

RELIGION / CHRISTIAN LIFE / SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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**the kingdom is backwards**

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# the kingdom experiment

A Community Practice on Intentional Living  
Bruce Nuffer / Liz Perry / Rachel McPherson

the  **HOUSE** studio

The House Studio, Kansas City, Missouri

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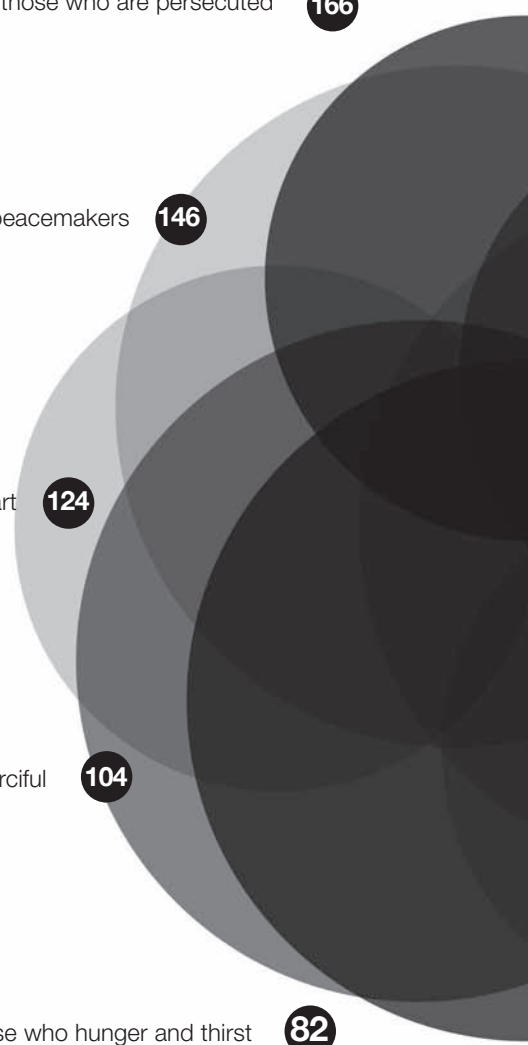
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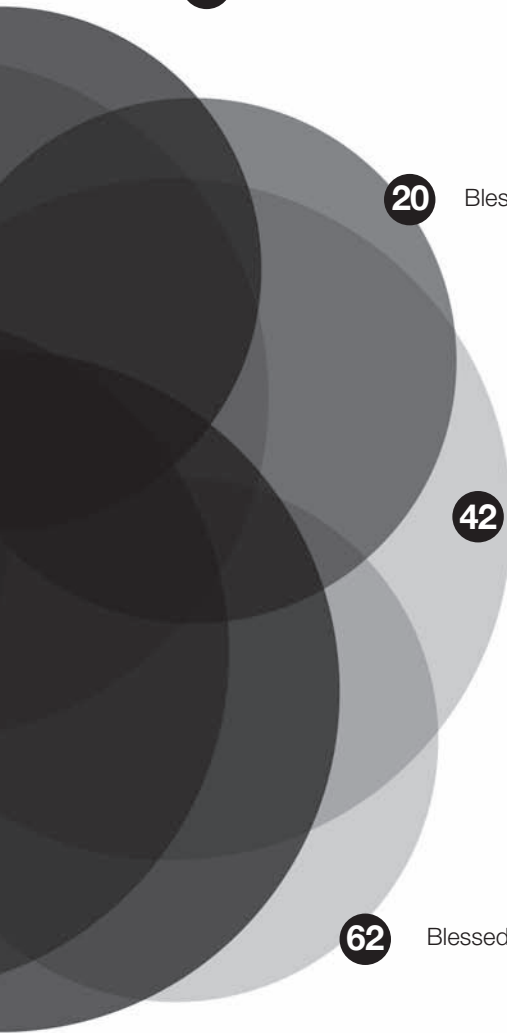
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most good things  
have been said far  
too many times  
and just need to be  
lived.

9

**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:**

“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.”



**Let's  
begin  
here**

**14**

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 choose one of eight experiments to carry out . . . or make up some of your own.**

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

**4 Share your stories with the group next week.**

The point of The Kingdom Experiment is intentional living. To work things out in community. To share life and stories while we're at it. To grapple with what good news means in the context of this specific time and place.

We'd love to know that once you're done with this book it will be impossible to read the Beatitudes without understanding them as a present reality. The kingdom is here *now*. And the blessing Christ promises are just icing on the cake when we make a commitment to living his way.

