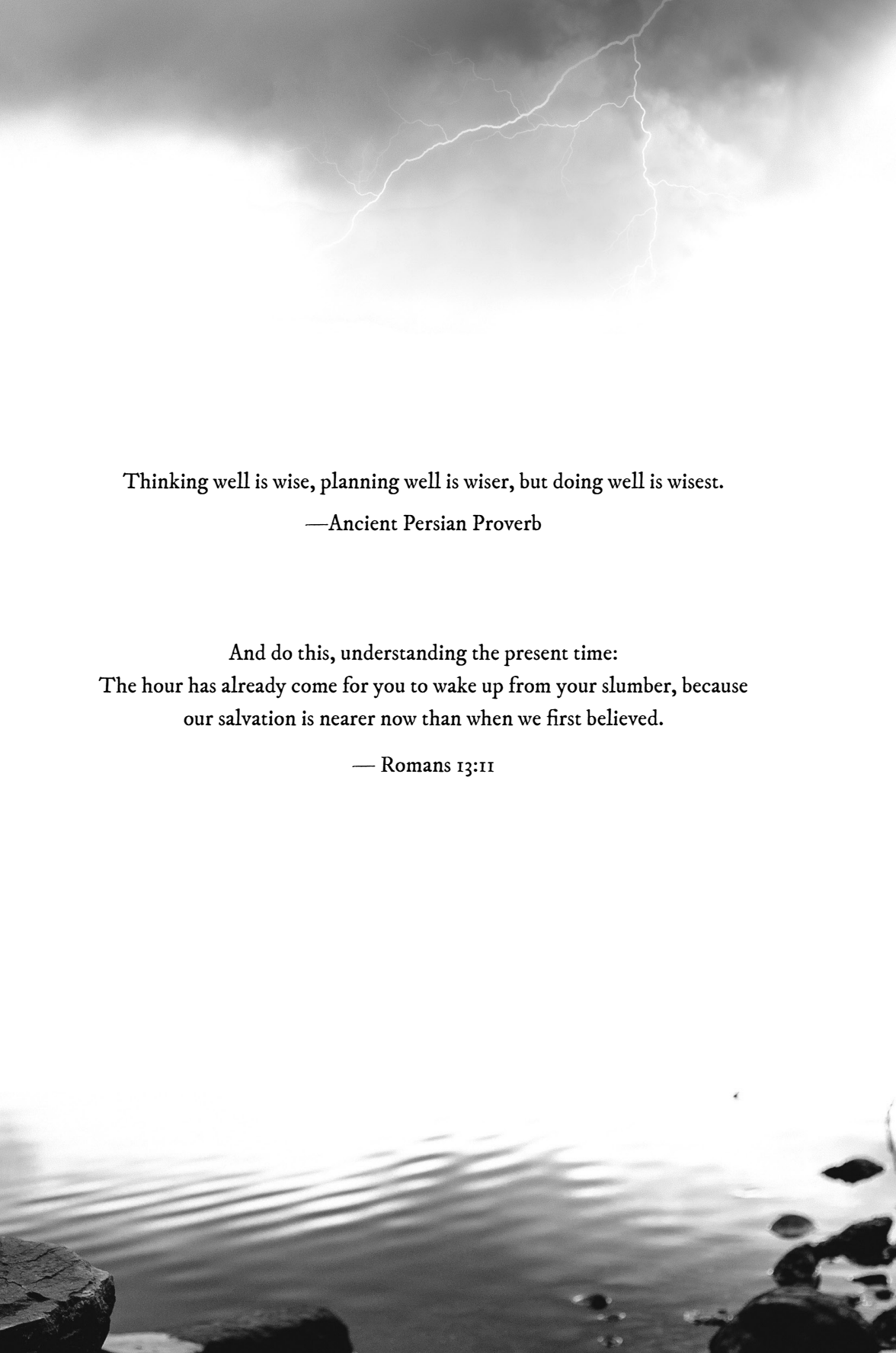


A black and white photograph of a person standing on a rock, looking out over a lake towards mountains under a stormy sky with lightning. The person is wearing a beanie and a dark jacket. The text '2' is centered in the upper half of the image.

2

*Getting Ready to Go*



Thinking well is wise, planning well is wiser, but doing well is wisest.

