



# the kingdom experiment

A Community Practice on Intentional Living

Bruce Nuffer / Liz Perry / Rachel McPherson / Brooklyn Lindsey

YOUTH EDITION

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the kingdom **is backwards**

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The House Studio, Kansas City, Missouri

Blessed are those who are persecuted

110

Blessed are the peacemakers

98

Blessed are the pure in heart

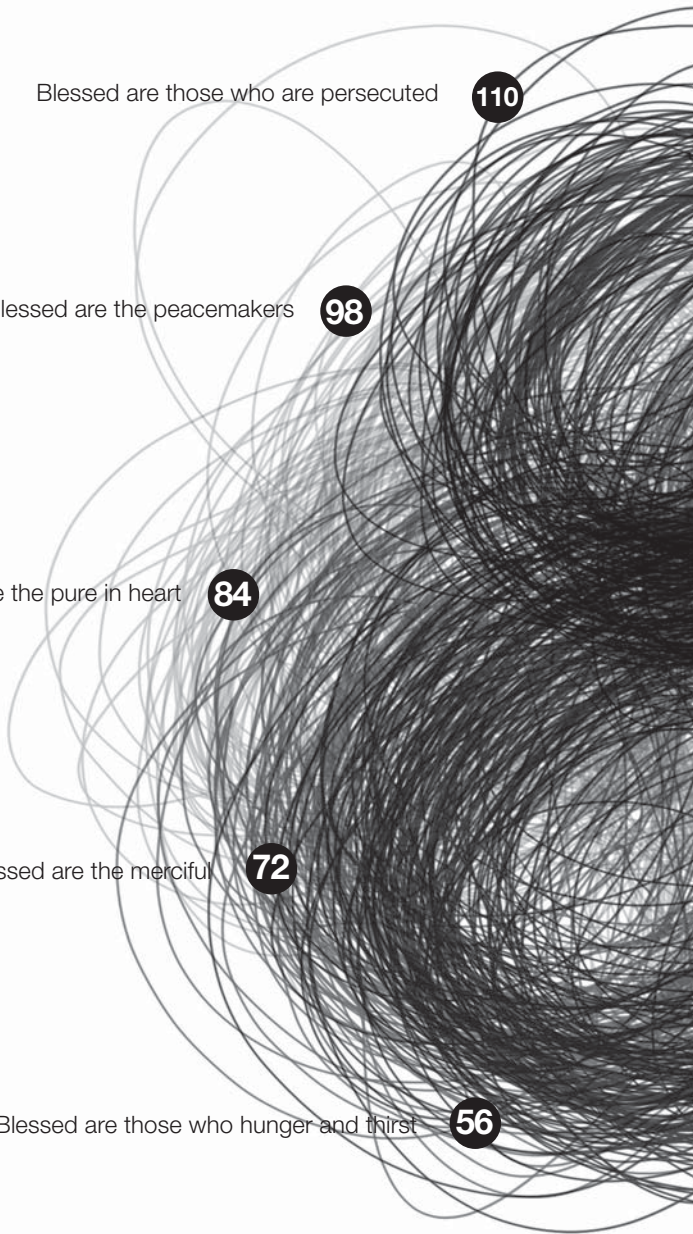
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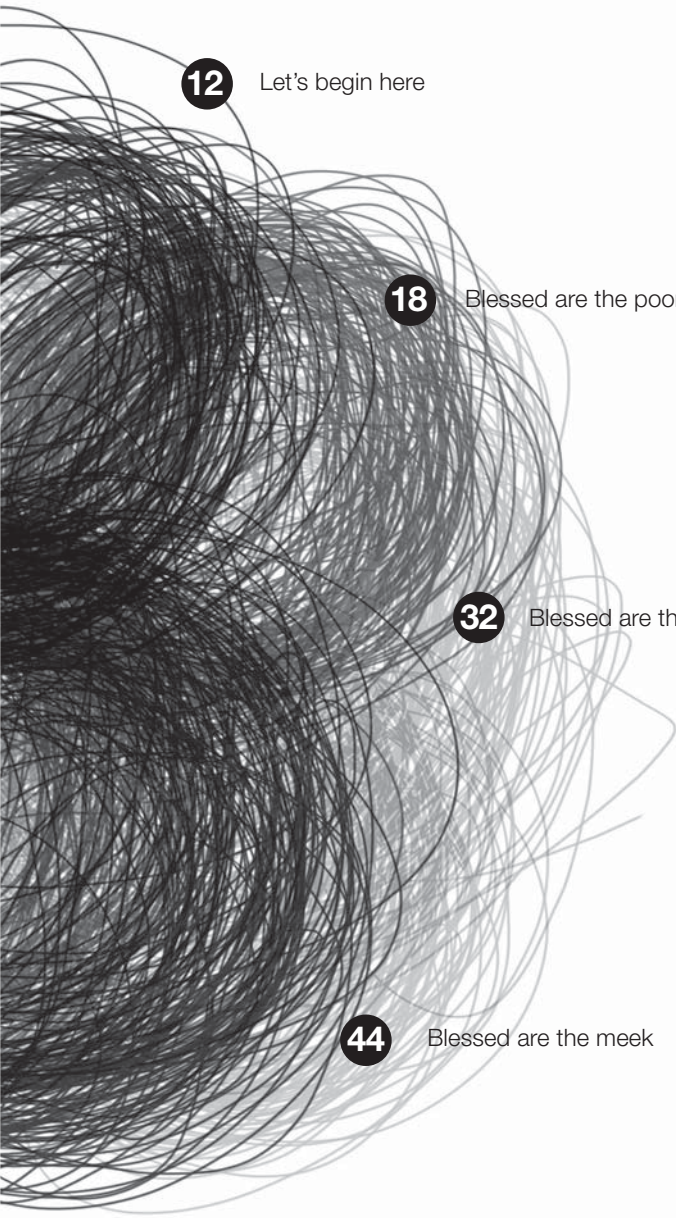
Blessed are the merciful

