being people, peace must be pursued. It will not be achieved by doing nothing. Much of the time, making peace between people will involve initiating conflict. One of the best expressions I've heard to describe this process is "constructive contention."

We begin learning how to make peace by practicing the fifth beatitude, blessed are the merciful. When we are hurt, we are willing to forgive and then pursue seeking the repentance that will bring genuine peace to the relationship. We care enough about the other person and our relationship to risk some short-term stress to achieve long-term peace.

Luke 17:3-4

What Jesus instructs us to do is not easy, but not following this process is a sure way to create resentment and bitterness that are guaranteed to destroy peace.

Often people we care about are experiencing conflict that does not seem to involve us. We may not have had any part in creating the hurt that exists, but if two members of our family or community are separated from each other, peace within our community is impossible.

Philippians 4:2-3

Paul is asking these two women to resolve their conflict and be at peace. He also recognizes that they may not be able to resolve their differences without help. Often, we need someone with an outside and objective point of view to help us see our part in the conflict and initiate conversations that can move us toward repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. This requires great wisdom, skill, and effort, and is the constant work of the children of God.

Although peace amongst people is very important to God, the ultimate peace-making role is to work for the reconciliation of another person with God. God has done most of the work. He sent Jesus to die for all of us to make His forgiveness of us possible. Our task is to let people know that forgiveness is available and encourage them to repent and receive it.

John 16:7-12

One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is to convince people that they need forgiveness. As peace-makers I don't think we spend enough time in prayer asking the Holy Spirit to do just that in the lives of people we love who are separated from God. I know I don't and I'm really trying to change that.

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Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Romans 12:14-19

What is harmony? What does it have to do with creating peace in a community?
What character trait leads to peace in our relationships?
What is the opposite character trait and how does work against peace?
What attitudes will destroy peace?
What is required to eliminate these attitudes in a community?
Why is peace not always possible?

James 4:1-6

What causes fights and quarrels among us?
What are you fighting with someone or God about? Why?
How does James tell us to end the fight and find peace?

Ephesians 2:11-18

Why could Jews and Gentiles not find peace? What separated them?
How much was Jesus willing to invest to achieve peace between Jews, Gentiles, and God?
What does it mean “to reconcile”?
Why are relationships so important to peace?

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

What is the worldly point of view of people?
What is the worldly point of view of Jesus?
What is God’s point of view regarding Jesus?
What is God’s point of view regarding people?
When we see people from God’s point of view what will we do?

Additional Scriptures:

Proverbs 12:20

1 Peter 3:10-12

Romans 5:1-2

Colossians 1:19-23

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It's Ok, I've Got Jesus – Matthew 5:10

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“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Mat 5:10-12 NIV)

This beatitude puzzles me. It doesn't puzzle me because the words are difficult to understand or the meaning is unclear. It puzzles me because the creator of the universe, a good and all-powerful God, chooses the way of suffering for Himself and His kingdom. The principle is clear throughout the entire Bible. It is a challenge for us. I had someone tell me once that he didn't believe in God because if there was a God life shouldn't be so hard.

Only this beatitude isn't about suffering in general. It is about a specific kind of suffering, the suffering that results from following Jesus. In China, Christian parents are striving to educate their children in the way of Jesus. They have created private schools to accomplish this task. These schools are now being persecuted. Here is an example of how one school responded:

Today, security guards still keep watch over the empty building to prevent the school from meeting, according to Jacob Jiang, one of the school's founders (WORLD changed his name for his protection). As teachers and parents fretted over the government opposition, Jiang reassured them: “Our name is Beatitudes, and the one blessing we lacked was ‘blessed are the persecuted,’” he said. “Thankfully God has a sense of humor. He allowed us to go through persecution so we could gain all eight blessings.” – World Magazine September 29, 2018 Issue

Persecution presents us with a choice. It doesn't matter if the persecution is subtle or life threatening. Anytime we are tempted to hide our relationship with Jesus, either to be included or to avoid real pain, we are faced with this choice. Do we really love Jesus and trust Him more than anything else? Jesus' love for His Father was the most important thing in His life. They were one and even the cross could not shake Jesus' trust in His Father. Persecution is real, and we don't have to live in a foreign country to experience it.

John 16:32-33

Jesus knew He was not alone and chose to go to the cross. Whatever we're facing, including persecution, we can choose Jesus. He has overcome, and He is with us.

Scripture Readings and Discussion Questions:

Mark 8:31-38

Why do you think Peter rebuked Jesus? What did Peter expect for Jesus and His followers?
Why does Jesus respond so strongly and directly to Peter?
What does it mean to “take up your cross”?
What is Jesus concerned will happen to His followers?
When have you been tempted to be ashamed of Jesus?
What gives you the confidence to be open and obvious about your relationship with Jesus?

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It's Ok, I've Got Jesus – Matthew 5:10

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Hebrews 10:32-39

What is happening to the church that this passage is written to?

Who could this passage be written to today?

What helps the followers of Jesus to persevere?

When have you been tempted to shrink back?

What do you find in this passage that would help you to stand firm?

Romans 8:35-39

How does Paul describe life as a follower of Jesus?

How do we tend to feel when we are suffering or being persecuted?

How should we feel?

What gives us the confidence to conquer and endure?

Additional Scriptures on Persecution and Suffering:

Colossians 1:24-26

Hebrews 5:7-10

1 Peter 1:3-9

Revelation 2:8-10

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