—Ancient Persian Proverb

And do this, understanding the present time:  
The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because  
our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

— Romans 13:11

**L**ike any journey we embark on, before we depart, we must always prepare. We prepare by assembling the tools, supplies, and mind we will need to navigate the path before us. In this chapter I want to introduce you to the attitudes that Jesus tells us will result in blessing. They are the most important tools we need to successfully navigate the path before us toward our promised land.

Maya Angelou, poet, singer, and civil rights activist, shared, “For me, the Bible is a map in the hands of a person about to take a journey. This map will show you every stop; it will show you the oases; it will help you see where you can get water; you will find out where you can get sustenance; it is the atlas of life!”<sup>13</sup>

## The Attitudes of our Life

No matter what kind of journey we are on, Jesus is our guide. So, what better place to start, than to ask his advice, right?

Jesus starts out his greatest discourse in Scripture, the Sermon on the Mount, with the most amazing detail.<sup>14</sup> As Jesus is teaching his disciples on the mountainside, he starts by speaking about attitudes in life; eight positive attitudes that change lives. These are called the Beatitudes. They are such great, beautiful attitudes on how we can be. These attitudes may be the most important part of preparing to start our journey and for what is ahead. Listen to what Jesus said:

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.

13 *The Bible: The Epic Miniseries*. “Extras: Believing in Miracles.” Disc 4. Directed by Crispin Reese, Tony Mitchell, Christopher Spencer. Twentieth Century Fox, April 8, 2014.

14 Matthew 5-7

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 children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10)

Stop for a moment and ponder how you might start to apply these attitudes to your journey and to your life. These attitudes are tools that can help guide and carry us through the many twists and forks in the road ahead.

## Jesus Speaks the Truth Upside-Down

Our journeys and our lives build on the foundation of these truths from the Beatitudes. These eight attitudes are full of paradox, the opposite of what the world would have us think, and when these truths are applied, they grab us and shake us up.

As you look at these attitudes, on the surface they may seem a little cryptic or hard to understand. To understand this wisdom, it is important that we first understand the context of what the listeners were hearing when Jesus spoke in that day.

### ***GUIDING PRINCIPLE: The Truth is Often Upside-Down***

The truth of Jesus is full of paradox. His truth often seems absurd, but it is always full of wisdom. Something deeply spiritual happens when we apply this wisdom to our lives. Let the upside-down truth and wisdom of Jesus be your guide.

We must not look at the Beatitudes solely on their own. They are the very beginning of the larger context of The Sermon on the Mount. When I preach, I would never expect someone to fully understand my sermon after only hearing the first five minutes. In his book, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, John Stott shares with us the purpose of Jesus' discourse, "it is

his own description of what he wanted his followers to be and to do.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount with these words:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Today so many people ask the question, “What can Jesus do for me?” Yet what Jesus ultimately wants is for us to do for others. In the Beatitudes, his listeners heard how to start *being*, so they could now *do*.

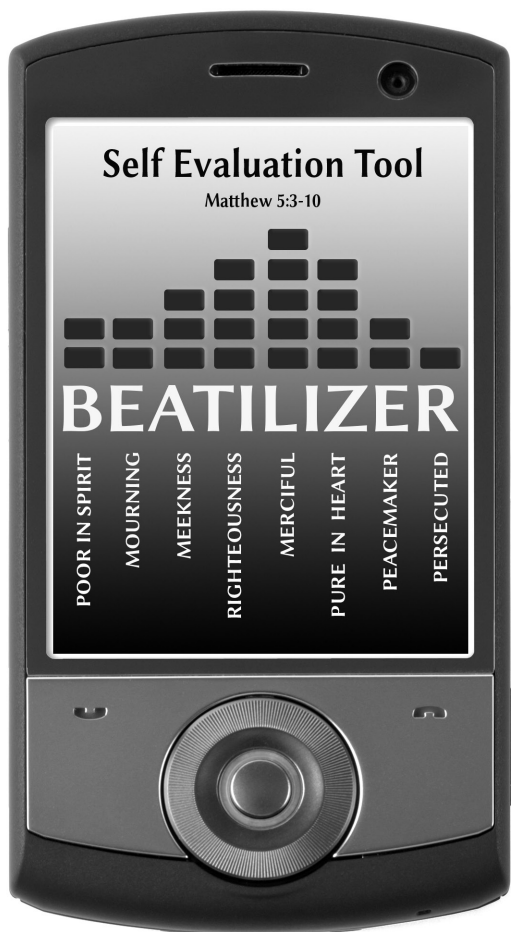
## Can We Live Up to This Standard?

