



GOD'S HAND

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

MORE AND MORE, ATHLETES—THOSE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH—are turning to the word in postgame interviews. It works in the secular arena but it points to an understanding outside oneself. It is this: *blessed*. It goes along these lines: "I am so blessed with what happened out there today," or "We're so blessed to be playing this game in the first place."

How about you? Are you feeling blessed today?

Your answer here may have something to do with how you measure blessings.

It's easy, for instance, to fall into the trap of comparison, where we stack our blessings up against those we see as more fortunate. We can't keep up, so we don't see ourselves as blessed.

Then there is the snare of expectation, wherein we play out success in the movie theater of our minds, and when the story of the big screen doesn't become the story of reality, we grumble and call ourselves cursed.

The full picture of blessing in the pages of Scripture requires us to look past the gains and the goodies. These come for some, and they are called blessings, yes. But in its grandest definition, biblical blessing is shown in God's hand ordering the hours of our living, especially as it pertains to living abundantly and eternally.

Hence, the Beatitudes. When Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with this list of bestowed blessings, he did not pronounce "blessed" those who are skilled or scholarly or strong, nor those who are moneyed or well-connected or even spiritual. Instead, he declared "blessed" those whose lives look like trouble. They are poor, they mourn, they are weak and persecuted. These are not winners, and yet they are winning—winning in the hands of God.

You see, the real test of those athletes who call themselves blessed after a win is what they are calling themselves after a loss. If they still see themselves as blessed then, they are seeing God rightly.

Opening questions: Count your blessings

What do you see as some of the biggest blessings in your life? How about a "blessing in disguise?"

The Beatitudes

Read Matthew 5:1-12. Which of these groups of people particularly catches your eye today? Do you count yourself among them—or would you find it very uncomfortable to do so?

Do you fear God requiring something of you that you do not want? How do you think through such a challenge? How might you find blessing in it?

The plan for our blessings

Read Genesis 12:1-3. What part did blessing play in God's promises to Abram? What was God's design for Abram's use of the blessings?

Read Galatians 3:10-14. What application does the blessing of Abraham have for us today? What might we do with this blessing?
