

**Series: New Year (Jan. 3 - Feb 14)**

***Momentum: Pursuing God's Blessings through the Beatitudes***

Blurb: We're starting 2021 by exploring how to make progress in our spiritual lives. It's easy to get sidetracked and stuck as we follow God's call. We settle for what we have, and we give up on moving forward in our spiritual lives. Jesus taught us how to receive more of God's blessings, especially in the Eight Beatitudes. Starting a new year is a great time to recommit to following Jesus' calling in the Beatitudes and to restart moving forward in our faith.

**Sun., Jan. 3: Epiphany, but no Holy Communion (previous week):**

Memory Verse: "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." -Psalm 16:11

Message: **Momentum (The Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform**

Sermon Scripture: Matthew 5:1-2

Reading of Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

Blurb: We begin the new year with a new message series about seeking the fullness of life that God offers. Almost without notice we can stall and stagnate in our spiritual growth. Yet Christmas has awakened in us a desire for more. So we go to Jesus, who teaches us the Eight Beatitudes, offering them not only as a description of the abundant life but also as a pathway to live it. We begin the journey and build momentum for holiness!

**WELCOME** -Pastor David  
Happy New Year!

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever." -Psalm 16:11

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify

*Blessed to Be a Blessing*

*Show Me How to Live*

Worship prayer -Pastor Andrew

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Matthew 5:1-12 (CEB) -Reader: Bethany Bonsell

**Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount with what are called the Eight Beatitudes. Matthew 5:1-12,**

**1** Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up a mountain. He sat down and His disciples came to Him. **2** He taught them, saying:

**3** "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

**4** "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.

**5** "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

**6** "Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.

**7** "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

**8** "Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

**9** "Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.

**10 “Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**

**11 “Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.**

**PRAYERS:** New Year’s Prayer for 2021 -Cassi

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE:** Epiphany Marking of the Door with Chalk -Pastor Andrew  
& **APOSTLE’S CREED** -Pastor Andrew

**MESSAGE:** Momentum (The Beatitudes) #1: Climbing the Platform

**PP#1:** Momentum (The Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up a mountain. He sat down and His disciples came to Him. He taught them, saying ....” -Matthew 5:1-2

Momentum (The Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform. Matthew 5:1-2 “Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up a mountain. He sat down and His disciples came to Him. He taught them, saying, blessed....”

We’re starting off the new year with a resolution to pursue the true Christian life. I don’t know about you, but I’m kinda done with a life on pause, in a holding pattern, just getting by. As I look back over last year and look forward into the new, I have a yearning for what really matters, for making progress in my life, especially my spiritual life which drives the rest of my life; I have a yearning to seek the full intention God plans for me. I think that this past COVID year has revealed a shallowness in our lives, and a shallowness in our reliance on God. It’s time to make the main thing the main thing again. You with me? You ready for more?

A year ago we went back deep into the Old Testament to the Ten Commandments. We heard God’s two-fold intention for His people: to love God completely and to love others. This is the godly life. And this fall we took a journey into the boardrooms of our souls and discovered that there is much inside that is not given to God. So now we are primed for getting real, and going deeper.

Jesus came to earth at Christmas. When He was 30, He began His public ministry, preaching and teaching to the people. And Matthew chapters 5-7 records His first major sermon; we call it The Sermon on the Mount. He begins with eight blessings that we call “The Eight Beatitudes.”

Jesus has come to usher in God’s Kingdom, to draw people back to God, to make the main thing the main thing. In the 10 Commandments, God gives the basis of the covenant, and then focuses on external behaviors: not killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying and coveting. In the Beatitudes, Jesus takes the old covenant and its external actions and takes them internal, right down into our hearts. Jesus calls out our motivations, our devotion, our desires.

