

Opening Your Heart



through the **Beatitudes**

By Fr. Ken Sedlak, C.Ss.R.



The Beatitudes are Jesus' clear-sighted description of the basic dynamics of the spiritual and human world in which we find ourselves.

When I heard the Beatitudes as a child I wished with all my heart that something like this could be true in my life. Could Jesus possibly love me this much? As long as I looked for outward expressions of Jesus' love, miracles that came to the rescue in my day to day life, I looked in all the wrong places.

Jesus, the Word of God, ushers the presence of God into our hearts. Jesus' words have "authority" in our lives when they break through our hearts and fill us with renewed awareness of God loving us and encouraging us. This happens only gradually, because God's love has to seep through our resistances.

The basic "work" of a spiritual path is learning how to stop fighting ourselves.

Put in a positive light this translates as learning to live in harmony with the reality of who we are in God's Universe.

All you need to do is become aware of your desire to be loved. That desire begins in God's love for you. This booklet, in eight simple practices, hopes to help direct you on that spiritual path.

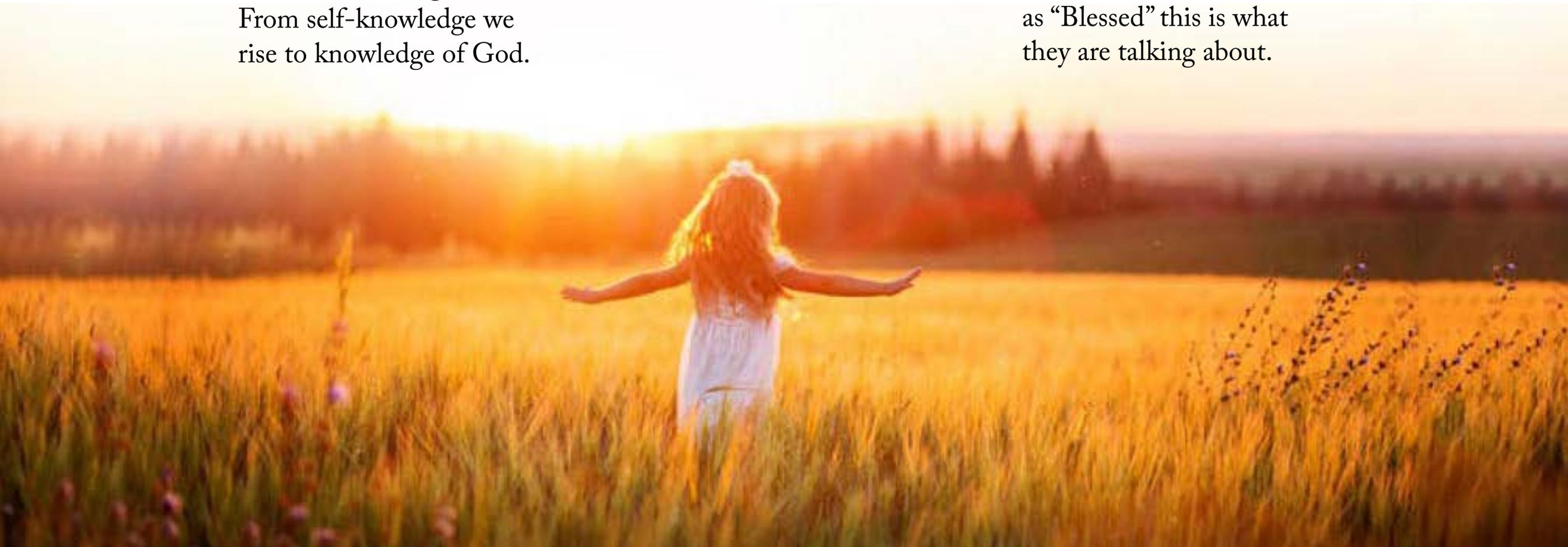
—Fr. Ken Sedlak, C.Ss.R.

Blessed

To be “Blessed” means that in knowing ourselves we simultaneously know God. When we see the truth about ourselves, we see that we are God’s children. Wisdom lies in knowing God and knowing oneself. From self-knowledge we rise to knowledge of God.

For Jesus
Spiritual living
does not
bring about
improvement or
perfection.

It brings about a maturity, a humanity, and a wisdom, an unconditional wholeness in the sense of being able to be aware of the whole and love the whole as God does. When the Beatitudes describe us as “Blessed” this is what they are talking about.



Practice Session

Blessed are you pure of heart, for you shall see God

Part of the soul's development is a reconnection with our essential groundedness in God, which is our true nature.

This is what is meant by being "pure of heart." In this part of our spiritual awakening we realize that our true nature is a non-thinking kind of awareness.

Meditation: This form of prayerful meditation is very simple. Take a couple of slow, deep breaths and let yourself relax into Trinity's gift of the moment. Then ask this simple question:

"Who am I?" When a word or phrase or image comes into your awareness, simply affirm:

"God is love." And then repeat the question: "Who am I?" Continue this for about ten minutes.

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.



