

**Russell Kelfer**

# **Relative Expectations**

**529-A**

**Series: The Beatitudes**

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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It was really a very simple statement, one of those sentences that can flow right past your heart if your heart isn't in tune. It was more than just that, however. It was the beginning of a series of one-liners that, taken seriously, would overwhelm and overtake the mind of man and cause it to do a 180° turn.

It was a step into deep waters, a leap if you will, that, once taken, would lead us into even deeper rivers, finally sweeping us downstream into an ocean of spiritual reality. "One small step for mankind", to borrow a phrase. Make that "one giant step for God". Properly understood and properly responded to, this one statement could change the course of the world.

Jesus, of course, was the one speaking. He was seated, much as a rabbi would be who was about to deliver something of earth-shaking importance. The location of this momentous address that would not only define His ministry but His message, was on a relatively unimportant mountainside. Here was a man with seemingly no credentials giving a sermon outside the confines of the local ecclesiastical synagogue to a most unusual mixed audience.

He spoke with an uncanny sound of authority, yet that authority was encased in an envelope of love. No one had ever spoken like this carpenter from Galilee. He spoke as though His message was straight from God, yet the God of whom He spoke had a different message than the rabbis of his day. In fact, He spoke as though He were God. Indeed, He was.

The awesome statement that began this message was to be the foundation, the cornerstone, of His entire life. He had laid aside His robes of righteousness and taken upon Himself the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of man. And, being found in fashion as a man,

He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8 NKJV)

He who was rich became poor for our sakes. He who had

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everything gave up everything for those of us who deserved nothing that we might, through His grace, have everything. He who knew no sin became sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. In other words, the richest man who ever lived, spiritually, the only one who never sinned, entered into our poverty that we might assume the ownership of all His riches. What an exchange.

No small wonder that the earth all but shook beneath His sandaled feet. He was about to turn man's concept of success inside-out and upside-down. The things man was resentful of were to become the building blocks of God's character in the believer's life. The things man thought would be the keys to the kingdom would, in effect, be the very tools Satan would use to sidetrack the child of God. That's why we have to listen closely. Otherwise, we will either glibly pass over these words because they are so familiar, or we will assume that they mean what we want them to mean, because, like the rabbis of Jesus' day, we will have assigned to those words worldly acceptable definitions.

The passage begins, "*He opened His mouth and taught them saying...*" This means that He spoke as though He was about to say something of eternal value and as though it came from His heart. Indeed it did, and it came from His Father's heart, as well.

He taught them saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

Here was the Living Son of God who had come to earth to establish a kingdom in the hearts of men and women, and He began this once in an eternity ministry with those words. "Blessed", the Greek word "*makarios*", said He, "is the man who is..." He was promising a kind of self-contained joy that would so capture the heart of God's child that there would be encapsulated, overwhelming victory resident within a life that could withstand anything that came from outside that life.

Wow! That was the secret ingredient man had been looking for since sin entered the world, and death by sin. Man, separated from God by his own disobedience, was about to be restored to fellowship with His Creator by an act of God that was as much a miracle as a bolt of lightning from heaven. God was going to a Cross so that man could return to God.

Once restored in that relationship, man was going to have the opportunity to live out his stay on earth with an inner strength that would give him an earth-sized picture of heaven itself. Life

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in the victory circle. Self-contained happiness in a world that defines happiness exactly the opposite of how God defines it.

This self-contained joy wouldn't, however, be the result of man's accomplishments, even with God's help. It would be the result of God's accomplishments, and the heights to which God would be able to lift a life into that strata of joy would actually be determined by the poverty that existed in that life. Not the wealth, the poverty. This was not physical poverty, but spiritual poverty. Physical poverty would, however, be an earthly picture of the spiritual benefits being poor brings to the table. The disciples didn't understand. We know that. They later argued over who would be the greatest when they got to glory. The crowds didn't understand, either. We know that. They thought this Jewish carpenter was a mad man. They accused Him of being of Satan because His message was so far afield from their religious philosophy. When the heat was on, they all took off like cheerleaders who just found out they were cheering for the wrong team.