**PP#2:** “Beatitude”

*beatus* (Latin)

*markarios* (Greek)

“blessed” or “happy” (English)

The word “Beatitude” comes from the Latin word that starts each one: *be-a-tus*. The Greek word is *ma-kar-i-os*. It’s often translated “blessed” or “happy.” Now, we usually differentiate between happiness, which is based on how things are going right now, from joy, which is a sustained

position. So, when we think of happiness, we think about our feelings when things go right. It's based on our circumstances. We're happy when work ends early, when we get the good parking spot, when the package comes in on time. Happy. But here we have Jesus saying that God's people are "happy" when their external circumstances are NOT so rosy. So it starts to dawn on us that the happiness or blessing that Jesus is referring to is not from our circumstances in life, but from our circumstance of living under God. When Jesus says "happy" we may better understand "joy." Blessed is a good word, I think. God's people see their world not by what happens to them, but from the sense of well-being and contentment that comes from knowing our position rightly with God. God's people are happy and blessed even when they face trouble and hardship.

Isn't this the kind of life you long for? Have you grown tired of the complaining and negativity about the limits of COVID-19 and social distancing? We talk so much about our suffering and loss. Yes, some have lost loved ones, and that is real. But most of the complaining has come from *inconvenience*. This has perhaps revealed a shallowness in our happiness.

So, we're looking for a momentum to grow: to grow in blessedness, to grow spiritually. And when this Jesus born at Christmas starts preaching and teaching, He speaks about a life that is blessed by God. That's what we're after! We desire more. And this Jesus opens up the pathway to a full and rich life.

Now, the Beatitudes are a bit weird and hard to understand at face value. Poor in spirit? Why are those who mourn happy? So, honestly, we really don't do much with them. We know about them, but we really don't live with them. But Jesus, as He comes out of the gate, starts with these. They must be pretty important! So, I think we need to rediscover them again.

**PP#3: Matthew 5:1-2**

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up a mountain. He sat down and His disciples came to Him. He taught them, saying ....

So, we're going to start with them in our new year. Matthew 5:1-2, "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up a mountain. He sat down and His disciples came to Him. He taught them, saying ...." Jesus sees those who want to pursue God. We join that crowd and press into hear Jesus.

He went up the hillside, and the people gathered around. He sat down. In that culture, the teacher would sit as the students stood. How different from us today! Here I'm standing preaching to you, and you are sitting down comfortably. In the church building we even have cushions on the pews. That may indicate part of our problem. We want to hear Jesus, but we want to be comfortable. And I routinely hear comments about making the message shorter. How different to stand at attention, bodily eager to hear, to absorb and take in all that we hear, wanting more. Sitting down people expect to be impressed, expect the speaker to make it easy to receive. Standing people make the effort, do the work, to reach out and get what's offered. Church, we need to join *that* crowd, to listen like this! We come standing, wanting, working, bodily eager to go get what we crave!

What does it mean to be blessed? How would you describe a happy life? Would it be a happy marriage, gifted children, good health, fulfilling work, financial stability, opportunities to travel, healthy church? Yet Jesus mentions none of these! In God's Kingdom, this is not where happiness comes from. Right off the bat, Jesus reorders what's real. Happiness comes in places we don't normally expect. Jesus teaches us God's view of blessing.

So, we're going to walk through the Beatitudes, one by one, over the next few weeks. Pastor Andrew will start us off next week with the first. But before we get there, I want to offer three ways that we need to approach the Beatitudes in order to get what God wants for us from them.

**PP#4: Momentum (Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform**

## 1. A Tool for Discernment

The first way to use the Beatitudes is as a tool for discernment. How do you know a goldfinch when you see it? By its bright yellow feathers, right? You know a bird by its markings. How do you know a Christian when you see one? What are the markings of a true child of God?

Some might say it's by what you believe. Well, true believers certainly do believe certain things and not others. Yet even though belief is necessary, it's not enough. Even Satan believes many true things about Jesus. And we know many people claiming to be Christians and who profess many right beliefs still indulge in a sinful life in many ways. There are many hypocrites Christians. But they are not pursuing a godly life. And, truth be told, Jesus really doesn't teach a lot of doctrines!