Blessed Are You Poor in Spirit, the Kingdom of Heaven Is Yours

Jesus gives us “poor in spirit” as a doorway to our spirit because it keeps us alert to our need for and connection with God.

Blessedness is about being completely human, not arriving at some transcendent state in which the difficulties of being human are not present.

All spiritual work is giving up the idealized self and arriving where you already are: not some place special or new, but here, where you already are.

Blessedness transforms into Belovedness not when we conquer our humanness in all its complexity and suffering, but when we learn to inhabit the basic imperfection of our human condition as the place where God is most intimately present.



Practice Session

Blessed are those who acknowledge the poverty of their spirit, who know that all the things we strive for don't satisfy a hunger for something we can't grasp for ourselves. We are poor in spirit when we know that our only true richness is God and the Kingdom of God's.



Love is humble: begin by calling to your awareness the expression of love as humility.

Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness on this quality of love. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

As you pay attention you are gently allowing your awareness to form new patterns of humility within your body and spirit. Each time you take a few moments to pay attention to this quality of humility you are giving unconditional love a chance to flesh itself out in your life. Like flowers growing in a garden the reality of unconditional love becomes more and more visible over a natural period of time.

This kind of gentle awareness works by allowing unconditional love to grow deeper roots over time. Spending a few moments of awareness each day allows it to naturally express itself in your living.

Call to your awareness the highest quality of love as humility.

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

Blessed Are You Who Are Mourning, You Will Be Comforted

“Blessed” means that the comfort promised in this beatitude is already our reality. We are already God’s; already divine even in our grieving. Both divine and grieving are our truth. As divine children we are alive eternally. Our nature is to be loved and loving. “Blessed” recognizes this as our truth.

Our Blessedness transforms us into “Beloved” when grief loses its monopoly on our hearts and we awaken to our divine capacity to hold both the loss and cherish the love that bursts all our barriers.

The blessed mourning in this beatitude is a sacrament. Its aching emptiness points to the sacredness of what we have lost. At the same time it also points to the expectations we have imposed upon our self.



Practice Session

Mourning is a prayerful state in which grief explodes our self-sufficiency and exposes the vulnerability of loving fragile beings. In this state our grief can blossom into compassion as it strips away our illusion of independence and control and leaves our hearts throbbing with God's love.

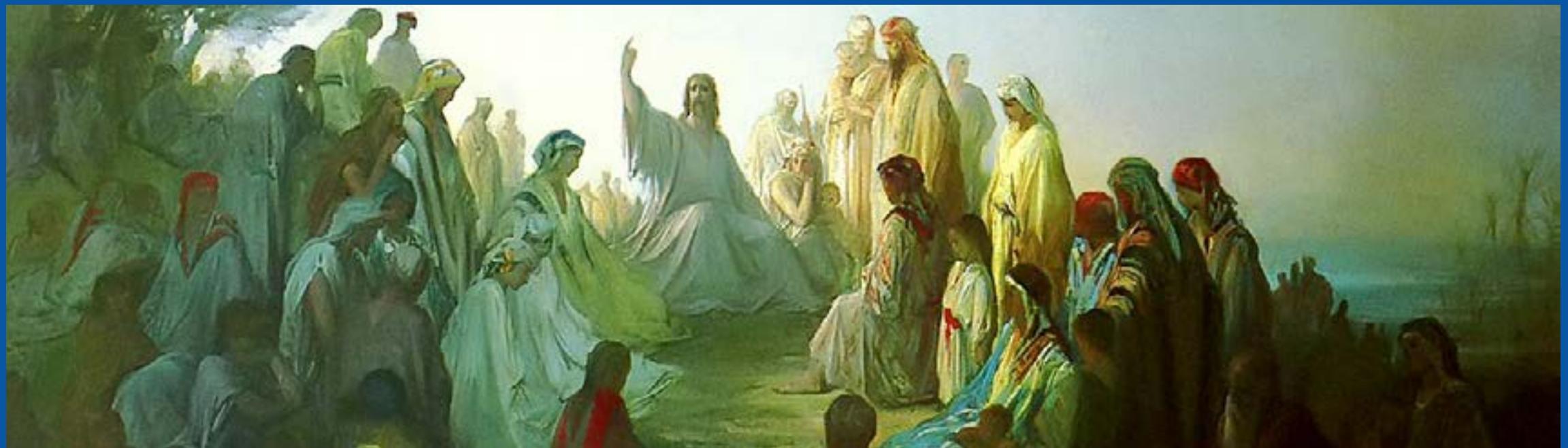
Love is compassionate: begin by calling to your awareness the expression of love as compassion.

Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness on this quality of love. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

Call to your awareness the highest quality of love as compassion.

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

This kind of gentle awareness works by allowing unconditional love to grow deeper roots over time. Spending a few moments of awareness each day allows it to naturally express itself in your living. At times you will remember moments when love seemed distant and difficult. Accepting these memories and feelings without judging, rejecting or analyzing them allows the unconditional quality of your love to develop. As it develops it will weed out the expressions of love that distort or inhibit its full expression.



