

6-15-2025

## **Relax Your Grip**

### **Matthew 5: 1 – 12**

Today I want to talk about how to receive God's blessings. I'm actually a bit uncomfortable making such an opening statement, because I don't want you folks to get the idea that I somehow have some inside knowledge on how to get things from God. I don't.

If I did, all my friends and I would be skating through life without a care in the world! I also don't want you to think of God as a Giant vending machine who's ready to dispense a blessing if only we had access to the secret code.

Like so many people, I too, want to be blessed by God – and I already have in so many ways. For example, God has given me almost 60 years of a healthy happy life.

I grew up in a loving family with a mom and dad that cared for me and gave above and beyond everything I ever needed.

I was able to further my education and pursue a career that I find fulfilling.

I married a wonderful woman who loves me and has given me five amazing children.

I have an income and live in a safe neighborhood where I don't have to fear for my life when I go to the store to buy groceries.

When I think about all these things, and realize that they are all from the hand of God, how can I not feel blessed and want to give thanks to Him?

But even with all this abundance, guess what? I still want more!

All this stuff is good for today, but what about tomorrow?

Will my children be safe and healthy as they continue their education?  
Will I still have my health?

What about my job? I'm completely dependent on other people for my income.

59 years of life has been a good run, but what about the next ten or twenty years?

Will God give me more?

And is it okay to ask for more or is that being completely selfish?

I look at other people's lives and they have much less than I have.

Maybe they live in a rundown shack or don't even have a home.

Maybe the street is their home.

Maybe they have no source of income or no family to visit when it's time to celebrate their birthday.

Maybe they have a terminal disease that needs attention but have no way of getting to the doctor.

The living conditions that we enjoy and even take for granted are far better than what many others in this world experience.

Is it right then, for me to ask for more blessings when others are doing without?

Many people these days would say no. It's not right to ask for more or want more or get more when so many are needy. But I'm not sure how depriving myself is necessarily going to help someone else.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not opposed to sharing or following the Lord's command that says when you see someone with no tunic and you have

two, give him your extra one. This makes complete sense to me. We bless others as God enables us to do so.

But I think we get off track when we start believing that somehow there's a limit to God's blessings. Sure, if there's limited resources in certain circumstances, we should think about rationing. We did that a few weeks ago with Julie's leftover birthday cake. Since we rationed at night, we were able to enjoy another slice in the morning! Nothing like birthday cake for breakfast! Yum!

But God's blessings are not like a birthday cake that disappears faster than the burning candles we put on top.

God's blessings never run out.

Listen to what God says through the prophet Malachi in the last book of the Old Testament: [In describing His response to our faithful obedience], God says, *"Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in the fields will not cast their fruit. Then all the nations will call you blessed for yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty."*

Obviously, God was speaking to the nation of Judah, but he very well could have been speaking to us, and I believe he is. And he's saying to us ...

Relax your grip on what you already have, then you'll be able to receive even more blessings from me which have no end! In other words, you don't have to hold on so tightly to what you have. I've got tons more from where that came from!

But it's human nature to want to hold onto things, isn't it? - and hold onto them tightly.

Even as babies, we have what I like to describe as monkey grip. Whether it's a bottle, a rattle, or our favorite toy, don't mess with my things. If you do, I'll be sure to throw tantrum, turn red, and start leaking from my eyeballs – and that's all going to happen before I let go!

Even as we get older, possessing things bring us great comfort and security and it's difficult to let them go.

Remember those clever advertisements from the company called Letgo.com? They are in the business of helping others sell their stuff online. One of the ads had to do with an astronaut in outer space who didn't want to let go of his stereo amplifier from the seventies. But his partner assured him that he wouldn't need it anymore since there's no sound in space anyway. Well, as soon as he places a photo of it online, a Russian Cosmonaut knocks on the spaceship's door ready to buy it. At least I thought it was funny.

For me it was a fishing pole, a baseball bat, my dirt bike or maybe my pellet gun. These were my prized possessions that established my identity and my freedom, and the thought of my younger brothers playing with them easily drove me crazy!

In my later years loosening my grip on my possessions probably became easier, but it wasn't without a struggle. Maybe moving to a new state every few years caused me to loosen my grip.

But it's just not material things that we're afraid to relinquish.

Sometimes it's a feeling of hate or resentment, jealousy or inferiority, shame or fear.

Sometimes we have a difficult time letting go of a relationship even though we know it's not a healthy one. We may hang onto it because we have a fear of the unknown.

Our current relationship at least gives us familiarity if not joy. And the relationship doesn't have to be a bad one either. It could have been a beautiful and edifying relationship, and these can be the hardest to part with.

Sometimes we hold onto experiences that have impacted us in a negative way. We may hold on to it until just the right time we can pull it out and use it to incriminate or embarrass another. I guess this would fall into the harboring a grudge category.

But here's the thing, whether we're holding onto material, emotional or some other thing with such a fierce grip, we'll miss out on the greater blessings God has for us.

And this brings me to our text for today – the beginning of the Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, and really the beginning of his public teaching and preaching ministry.

