

DISTINCT

LIVING ABOVE THE NORM



MICHAEL KELLEY



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Distinct: Living Above the Norm
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Training



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ABOUT THIS STUDY

Don't blend. Don't compromise. Be distinct.

If everyone else jumped off a cliff, would you do it, too?

We all heard that one from our parents; some of us have even said it to our own kids. The point is simple: just because everyone else is doing something doesn't make it right. The problem, though, is that we like to fit in. Ever since we were kids, we wanted to like the right kind of music, wear the right clothes, and use the right technology.

In other words, we want to jump off the cliff *because* everyone else is doing it.

As disciples of Jesus, we were made to be different. To stand apart. To live in such a way that it's clear we aren't bandwagon crowd-followers; we're followers of Christ. That fact alone makes us stand apart—distinct from the crowd.

When we started following Jesus, everything about us changed, whether we recognized those changes or not. We have a new heart. We have new desires. We have new attitudes. And all of that newness stands in sharp contrast to the old.

In His most famous sermon, Jesus helped His followers—both then and now—see just how different God made us to be. In everything from our character to our relationships to the way we love other people, we were made to stand apart from the crowd. Just as it was for those who heard the Sermon on the Mount for the first time, every day of our lives is filled with opportunities for us to compromise and blend in with the norm.

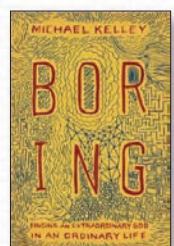
Or to be distinct.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michael Kelley

Michael Kelley is a husband, dad, author, and speaker. He serves as the Director of Groups at LifeWay Christian Resources and, in all those arenas, is trying to help people have a holistic view of what it means to be formed in Jesus. Michael is the author of *Boring: Finding an Extraordinary God in an Ordinary Life* and *Wednesdays Were Pretty Normal*, which tells the story of his 10-year-old son's battle with leukemia. Michael blogs at michaelkelleyministries.com.



SESSION 1

DISTINCT IN MY CHARACTER



*What was the happiest time
in your life?*

QUESTION #1

#BSFLdistinct

*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."

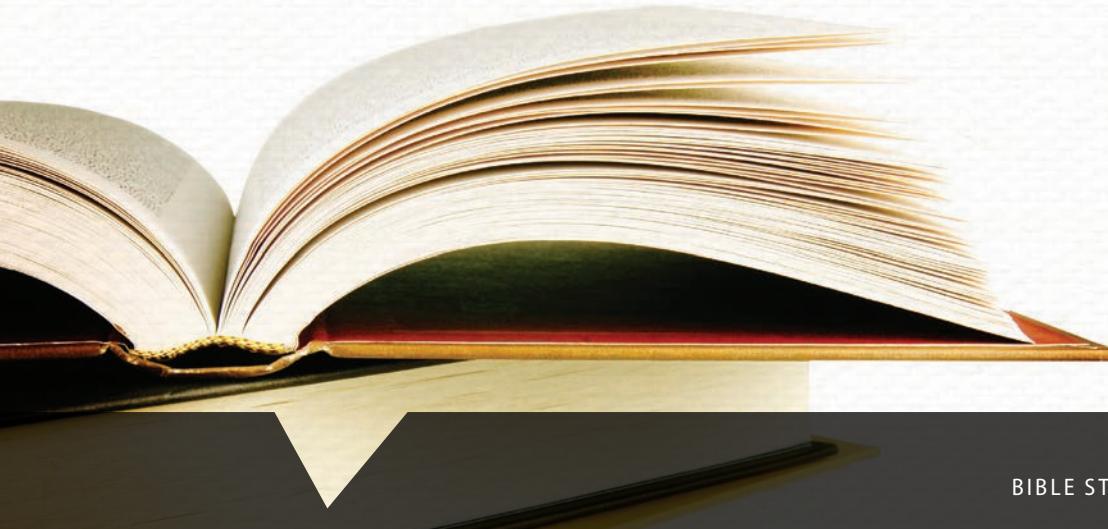
WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

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

QUESTION #2

FEELING BLESSED

What are the major blessings in your life? Use the space below 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

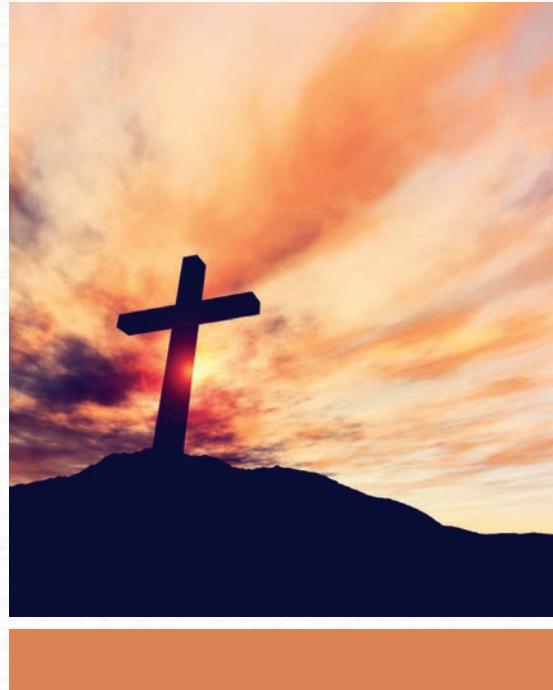
The cross on the right illustrates life in the kingdom of God. The vertical bar reflects our relationship with God. When we recognize our spiritual poverty, mourn over our sin, gently submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord, and hunger and thirst for His righteousness—our vertical relationship with God is 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.

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.



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

QUESTION #3

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

QUESTION #4

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.

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

QUESTION #5

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?



My thoughts