And if this book helps you turn this way of living into a habit, we wouldn't complain about that either.

It's like unpacking. And boy is this suitcase big.

The eight Beatitudes are found at the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. They aren't catchphrases or proverbs meant to stand alone . . . so don't even try the esoteric thing and Scripture-drop these on an unsuspecting brother—you know, to gain super-Christian points or something.

**16**

By opening his teaching with these counter-intuitive statements, Jesus was creating some tension that he resolved throughout the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. That's why we can—and should—draw liberally from the whole passage as a way to contextualize what the Beatitudes look like when they are lived out. It might give us a more holistic picture of kingdom living.

Things to think about:

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 prophecy of Old Testament Scriptures, which is why the Pharisees could never quite write him off.

Here's some context from where the people stood. Israel's entire existence is shaped around one epic event: their exodus 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-abstract 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.

Thus began 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 perks to pass around. 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 embodiment of God's new law.

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

Like we said, prophecy 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 . . . everything. He says there is a different kingdom at hand, and that this kingdom will be counter to everything they’ve known. Which gets them awfully excited considering their current economic, social, and spiritual conditions are less than par. And we’re talking way less. Let’s just say between Caesar and the Jewish priests, it seemed pointless to even suit up.

Jesus’ main intention for speaking a blessing over the disenfranchised 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 out of context, 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 manifestations of kingdom living.

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

Couldn’t Matthew and Luke have compared notes or something? Meaning, Luke was short and to the point, always including woes that make us kind of sad. He also concentrated heavily on physical trials. Matthew, on the other hand, left out the woes and seemed to embrace

spiritual trials alongside the physical kind.

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 tension. And it's a messy place to be.



**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 money, it seems we've got to be real intentional about seeing the poor.

Regardless of our proximity to poverty, it exists. Jesus said so himself, "The poor you will always have with you" (Matt. 26:11). Even for those of us who aren't on the economic fringe, we're pretty familiar with what it looks like.

Notice that Luke's and Matthew's accounts of the Sermon on the Mount read a little differently where this verse is concerned. While Luke believed Jesus was addressing physical poverty (Luke 6:20), Matthew goes a bit more abstract on us. He supposed Jesus was also speaking to the emotional toll of poverty—to our spiritual desperation during times of trial.

Look at it this way. When our present circumstances are good, 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 narrative of hope. And hope, by its very nature, has a way of bringing us into humble relationship with that which is greater than ourselves.

Jesus was saying when we get to a place of dependency we're fortunate, because it's the devout trust sustained through poverty, rather than poverty itself, which produces blessedness.

Now skip ahead to the part where Jesus explained 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**



## Talk

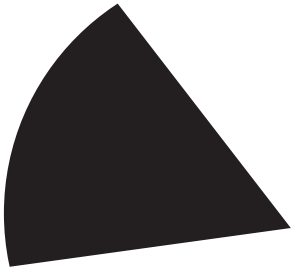
**Many people think seeing God through the eyes of the impoverished is a better and more accurate way to know him. Does actually being poor and experiencing poverty bring us closer to God?**

**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 dependant on God for even our most basic needs?**

# Shut your pie hole.

Fast from food as a means of making yourself aware of its physical and emotional ownership of you. Consider how important it is, then reflect on Christ's implication that life is more important than food. Consider doing this as a group, then break your fast with a community meal.

**Pen, say hello to paper.**



# Ten items or ~~less~~ more.

Not everyone has the luxury of choosing between fettuccini alfredo and chicken parmesan. Go grocery shopping, then donate everything to the local food pantry. And don't just camp out in the canned food aisle.

**Drop a line.**

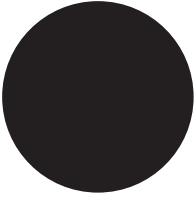




# Don't even give me the evil eye.

The Bible describes a person who chases after wealth 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. In this spirit, when you drive-through this week, pay for the person behind you.

**Tell the page what you think.**



# Roughing it. Air mattress not included.

Sleep on the floor for a week. Consider how life might have a different focus if this were your routine. If you're feeling extra adventurous, go without the comforts of warm water. In many places freezing showers are the norm. That's right, Brrrrr.