Notice that during these 12 verses, Jesus uses the word blessed no less than 9 times. This observation alone tells us something about ourselves and God.

First, we are a needy people and desperately need God's blessings – we need God's benevolent actions to operate toward us and in us in the here and now so that not only can we survive this life but look forward to a life with God after this life!

In other words, we need God's blessings all the time.

And we can see this truth being played out in the verses leading up to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew writes, *"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountain side and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them."*

Now isn't this interesting?

Jesus sees the crowd and immediately begins to teach them. He didn't try to feed them or entertain them or even try to organize them into some sort of religious movement. He simply taught them.

Jesus, who knows us better than we know ourselves, knew that this crowd of people needed to learn, and not just about anything – not about nature or the weather or the latest political news, but about his Father and how we are able to relate to him and how he wants to bless those who seek him.

And isn't this the essence of the Gospel?

To teach us how to relate to God?

When we share the Gospel, what are we trying to convey to the listener?

Isn't it the truth that our relationship with God, our creator is broken and in need of repair?

That our relationship with God is not where it should be because of our sin nature, and that the only way we can have a restored relationship with Him is if we come to him with a repentant heart, confessing our sins, and asking God to forgive us?

Isn't this what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount?

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* We must recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy. We must admit that we cannot save ourselves.

*"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."* Again, a recognition and confession of our spiritual depravity and a genuine expression of godly sorrow that leads to repentance and to God's mercy.

*“Meekness”* speaks of humility and a willingness to hold loosely to those things that are temporal so that we can embrace and inherit eternal things - God things and heaven's blessings.

*“Hungering and thirsting for righteousness”* acknowledges our need for a righteousness that only God can give. Godly righteousness can be ours only if we come to God seeking His grace and applying the faith he gives us to believe in Him.

And the list goes on.

Jesus taught, *“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.”*

In the Gospel we find hope, and a key theme of this hope is that we will be transformed into Christ's likeness.

If we're communing with God, His Son's mercy toward us will overflow into the lives of others, and this experience will be evidence to us that God is making good on his promise to us, that he's changing us from the inside out. This gives us hope!

*“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God.”*

To me, this is the most logical and straight forward teaching by Jesus.

We have no place in Christ's family if we remain divisive, combative, and antagonistic toward God, his people, and his plan to redeem the world.

Until we become a child of God, we remain bereft of the greatest blessings God offers us – new life in Christ!

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

You see, the world hates that which isn't its own. The kingdom of heaven is not the world's kingdom. It's God's.

This is why it hates Jesus so much, because Jesus came from God and is God. He invaded this world with the intention of rightfully reclaiming it as his own and restoring it to better than its original condition.

But like most invasions, a battle will ensue.

The greatest battle has already been waged when Christ died on the cross and rose again, but skirmishes will continue until Christ's return, and this is the reason why we, his children, will continue to be persecuted.

When we follow Christ, we put ourselves in the other-worldly camp with Christ and become enemies of the world's system. But our reward is heaven itself and God Himself, so our enlisting in God's army is entirely worth it.

So, the Gospel is clear and totally imbedded in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It's unmistakable and undeniable.

But who is this crowd of whom Matthew speaks and to whom Jesus addresses?

Well, we learn a little bit about them from the last verse in chapter 4. They are both Jews and Gentiles, and they have come from various nearby regions after hearing stories about Jesus and the miracles he's performed.

Matthew even lists the different regions from where they came: Galilee, Syria, the Decapolis which is conglomeration of Greek cities, Jerusalem, Judea, and from a region on the east side of the Jordan river.

So, this crowd is quite a diverse group – different cultures, different races, different backgrounds, jobs and social status, but they all have one thing in common, don't they?



They are in desperate need for Christ's healing, and in desperate need for Christ's blessing in their lives.

So, they travel great distances to be in the presence of the healer.

They come with their illnesses, their diseases, and their sicknesses hoping for a miracle.

They arrive with physical suffering, severe pain, and even demon-possession that has tormented them for who knows how long.

Many are suffering from seizures and paralysis, and without the help others they probably wouldn't have even been able to make the journey, but they did.

Have you ever felt like that?

When you felt like you couldn't go another step?

But you went anyway, because you had faith – and not just any faith – any faith won't do. Only faith in the living God can make the difference.

And there is Christ ... to Physically heal?

Yes, but more importantly to reveal his father to those who have eyes to see.

*"Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God."*

I suspect that there were those in attendance in the crowd who were physically healed, and yet missed God. And I'm almost sure there were also those who remained in poor physical condition but experienced something so much greater than physical healing. For the first time they believed in the Messiah, the lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

How do you receive the blessings of God?

You seek him out, and potentially take a difficult journey that may inconvenience you and cost you dearly, but you go to him by faith, and with a loose grip on the things of this world, and with a heart willing to learn from the Master, you ask him for healing, receive gratefully anything he offers, because you know and trust that He knows what's best for you and that his storehouses of blessings from heaven are never-ending. Amen.

**Benediction:**

*"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3: 20 - 21*