Some may say that a Christian is known by their deeds. Christians show their faith in their actions. True. You cannot be a Christian without godly actions. Jesus says obedience is key. Even so, it's not enough. In Matthew 7 Jesus also says that He will disown many who claim to follow Him and even who are busy doing ministry in His name. Belief is insufficient. Behavior is insufficient.

What are the markings of a true child of God? Jesus gives the Beatitudes as His answer. These are the distinguishing characteristics of a follower of Jesus. So, first use of the Beatitudes: use them as a tool for discernment. Do these describe you? As you look at your life as a disciple, are these your markings? Are you a peacemaker, or does your presence bring turmoil? What is the condition of your heart? Is it marked by purity? Are you merciful? Do you forgive others quickly? Do you react in mercy toward the weaknesses of others? Are you driven for righteousness? Do you mourn over your sins?

Jesus gives the Beatitudes as a description of the godly life. Does Jesus describe you here? Would others say they do? This list can help you honestly assess yourself and your spiritual progress.

Here's a key. You see, the Beatitudes don't describe how to *become* a Christian. It's not: Go out and learn to do these so that you can be restored to God. No. That comes only by grace: what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our salvation is won by Jesus' effort, not ours. The Beatitudes, instead, describe what a Christian looks like. And therefore, we can use the Beatitudes to examine ourselves honestly. As the last year revealed, it is way too easy to profess to be a Christian but then stall out and just rest there, deceiving ourselves.

**PP#5: Momentum (Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform**

## 1. A Tool for Discernment

## 2. A Key to Progress

And here is the second purpose of the Beatitudes. We are pursuing holiness. We want to become more the way God wants us to be. We are seeking the fullness that God intends. And when we examine ourselves under the Beatitudes, we realize that we have more to go. The Beatitudes describe the Christian life, and they also describe how to pursue more of the Christian life. They offer a process to grow spiritually. If you look down at some of the harder Beatitudes, like showing mercy, forgiving others, being pure in heart, making peace, do you find you need to grow into those a bit more? Yes? Well, the Beatitudes also show you how to do that. You see, there is a progression here. Each one flows out of the previous one.

**PP#6:** *Colin Smith's image of a tree with roots, shoots, and fruit, from his Momentum curriculum.*

Pastor Colin Smith uses this image: think of it as a tree. The first three Beatitudes are the roots. They focus on our need: how we are poor in spirit, how we mourn our sin, how we need to get rid of our pride. These are the foundations, the roots. The tree itself, the shoot that comes out of these, is the life that is described in the Fourth Beatitude, as hungering and thirsting after God's righteousness. And this life of righteousness bears fruit, the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Beatitudes: Mercy/forgiveness, purity of heart, and peace. Root, shoot, and fruit.

The Eighth Beatitude is not a fruit, but an outcome of this life. When you live this way, you will be persecuted. You are blessed because you are living God's life!

**PP#7:** *Colin Smith's image of gymnastic rings from his Momentum curriculum.*

Colin Smith also uses another image to describe the progression of the Beatitudes. Think of it as successive gymnastic rings. How do you get to the later rings? By swinging through the first ones. When you grasp the first ring, you have a momentum that swings you within range of the next one. The second ring gives you momentum to grasp the third. You find it hard to forgive someone who really hurt you? How do you live out the Fifth Beatitude? You do it by starting at the first one.

The first ring everyone can get on. It's recognizing and admitting that you, in yourself, don't have what it takes to live the Christian life. It is truly being poor in spirit. Pastor Andrew will take us into that one next week. But it all begins with an honest admission that we can't do it in our own strength. The first ring, the first Beatitude, is admitting that we are poor in spirit, and that we need God's strength to help us. It's a relinquishing of our pride, of our being okay, of being good enough. To step up to the platform—to want more of God—starts with honestly admitting our need of God's help. This first ring is within everyone's grasp who climbs up the platform.