No, they didn't quite get it. Not yet. But Jesus knew they wouldn't. He was, in fact, primarily teaching kingdom principles for those of us who would one day follow after. He wanted the church, even in these last days, to grasp and appropriate the concepts of Lordship and humility and dependence that would set it free from the stains of compromise. Oh, that we would grasp them before the trumpet's blast. Oh, that we would.

The word "poor" is crucial to our understanding of what the Master wants of us. The word most frequently used in the New Testament is the Greek word "*ptochos*". It means, literally, to be reduced to beggary, begging, asking alms, destitute of wealth, influence, position, honor, helpless, powerless to accomplish an end, poor, needy, lacking in anything.

The picture is one of a beggar, standing on a street corner, helpless, humiliated, devoid of the respect that accompanies possessions, unable to be or do anything without someone else's help. It is such an unappealing place to be that most of us look the other way when we see someone who fits this description. We accelerate through the intersection. We turn our heads away, lest we be sickened or convicted by their condition. That is what physical poverty looks like.

Let's now make the "Spiritual Switch". Let's look at God's

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perspective concerning our expectations. In our last study, we looked at being poor in spirit in relation to our “relative insignificance”. We determined that two basic attitudes had to prevail:

- 1) We had to be humbled
- 2) We had to be dependent.

Both typify the poor man, and both typify the mind of Christ.

Now we are looking at the second side of the coin: the relative expectations of a poor man, when compared to someone who seems to have either all they need, or all they think they need to have to get more. Let’s see what principles emerge. We will take a look at physical poverty and examine the spiritual ramifications of a poor man’s expectations, then attempt to apply those to our walk with God.

### PRINCIPLE #1

The poor man gets excited over the simple things of life. Have you ever noticed that? The question we have to ask ourselves is, do we? If you make a visit to the ghettos and offer each person you see a hot roast beef lunch, very seldom will someone come up to you and say, “Good grief, these mashed potatoes are lumpy! This gravy is too thick. The peas are not seasoned properly. I don’t want to use a plastic fork and paper plate.” That’s probably not the response you’ll get. Why? Because the one who has nothing and knows he has nothing tends to be grateful for whatever life gives him. What about you?

I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. (Psalm 132:15 NKJV)

The poor and needy seek water, but there is none, their tongues fail for thirst. I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

I will open rivers in desolate heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree; I will set in the desert the cypress tree and the pine and the box tree together,

That they may see and know, and consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it. (Isaiah 41:17-20 NKJV)

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God is saying that the poor have a big place in His heart. He understands their hunger. He gives them bread when they have none. When their humility and dependency causes them to cry out for the simple things of life like water, He will literally open springs where there were none, plant trees to shade them where there were no trees. The reason? That they may see and know and consider and understand that the hand of the Lord hath done this. Get it? They had nothing. They knew they had nothing. They cried out to God. He heard. He answered. He miraculously met their need. They knew it was Him. It had to be. That's why He did what He did, and that's why He did it the way He did.

However, as soon as they began to accumulate some of the things He gave them, they began to assume relative expectations. They didn't necessarily think God owed them what their rich brothers had, but now they assumed He probably owed them at least what He had just provided.

Think of being immunized from an allergy by taking allergy shots. You take actual doses of the thing that is bothering you until you build up an immunity to it. It all happens gradually. It is similar to being anesthetized, but that happens quickly. Satan wants to immunize us to material possessions. He wants us to require ever-increasing larger doses to be satisfied. The poor man, however, still gets excited over the simple things of life. The homeless man isn't dissatisfied with the size of his living room, he has none. The starving man isn't arguing over the size of his meals, he is grateful for the crumbs that fall from another's table.

Oh, dear God, teach us to be poor in spirit once more. Teach us to be grateful for every word from God's word given to sustain us. Teach us to be as excited over a tiny glimpse of God's holiness as we are over some shiny new toy. Teach us, Oh, Lord, to be poor in spirit once again. How excited do you get over the truths of Scripture today? How excited do you get over the "little" miracles God performs in your life each day? Is there really such a thing as a "little" miracle?