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Blessed are those who hunger and thirst

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**12** Let's begin here

**18** Blessed are the poor in spirit

**32** Blessed are those who mourn

**44** Blessed are the meek



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most good things  
have been said far  
too many times  
and just need to be  
lived.

7

**Shane Claiborne**

**So NOT an Introduction**

We've gotta be honest. When we started writing a book on the Beatitudes, a few of us got nervous about the viability of the whole project. Sort of ran for the hills. Fortunately, there's nothing but flatlands here in the Midwest, so we didn't get very far before the Holy Spirit and our coworkers found us.

Mainly, we just had a lot of questions. The first? Would there be anything new to say? Anything that wasn't cliché or hadn't been preached in a thousand sermons already?

One thing was certain; we didn't want this to end up as a "how-to" for getting blessed. We think this world has enough self-help books in Barnes and Noble to keep us more than occupied for the next century. Agreed?

So, we began brainstorming this project the only way we knew how. We sat down at a table and started talking ideals, what we personally wanted out of a small group. Bruce, the real adventurous servant, wanted a small group that was hands-on. Active in the community and such. Rachel, the deep, ministry-minded one, cared more about learning new things from the Bible and being intentional with Scripture. And Liz, the abstract art lover, just wanted to journal during the week and share thoughts with her friends.

Then it dawned on us. (We love it when this happens.)

Why can't we do them all? In one book?

Some will call it impossible. But we'll call it uncurriculum. Or better yet,

**the kingdom experiment.**

# And he began to teach them, saying:

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

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You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.”

## Matthew 5:3-10 (TM)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

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

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

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

# Matthew 5:3-10



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We know you hate directions. But you can always tear this page out and find your own way through the book.

# It's plain and simple.

**1 Read and discuss a chapter.**

**2 Each person can choose one of seven experiments to carry out.**

**3 Talk about the experiment you'll do together as a group. (One or more options will be given for you or you can make one up together.)**

**4 Journal your thoughts on our pages. (Why else would we give you so much white space?)**

**5 Share your journey.**

**Tweet your experience: [twitter.com/KEyouth](https://twitter.com/KEyouth).**

**Text your youth leader or best friend when you get a glimpse of the kingdom. Pray for God to show you his kingdom this week.**

**6 Share your stories with the group next week and talk about what changes you may make in your life as a result of what you experienced.**

The point of *The Kingdom Experiment* is on-purpose living. To work things out in community. To share life and stories while we're at it. To think about what good news could mean in our time. We'd love to know that once you're done with this book, it would become natural for you to see that God is doing something different in the world right now, that God is slowly putting things back together, the way they were meant to be from the very beginning. And if this book helps you turn this way of living into a habit, we wouldn't complain about that either.