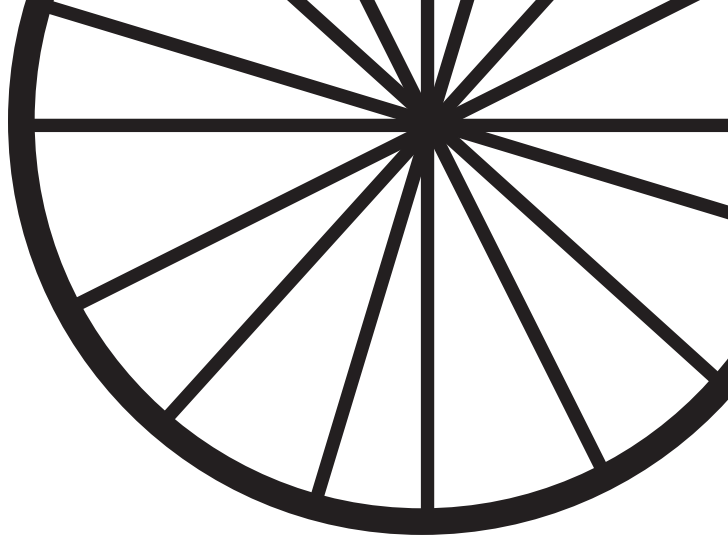
**White spaces are meant to be filled, says us.**



# I ain't no Lance.

Take your bike out (or borrow a friend's). For an errand which you would normally use your car, use the bike. Consider how your life would have to change if this were your only means of transportation. How long would you have to plan for a trip to the grocery store? How far away from home would you be able to work? What if you could only walk?

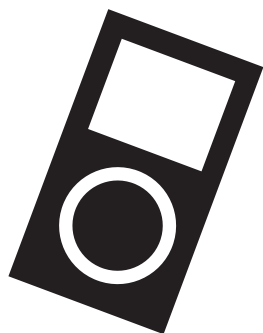
**Do tell.**



# Go with the flow.

In her song “Names and Dates and Times,” singer Ani DiFranco tells us to go to the East River and throw in something valuable, something we depend on, something we feel we can’t do without. Well, don’t throw it in the East River. Instead, give it away and don’t replace it.

**Save the ink industry. (Write things down.)**



# Because she's always wanted a goat.

Go to [kiva.com](http://kiva.com) and give a loan to someone in a third world country.

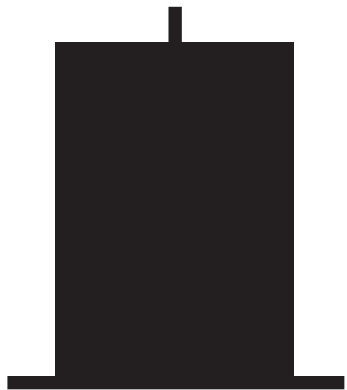
Word. (that's right, we know slang)

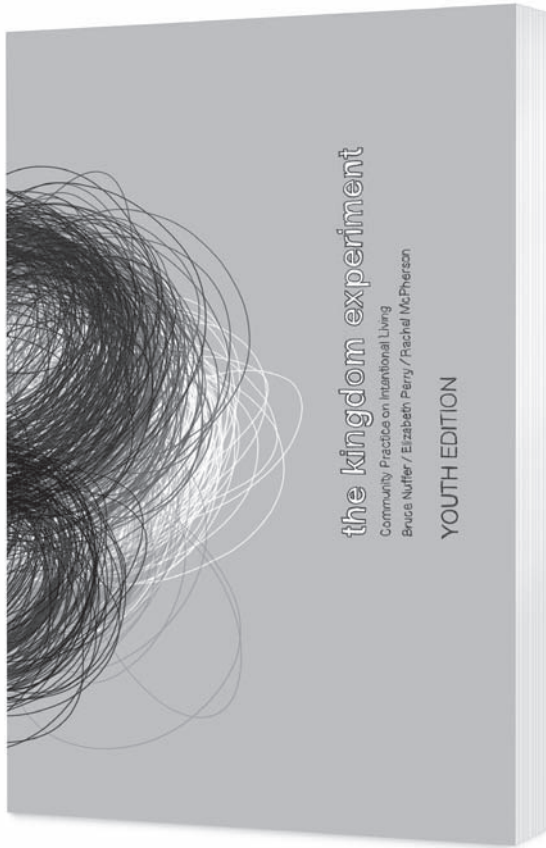


# Thanks but no thanks, Mr. Edison.

Minimize your use of electricity (e.g. candlelight instead of 60 watts, books instead of TV, line dry instead of tumble dry). Donate to your electric company's poverty account.

**Push a pencil.**





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## YOUTH EDITION

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