If a miracle is God doing something supernatural, how could any miracle be insignificant? God's answering that prayer in the heart of that loved one as you labored before Him in intercession is just as miraculous as parting a sea. God's changing the heart of that evil man through the blood of His Son is at least as miraculous as bringing water from a rock. God's causing the

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phone to ring or the doorbell to ring at just the moment you need it is ever as miraculous as raising Lazarus. Any miracle requires supernatural intervention, either in the doing of it or the timing of it. Without God's intervening, it would not have happened. Therefore, you cannot categorize miracles as bigger or smaller based on man-made criteria. When God intervenes in our lives in answer to prayer and we do not see the awesomeness of it, we are no different than the children of Israel who, having been miraculously delivered, began to tempt God and murmur the first time things didn't go as planned. They accused Him of bringing them out with a mighty hand to kill them. They had ceased being poor in spirit.

Are we any different? Do not our expectations become presumptuous at the drop of a hat? Do we not begin to take for granted the power of the word to change our lives? We have ceased being poor in spirit. Do we not begin to take the miracles of the ministry for granted? We have ceased being poor in spirit. Instead of falling on our faces as individuals and as congregations when one lost soul finds eternal life and is ushered out of darkness into light, we yawn, "Only one today, Lord?" How it must break His heart. The poor man gets excited over whatever God does for him. The poor in spirit do the same.

### PRINCIPLE #2

The poor man learns to live one day at a time because he has no savings. We trust our reserves as we read in Luke 12:19. "Lord, I can get by at least another month. I have a savings account, a piggy bank, a couple of stocks. Even though they are not doing so well, at least they are there for me to fall back on. I have equity in my house and my car. I'm doing okay without You, Lord. If need be, I can get by for a little while, but I will call You when things get desperate." But the poor man goes to bed hungry and says, "Maybe tomorrow I will wake up and cry out to the Lord and He will provide what I need for that one day." This is what the poor man learns to do. This is what the poor in spirit need to learn to do.

We borrow from tomorrow. Matthew 6:24 tells us not to do that. Why? God has divided life into days and made provisions to care for us one day at a time. How much more is that true in the spirit realm? Instead, we labor, fret and worry over things that may not come to pass, all the while losing that self-contained joy



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that only a poor man can experience. God help us to recapture the freedom of spiritual poverty that removes from our shoulders the responsibility for things we cannot control.

Go out to the ghettos again and interview someone who is on welfare and can't find a job or can't pay his rent. Ask him, "Mr. Needsmore, what are your long-range plans for the future? Could I interest you in some long-term investments?" He'll look at you as though he didn't hear you right. "Long-range?" he responds. His concern is eating tomorrow. He is crying out for help for the simple needs he has now. He isn't worried about laying up reserves for his retirement. He is concerned about food on the table. His whole perspective, then, is different. Not knowing what tomorrow holds, he refuses to be presumptuous. He refuses to be matter-of-fact about a little thing like food. Unless someone intervenes, he and his family are out in the cold. There is a state of desperation that amplifies his dependence.

God has painted that picture into the sands of poverty because in the spirit realm, the believer is called upon to have that mindset. Jesus lived one day at a time. He told the disciples they had to do the same. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," said the Master. In other words, you can't control tomorrow. You can only respond to today. How often do we miss the blessing of a dependent spirit simply because God has so blessed us today that we cease placing our weight on him for tomorrow?

We pray for a job. God miraculously gives us one. Instead of making that job a day at a time miracle, praying over each decision, each response, each sale, we begin to take over in our own energy. Like the little boy sliding frantically off the roof, who cried, "Lord save me", only to have a nail catch the seat of his pants and then respond, "Never mind, Lord, a nail did it", we think God delights when we take over after He's done His part. Beloved, He's never through doing His part. We pray for strength in the midst of a crisis. Something supernatural happens. It is as though God has injected our spirits with a kind of spiritual adrenaline and we have divine energy, divine strength, divine joy at a time when, apart from a miracle, we would be virtually decimated. We became desperate. We became poor in spirit. We cried out to God in our desperation and He answered.

Now what do we do? Do we learn from that experience how to live a dependent, humble life? Do we learn how to live one day

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at a time in the energy of God's Spirit? Or do we try to explain it away and go on our way the very same way we always have? Relative expectations. Poverty of spirit. Oh, dear Christian, study the lives of those who are poor. Learn from them how to trust God.