And from there, we now have momentum to help us go to repentance. We mourn our sin and repent of it before God. These are the foundational roots of purity of heart, of quick forgiveness, of making peace. God can't do those through us until we cultivate our hearts of humility and openness to God's working in our lives. And we aren't open to God's work until we step up to the platform of discontent with life as we now know it and want more, want to pursue holiness.

If you find yourself struggling on forgiveness, if you've lost your momentum, you may find yourself kinda stuck, hanging there. What happens when a gymnast loses her momentum on the rings? She kinda hangs there, trying to swing. But eventually her strength fails, and she falls. What must she do? She starts again on the first ring! Same with us spiritually! We begin again at the beginning of the Beatitudes, admitting we can't do it on our own, mourning our bitterness to others, submitting our lives to God. Building that momentum can then carry us through the tough calling of forgiving deep wounds.

We continue the Christian life—momentum, swinging—every day. We never *complete* or leave behind the first rings, as they continually provide momentum for the higher markings of our Christian life.

**PP#8:** Momentum (Beatitudes): Climbing the Platform

1. A Tool for Discernment
2. A Key to Progress
3. A Window to Worship

One more way the Beatitudes will help us as we pursue holiness: they become for us a window of worship, a way that we see Jesus more and more clearly. You see, everything Jesus says, He does. He is the Blessed One. He lives a life of true happiness. Looking at Him we see the true

markings of the Christian life. And by working through the rings, we see Jesus so much more clearly, modeling for us how to live, motivating us to keep going, depending on Him for strength and growth. And it swells our hearts in worship, and we are captured into Him all the more. As we see Him more clearly, we become more excited about growing like that ourselves. Jesus invites us to come and become more like He is. He swings with us, making us able to swing.

In Christmas, we saw clearly His poverty: He left heaven behind, and became a human. He showed true humility: allowing Himself to be persecuted and killed. He mourns sin—not His sin because He had none—but He wept over the sin of Jerusalem. In the Garden of Gethsemane we see His meekness: He submitted His will to that of the Father, giving up Himself for God’s plan. He fulfills all righteousness, practices true forgiveness, and is Himself the Prince of Peace who offers to us true peace with God.

**PP#9:** *Image of the platform in front of gymnastic rings, with the gymnastic rings coming next.*

Perhaps we’ve found ourselves hanging, stalled on our Christian lives. Or perhaps we’ve grown tired and fallen off. But, we’ve been Scrooged over Christmas. We’ve been captured by the blessing that God offers. We’ve been given a second chance. And now we see that we’re offered again the Eight Beatitudes: describing the abundant Christian life, and the pathway to actually live it. They are 1. a tool for discernment, to honestly see ourselves where we are. They are 2. a key to progress, laying out the pathway to blessing. And they are 3. a window to worship, so we can see Jesus more and more clearly. And so, today we’ve stepped back up to the platform, committing that we want more, we want God’s intended blessing. Jesus lays out the rings in front of us and puts the first one right within our reach. And He invites us to join Him as we take the leap of faith.

This week, as we climb up to the platform, I ask you to read the Eight Beatitudes each day. It’s Matthew 5:1-12. Read it once a day, each day. And let’s ask the Holy Spirit to work in us a desire for more!

Amen.

**CLOSING SONG:** *Go Tell It on the Mountain* -Sanctify

**OFFERING:** -Pastor David

-Give of your monies to God’s work through this church. You can mail it in or drop it off in the church office. Or, most conveniently, you can make an automated transfer or a debit card payment on the church website or by using the “square” on the bulletin.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** -Pastor David

Next week’s message: Momentum, the First Beatitude -Pastor Andrew

Tomorrow’s Monday video devotional will start a series on the Beatitudes, flushing out something more from the sermon, or something I didn’t get to include.

Devotional videos Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Wed. programming starting again this week: Echo, Confirmation, Youth Group, via Zoom

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” -Psalm 16:11

**BENEDICTION** -Pastor David