Blessed Are You, the Gentle, the Earth Is Your Inheritance

To find true rest
is to give up
the judgments
we inflict upon
others and
upon ourselves
for failure in
perfection.



Practice Session

This Beatitude uses gentleness as the door way into God's world of unconditional love. Jesus invites us into this world: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart... "

Gently laying down our burden and trusting in God's love means allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. To find true rest is to give up the burden of being something that we are not and cannot possibly be. To find true rest is to give up the burden of finding our value, self-worth in what we have and have accomplished.

Love is gentle: begin by calling to your awareness the expression of love as gentle acceptance.

Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness on this quality of love. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

Call to your awareness the highest quality of love as gentle acceptance.

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

God does not care about the person we want to be or think we should be. This person doesn't exist. God simply loves us as we already are. This is often uncomfortable for those of us who have been trained to try to win affection. But if we begin as we are we will mature into a trust that allows God to be the Source of our living. It will help us come to know ourselves for who we are and to respond to God's presence as we are. Love is the ability to be present to ourselves as we are, without interference from our judgments and expectations, and to be ourselves without pretense.

Blessed Are You Merciful, For You Will Be Shown Mercy

Mercy is God's love freely given. We can't grab it, nor do we merit it. It is our Father's joy to be merciful. Mercy is our Father sustaining us as "Beloved children."



Practice Session

If we give up judging ourselves or justifying ourselves and count our self among the “tax collectors and sinners,” we will find that we have turned into the people whom Jesus seeks out, the people ready to hear about the mercy of God.

Mercy returns us to the true ground of our dignity, worth and meaning as manifestations of our Father’s love. Mercy is not mercy until it exists in the concrete situations of our lives. Our Gospels begin with a very concrete image of mercy that is meant to slip past our defenses and free our spirit. Mercy is an infant born in a manger.

Love is mercy: begin by calling to your awareness the expression of love as mercifulness.

Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness on this quality of love. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

Call to your awareness the highest quality of love as mercifulness.

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

God loves us into existence at every moment. And the only way to hold onto that love is to give it away in acts of mercy. This is one of Jesus’ basic principles: we experience God’s love for us by loving other people. We grow spiritually by emptying ourselves and making room for God to fill us.

Blessed Are You Who Hunger and Thirst for Rightness, You Will Be Satisfied

Live generously and
graciously toward others,
the way God is living
toward you.



Practice Session

Love is Generous: begin by calling to your awareness the expression of love as generosity.

Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness on this quality of love. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

Call to your awareness the highest quality of love as generosity.

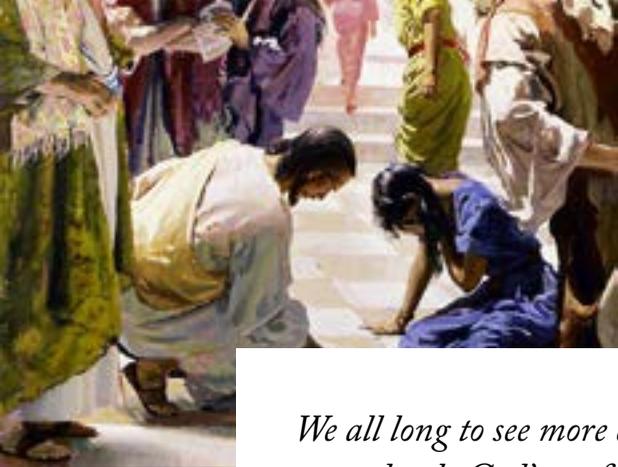
After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

God's love for you is the basis of your being alive and you can know its reality by gently being present to yourself. This naturally unfolding process begins by being present to who you are right now. The awareness your presence brings is like sunlight on a garden. It warms and nurtures the ground from which the flowers will grow. Your gentle presence encourages the love within you to sprout.

Our beliefs and moral injunctions become narrow and rigid if taken too literally. They are meant to point us to the inner reality of God's presence, loving us into existence and the Source of our loving actions toward each other. They bring us into a mystery we cannot possess but which we can only approach with awe, unknowing and only relate to with love.

Our faith matures as we begin the transformation from an external approach to our beliefs and activities to an internal connection with the unconditionally loving presence of God as the Source of all that is good, satisfying, life-giving, love-giving and worthwhile in our lives.

We find our prophetic and blessed self only through the way we live within the community of our brothers and sisters. Our nature is to belong. Being human requires more than one. We exist only in relation to others.



We all long to see more expansively and experience more deeply God's profound presence in our lives.

In Beatitudes and Blessings Fr. Ken Sedlak takes us on a journey through the Beatitudes that will fill our hearts with love. Fr. Ken's message is simple: God's love for us is beyond anything we can image; we only need to stop fighting ourselves to experience it. The Beatitudes are Jesus' straightforward description of the basic dynamics of the spiritual and human world in which we find ourselves. .

Fr. Sedlak has been a Redemptorists priest for over 40 years, and a spiritual guide to generations of parishioners at St. Michael's Church in Chicago. He wrote *Opening Your Heart Through the Beatitudes* based on his own spiritual journey with Pathways, a prayer and spiritual support group at St. Michael's Church in Chicago.