### PRINCIPLE #3

The poor man knows what sacrifice is. The key point in the story of the widow's mite is that there was nothing left over when she was through as we see in Luke 21:1-4. The choice she had to make was a real choice. If she gave anything, she gave everything. We have learned, however, that the richer we are, the more painful it can be to give away most of what we have. We tend to give tokens and be proud because of the size of the gift, (its relative size compared to what others are giving). The poor man may give all he has and be embarrassed that the gift is so small. That is the spirit we are supposed to have in giving to the Lord, not just with our money, but with our very lives. Watch for it. As young believers, we often gave of our time and our influence and our energy without stopping to count the cost. We were giving back to God everything because God gave everything in exchange for us.

Look what happened, though. The longer we served Him, the more enamored we became with our faithfulness rather than with His. Because we do this or have done that we feel that God is impressed, and so we begin to temper the giving of our time, our money, our influence, and our energy. After all, we surmise, God understands. As we look around, we come to church as often as our friends do. We give as much as our friends do. We volunteer to meet needs as often as they do.

As time goes by, we forget what sacrifice is. If the phone rings at an inopportune time, even though God seems to have arranged it, it's an inconvenience. If there is a mission need that seems crucial, but we helped with the last one, it's an inconvenience. We think God has relative expectations of us. We think He is weighing our sacrifice in the light of everyone else, the way the disciples were weighing the gifts of those who dropped their shiny coins in the treasury that day. Not so. He is weighing our sacrifice in the light of His. He is weighing our commitment to Him in the light of His commitment to us. God help us.

PRINCIPLE #4

The poor man knows what is important and what is not. If he has to choose between a t-bone steak that will last for one meal or fish sticks that will last for three meals he may well pick the fish sticks. Why? He is more interested in that which sustains than he is with that which satisfies. You and I may need to learn the same thing. We tend to lust for things we don't need. We become envious of things we don't want because there is a certain thrill in the getting of them and a certain ego-driven satisfaction in just having them. Others who may be starving or begging would shout for joy just to have what we are discarding. We get so proud of what we give to the Salvation Army or some other worthy group, when they are often things we are giving away because we don't want them any more. We have replaced them with something newer or better. Because we get confused over our priorities, spiritually, we often lower our standards in proportion to how we view ourselves in the light of the other Christians, not in the light of the holiness of God. We become satisfied with less time in the word, not more. We become satisfied with less commitment to the local body of Christ, not more. We become satisfied with "spiritual quick-fixes" rather than letting God take the time He needs to do a lasting work in our hearts over the process of time. Our priorities begin to bend to those of the world and we begin to act as though our position in the church was tantamount to our position in the kingdom. We are no longer poor in spirit.

We must, every day that we live, become more and more aware of our need, more and more aware of God's grace, and more and more humbled and dependent in His presence. That the Living God who framed the universes by the breath of His power should choose to die for my sins, to live in my heart, and to guarantee me an eternal home in His everlasting arms ought to take me to my knees in gratitude and awe every day that I live. Then, having come to that position, one of deep humility and dependence, seeing myself as totally insignificant apart from Him, I now have to look at life's expectations from that same vantage point. Now it is a matter of zero expectations.

If I deserve nothing, I can do nothing and I can be nothing apart from who I am in Christ, then what does God owe me? He owes me what He has promised me, not because I deserve it but because of His infallible word that's true. But what has He

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promised me? He has promised me eternal life. He has promised me a home in heaven. He has promised me His indwelling presence. He has promised me His precious word. He has promised me a self-contained kind of joy that will overwhelm my spirit with His Spirit and give me constant, unassailable peace through His grace, even as life bombards me with all of its ills.

He has made us royalty. He has made us heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. All the treasures of the kingdom are ours for the taking and we have been given the right by the King Himself to expect and appropriate all of those spiritual treasures. What He hasn't promised us is a bigger house. Or a newer car. Or a better job. Or a pain-free existence. Or a long life. He hasn't promised us what the world calls "happiness". He didn't promise it to His Son, either.