The eight Beatitudes, or blessings, are given by Jesus in one of his most famous teachings. They aren't catchphrases or a "top eight" list to happiness meant to stand alone . . . so memorizing them or listing them as your favorite verses on Facebook doesn't really make you a good Christian. They are meant to be lived, and they are meant to be shared.

By opening his message with upside-down statements, Jesus was creating some tension he resolved throughout the rest of his teaching. That's why we can—and should—look at the whole passage as a way to see what the Beatitudes look like when they are lived out. It might give us a more complete picture of kingdom living.

Things to think about:

**14**

This particular sermon mattered for some reason. Both Matthew and Luke chose to write it down, though it's believed that Jesus would have given hundreds of similar messages during his three-year ministry. Judging by its length, this was no small hand cramp.

Also, the folks who were listening would have understood the significance of *how* and *where* Jesus delivered this sermon. You see, Jesus was constantly fulfilling the predictions of Old Testament writings, which is why the Pharisees could never quite write him off.

Here's a glimpse into the hearts of the people listening for the first time: Israel's entire existence is shaped around one epic event—their evacuation out of Egypt. While in the desert, the prophet Moses climbed up a mountain and received a word from God. He called it the law, which represented ways they could please God and learn about his heart.

The chance to know this previously otherworldly God got them real excited. For like a minute. And then they spent the rest of their lives breaking all the laws and trying to clean up after themselves.

This started a vicious cycle of elected priests who went around policing the Ten Commandments (and some of their own laws) with the belief that if all of Israel could go one day without sinning, God would come to earth in the form of a king . . . flowing robe, long gray beard, and lots of VIP passes to give out. Right?

Wrong.

Israel's attempt at perfection is unsuccessful to say the least.

Fast-forward a good thousand years, give or take some change. Now Jesus climbs up a different mountain and says he has an updated word from God. Mainly, that he is the new word. A living, human form of God's new law.

**15**

He even proclaims, “You have heard that the law of Moses says . . . But I say” (Matt. 5:21-22, NLT).

Like we said, Old Testament predictions fulfilled. Only this isn't the kind of Savior everyone has been dreaming up.

Right away Jesus begins asking the people to repent, which really just means to rethink, to change . . . everything. He says there is a different

kingdom at hand and that this kingdom will be opposite from everything they've known. Which gets them awfully excited, considering their current economic, social, and spiritual conditions are pretty crummy.

Jesus' main intention for speaking a blessing over the insignificant was to assign them worth in a way no one had before. He was flipping things upside down. Establishing his kingdom in the margins. More than that, he was entering into a covenant with the people—promising to actively fulfill that declaration of blessing in their lives.

Often when we read the Beatitudes outside of the full story, we turn them into conditional statements. *If I want God's blessing, then I better seek after persecution or petition tragedy.* But that's missing the point. These blessings aren't necessarily mandates but rather natural effects of kingdom living.

There's something else we've got to know. What's the deal with the two separate, slightly differing memories of this sermon?

Couldn't Matthew and Luke have compared notes or something? What we mean is that Luke is short and to the point, always including woes that make us kind of sad. He also concentrates heavily on physical trials. Matthew, on the other hand, leaves out the woes and seems to embrace spiritual trials along with the physical kind.

## 16

Like authors these days, each had a unique purpose for his message. Something specific he was trying to get across. Matthew wanted to give people a picture of the new kingdom—the good things God was up to. Luke was more concerned with showing people the problems with the old kingdom and the things Christ came to alleviate.

Regardless of the writers' differences, the message is the same. The kingdom has come. It's *already* here because Jesus brought it with him.

But it's *not yet* complete until he returns to perfect it. It's the kingdom of the *already* and the *not yet*. Which is where we live—between the two places. And it can be a messy place.



**Blessed  
are the  
poor  
in spirit**

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

There are a lot of poor people around us. Well, maybe not around us. Because in a day of a booming middle class and shiny plastic things that spend like cash, it seems really easy to forget that there are people with needs all around us—or that we have needs ourselves.

Regardless of how close we are to poverty, it exists. Jesus said so himself. “The poor you will always have with you” (Matt. 26:11a). Even for those of us who have never needed much, we’re pretty familiar with what it looks like.

Notice that Luke’s and Matthew’s stories of the Sermon on the Mount read a little differently where this verse is concerned. While Luke believes Jesus is addressing physical poverty (Luke 6:20), Matthew goes a bit deeper. He thinks Jesus is also talking about our spiritual desperation during times of trial—about moments when we realize that depending on God reveals hope and Christ’s rule in our hearts.

