Improving Your Serve  
Lesson 9  
Matthew 5:1-12

Portrait of a Servant

Our study opens with what might seem to be a very straightforward question, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” However, as we carefully reflect upon “Improving our Serve” the reference to growing up becomes much more involved. For the believer the question should be “what does Jesus want me to be when I grow up.” In this study we are challenged to consider what Jesus intends for us “to be” when we are fully transformed into His image. The book suggests that the answer is the same for every believer, that Jesus’ desire for our spiritual maturity is that we “be different.”

As we reflect upon “being different,” the fundamental consideration must be what the believer looks like clothed in the character of Jesus. In other words, if you were to paint a portrait of the attributes of Jesus lived out in the life of the believer what would it look like.

In this lesson, Chuck Swindoll points us to the unique portrait Jesus painted in the Sermon on the Mount of someone whose lifestyle is by contrast shockingly different from the accepted norms of our society. A portrait of a lifestyle rooted in a value system which is measurably different ethically, spiritually, politically, socially, professionally and personally. It is a portrait that presents a radically different picture of a servant completely distinct from what is admired by the non-Christian world.

I. Jesus’ Call – “Be Different”

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ call to be different is a call to a standard of living that goes beyond what are normal expectations. His call requires more than just looking righteous, it requires a new way of thinking. In Matt 5:20, Jesus lays out what this difference looks like by contrasting the external righteousness demonstrated by the religious leaders with the internal righteousness that is to flow from the hearts of His disciples. Jesus shows that the religious leaders were putting all their emphasis on the external appearance of complying with the law and their traditions, but in fact, their hearts were far from right thinking or righteous living.
In this text, Jesus exposes their phony self-righteousness and then remarks that the righteousness of His disciples must “exceed” the righteousness of the religious leaders.

1. According to the scriptures below, how should our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees?

- Matt 23:22-23
- Matt 23:25
- Matt 23:27-28

2. In Luke 18:9-14, what is the difference between these two men regarding how they approach God and express righteousness?

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II. The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are the introductory statements of Jesus’ famous “Sermon on the Mount.” In English the word “beatitude,” comes from the root word, “beatify” meaning having attained or received God’s blessedness. Thus, the Beatitudes take us into the blessedness of God and offer us a rich dose of ancient wisdom packaged in a new attitude that brings about this different lifestyle of righteousness. Each of the eight statements begins with the words, “blessed are” implying that the blessedness of God is the believers inheritance for a life lived according to God principles. They paint a radical picture of what the “blessed life” looks like, then give us permission to live that life into being with an eternal promise that “God Himself will faithfully fulfill.” Now, before we embark upon our study of the individual beatitudes, let’s consider the below observations that identify the theme shared in each of Jesus’ radical teachings on divine character.
In *Matthew 5:3-10*, there are three general observations that show us the spiritual attitude common to all those seeking to improve their serve.

- **True Servants** embrace all these qualities in the *Beatitudes* as they grow and cultivate a lifestyle pleasing to Christ.

  How does this lifestyle shape a servant’s identity and responsibility?

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- **Inner Happiness** the blessing of the *Beatitudes* leads to the kind of peace that brings lasting joy and great satisfaction to our relationship with Christ and one another.

  What attitudes do you need to change or develop to experience inner happiness?

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- **Eternal Promise** flow out of the abundance of spiritual wealth in the economy of God to all who dare to apply the *Beatitudes* to their lives.

  What promise would you like to have come alive in your life today?

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**III. The First Four Blessings**

The divine character traits in the *Beatitudes* are so radical that Jesus starts these *first* four teaching with those who are suffering: the poor, the grieving, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst. Notice, Jesus did not speak to the elite, the wealthy, the powerful, the leaders, or the ruling class. But to those who are void of worldly trappings, those who potentially have ears to hear, minds to understand, and hearts to perceive the word and the will of God. Consider how Jesus comes to us when we are open to Him. *First*, Jesus offers God’s blessings, *secondly*, he identifies with our condition
suggesting that no matter our station in life, Jesus sees and He cares. Thirdly, He makes an eternal promise that God alone will carry out. Yes, this must have been quite a day for the listeners but I believe the Beatitudes, still show us a practical way to live out our faith when we are surrendered to and controlled by the will of God.

Let’s examine the first four Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-6, and allow them to bring us more closely into the richness of God blessings, so we can see the true picture of an authentic servant.

What can we learn in verses 1 and 2 about the event that form the environment in which this message was delivered?

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In verse 3, Jesus blesses the “poor in spirit” and He promises that theirs is the “kingdom of heaven.”

1. Is being “poor in spirit” differ from just being “poor” and how is it different?

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2. How does Jesus’ blessing of the “poor” impact or challenge our own desire for physical or material comfort?

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3. What does Jesus mean by “theirs is the kingdom of heaven?”

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In verse 4 Jesus blesses those who “mourn” and He promises that they shall “be comforted”.

1. What kind of sorrow does this verse reference and what does it say about the heart of God?

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2. What condition does the word “mourn” convey about the blessed?

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3. How do you think those who mourn will be comforted and why do you believe that?

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In verse 5 Jesus blesses the “meek” and He promises that they shall “inherit the earth.”

1. In the context of verse 5 what does the word “meek” mean and can you apply it to your life?

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2. Based on your definition “meek” why do you think it is a quality that servant must possess?

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3. Why do you think Jesus would promise the meek that they shall “inherit the earth”?

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In verse 6 Jesus blesses those who “hunger and thirst” after righteousness and He promises that they shall “be filled.”

1. What do you think it means to “hunger” and “thirst” after righteousness?

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2. Having been filled, as Jesus promised, do we still hunger and thirst for righteousness?

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3. Is it possible to hunger and thirst after righteousness and still not obtain it?

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Now, that we are half way through our study in the Beatitudes. Let’s reflect on the opening theme that Jesus’ desire for our spiritual maturity is that we “be different.” Are you different? Has our study caused you to challenge the status quo of your own spiritual life? If we strip away all of the things that you do who would you, be? As you ponder this lesson let it strengthen and guide you to “be different.”