What then constitutes right expectations? Right expectations involve living each day with an attitude of gratitude that the Living God loves me enough to provide for me in the physical realm whatever He thinks will most bring glory to His name: sickness, health, poverty, wealth, acceptance, rejection. Whatever will cause His kingdom to come, His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. It also means living each day in the spirit realm trusting God the way a poor man does. It means being excited over the simple things of life, getting as excited over life's "little miracles" as we would over the parting of a Red Sea or the gushing forth of a river out of a rock.

It means learning to live one day at a time, trusting God to take care of our tomorrows, just as He promised. It means living by faith without fear. It means taking that answer to prayer not as an excuse to take over, but as a reminder not to. It means understanding, day by day, what it means to give everything the way a new believer does: time, energy, and possessions. Everything. It means rejoicing over every opportunity to give away our very lives because He gave His for us.

It means keeping the priorities of a poor man, too. Grateful for that which sustains us, we cease clawing for that which satisfies us. It means that every day we live, we become more and more in awe that God would save the likes of us. We become more in awe that God would sustain the likes of us. We become more in awe that God would provide for the likes of us with spiritual riches beyond understanding, with grace beyond description.

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It means greeting each new day the way a homeless man would, crying out in faith, “Lord, I am a poor stranger in a foreign land and I have not one thing to sustain me this day but what You provide. I deserve nothing. I have earned nothing. I need everything. My spirit cries out for Your Spirit to become my provider and sustainer. Help!”

Pray like that and mean it. Then, be still. Very still. Don't give God a laundry list. He knows your needs. Give Him a praise list instead. Begin praising Him for His mercy, His grace, His holiness, and His love. Praise Him that whatever He gives you that day is more than you deserve. Then, rise from your knees and walk with confidence into the sunlight of a day in which apart from Him, you can do nothing, but in Him, you can experience spiritual miracle after miracle, joy upon joy, self-contained happiness poured out of heaven because you dared to be poor in spirit. Meditate this week on these three passages of Scripture:

The Lord says: “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?”

For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,” Says the Lord. “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.  
(Isaiah 66:1,2 NKJV)

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.

I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.  
(Revelation 3:15-18 NKJV)

The humble also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.  
(Isaiah 29:19 NKJV)

Pour those words into your heart for seven days. Ask God to reveal hidden truths and mysteries of Scripture to your seeking heart. Ask Him to take those words from His word and apply

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them to your need to be poor in spirit. As He does, stop what you are doing whenever you can and fall down on your knees and worship.

Oh, the subtle ways Satan moves into our lives and builds upon false foundations, causing us to see ourselves as men and women God needs rather than seeing God as everything we need.

The meek shall increase their joy in the Lord. That inner confidence in God that is not affected by external circumstances will only get better and better and better. Those who are truly poor in spirit shall constantly rejoice...in their circumstances?

No, in the Holy One of Israel.

May it be so in our lives, beloved. May it be so.

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### For Further Study and Application

1- Try to imagine the mindset of those who listened to Jesus on that hillside. How would you have received such shocking statements? What conclusions would you likely have reached? How much discernment do you think the disciples had at this point? Why, then, do you think Jesus preached such deep truths so early in His ministry?

2- Can you visualize the image of a beggar on a street corner or a homeless family and then superimpose that image on your heart as it applies to your attitude towards God? Is the pattern of being “poor in spirit” beginning to settle on your spirit? How do you see yourself in that light?

3- How excited do you get when God performs one of life’s “little miracles”? Do you greet them with less awe than you did as a young believer? Why? Do you tend to see miracles of timing as less impressive than physical healings or provisions?

4- What do you think God meant when He promised in Isaiah 41 that He would take care of the poor and the needy? Why is verse 20 so critical to the passage?

5- The poor man learns to live one day at a time. Why is that so important to God? How does daily trust make faith a reality? Why do you think God divided time into days?

6- Why does the poor man concern himself more with that which sustains than that which satisfies? Can you make the “Spiritual Switch”?

7- As you meditate on Isaiah 66:1-2, Revelation 3:15-18, and Isaiah 29:9, ask yourself:

- a) What or who is God looking for?
- b) What or who is God sickened by?
- c) How is joy affected by spiritual poverty?

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