Look at it this way. When everything is going well, we’re content to focus on what is

immediately before us. But when life is without options outside of God’s grace, we are forced to engage in the story of hope. And hope, by its very nature, has a way of bringing us into humble relationship with Christ, the leader of the kingdom.

Jesus was saying that when we get to a place of dependency, we’re fortunate because it’s the dedicated trust sustained through poverty and trials that produces blessedness in us.

Now skip ahead to the part where Jesus explains what trust looks like in the face of poverty (Matt. 6:1-4, 19-34). Most people in the ancient world lived on the edge of death—food, clothing, and shelter were all they needed. We understand they spent most of their time worrying about these things. So for them, as well as for us, the first step in overcoming worry is to recognize that a devout trust in God is more important than our basic needs.



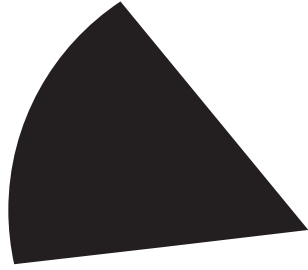
í want you to be  
concerned about  
your next door  
neighbor. do  
you **know**  
your next door  
neighbor?

**Mother Teresa**



**Compare a time when everything was going great in your life (a time when you didn't have many worries and you were very happy) to a time when you were "at the end of your rope" or had a major need. Which scenario drew you closer to God? In which scenario did you find yourself trusting God more?**

**In a society where we define *need* as the newest iPod, it is easy to overlook the fact that we are blessed to have food on our tables. Society has adopted the mentality that the basics are owed to us. How can we adjust this mentality and live a life dependent on God for even our most basic needs?**



# Shut your pie hole.

Fast from food for a period of time as a way of making yourself aware of its physical and emotional ownership over you. Think about how important food is to us; then reflect on Christ's suggestion that life is more important than food.

**Journal your thoughts here.**

# Ten items or ~~less~~ more.

Not everyone has the luxury of choosing between steak and grilled chicken. Skip a meal or use some allowance to go grocery shopping; then donate everything to the local food pantry. Try to buy things you would like, not just the cheapest stuff on the shelf.

**Journal your thoughts here.**



# Don't even give me the evil eye.

The Bible describes a person who chases after material goods as having an evil eye.<sup>1</sup> So when Jesus speaks of a person with good eyes (Matt. 6), he is talking about someone who is generous and not solely concerned with his or her own needs. Try being generous this week. Instead of spending your extra cash on new clothes or music, spend it on a friend who doesn't have as much as you. Even better, don't let them find out it was you!



# **Roughing it. Air mattress not included.**

Sleep on the floor for a week. Think about how life might be different if you didn't have a comfy home. If you're feeling extra adventurous, take a few showers without warm water. Remember, with less of you, there is more room for God.

**Journal your thoughts here.**

# Let it go.

Take a trip through your room and find something valuable, something you depend on, something you feel you can't do without. Practice what it means to depend on God by giving it away and not replacing it. Have a conversation with one or both of your parents before you do this experiment. Talk about what it means to you to give away something of great value, knowing you are not going to replace it for a while.

# Because she believed her life counted.

Go to [alexslemonade.org](http://alexslemonade.org) and give a donation to help fund cancer research for dying children. Those who are sick often see God's kingdom much differently than we do. Remember the lesson Alex's life can teach us as you save up for this worthy cause.

**Journal your thoughts here.**

# Thanks but no thanks, Mr. Edison.

Minimize your use of electricity (e.g., candlelight instead of 60 watts, books instead of TV, line dry instead of tumble dry). Talk with your parents about donating the difference in your electricity bill to your electric company's poverty account or about making this a way of life for the long run.

**Journal your thoughts here.**

# Community options.

**1** Watch Alex's story together at [alexlemonade.org](http://alexlemonade.org). Set up a lemonade stand in her memory and donate the collections to cancer research. Fill out the donation form online and donate the money in memory of someone in your life who shares the same passion Alex does. It could be a church member, a friend, a leader who has made a difference in your life, etc. Alex knew what it meant to be poor in spirit, and because of this knowledge she was able to change the world. So can you.

**2** Talk to your church or school about having an electricity fast for a week. Ask all teachers, pastors, and leaders to unplug everything not being used. Use candles when possible.

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