As we look at and begin to understand the Beatitudes, we may start to feel like we can never live up to this standard. Some scholars have even dismissed the Beatitudes as an impossible ideal or standard to reach. What I believe they don’t understand, however, is that the Beatitudes are attitudes we adopt and build into our lives, not final goals we somehow reach.

Thankfully, with Jesus, it is never about being perfect.<sup>16</sup> All he wants from us is to trust him, take the guidance he offers, and grow. If we could see these attitudes playing out in our life in real time, they may look like the bands on a graphic equalizer. I developed a little tool called the Beatilizer (beatitude equalizer) to help illustrate this:

15 John R. W. Stott *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount – (Matthew 5-7 : Christian Counter-Culture)* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 14–15.

16 As I looked at the many Greek words Jesus used and translated as “perfect,” I saw one thing in common, they are all described using action words, “to make,” “to carry through,” “to add what is yet wanting.” This suggests perfection is a path or journey, not a final destination.



If you were to look at these eight attitudes as they are playing out at any moment in your life, they might look like the Beatilizer pictured here. Can you see how it looks like the bands on a graphic equalizer? The higher the band (small blocks), the stronger the attitude. Conversely, the lower the band, the more that attitude is lacking. Look at any moment in your life and one attitude might be stronger than another, or one attitude may be needing some attention. Our humanness makes it so. This little tool is a helpful way for you to visualize how these attitudes are either thriving or not thriving in your life.

When I was younger and still did not understand what a relationship with Jesus was, my Beatilizer looked like the one above. Notice the poor in spirit band; it's pretty low. I was still trying to live life on my own wisdom. I did not fully trust God and had not surrendered my heart to him. The mourning band is also low. Even if I recognized the sin in my life, I paid it little mind.

Let's look at the other bands (attitudes): the meekness band is a little higher and so is the righteousness band. I still had a long way to go in trusting God, however, and though I was a good person, my heart was anything but pure (pure in heart). I only thought of myself and when angered, I often sought retribution or revenge. I just wanted to get back at someone who wronged me (being a peacemaker). I often had a hard time understanding life and let other people's words and actions affect me. I was very conscious and wary of being persecuted. I didn't want to be made fun of for being a Christian and allowed that to shape me rather than getting my strength through Christ (persecuted for righteousness).

***GUIDING PRINCIPLE:***

***Perfection is a Journey, Not a Destination***

Very often we feel we cannot measure up. If we recognize that Jesus works in our weakness and we are on a path to perfection with Him, then we can see hope in our lives.

Each of these eight attitudes ends with a state of blessedness. Blessedness is not necessarily happiness, and it is not a gift for doing the right thing. It is also not something to be earned or presented to us. Blessedness is an experience of hope and joy. It is independent of our outward actions. Blessedness is the beauty that overflows from applying God's wisdom to our lives.

It is important to point out these eight attitudes can be applied to most of the situations we face, whether a simple question of honesty or the struggles and troubles we face in life. As we discuss each beatitude, I will present them as they apply to a journey. In Appendix 1, I provide more examples, so you can get a fuller picture of how they can be applied to any situation you face in life. Our journey in life is not about the quantity of miles we walk, it is about the quality of our daily walk. As we embark on our journeys, these attitudes will guide us to blessing; they help us reach our promised land.

Finally, let me point out the genius of Jesus and God's wisdom. These attitudes are presented in an order; each attitude building on the previous ones until we get to a point of great harmony. At the same time, we should not approach these attitudes as needing to get one right before moving on to the next but recognize that as we work on each one they build and grow together. More specifically, the first five attitudes build our hearts and strengthen our life experience, and the last three attitudes are largely the result of the application of the first five. Jesus is amazing!

Before we move ahead, let's take another look at the Beatitudes as Jesus spoke them. I want you to read them through slowly. Focus on each one as you read. Read them once, read them twice, really focus on them, and read them again. Then, in the next two chapters, we will look closely at each specific attitude; what it means, and how each one can apply as we journey in life. Listen again to the amazing words of Jesus:

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 children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10)