

A detailed botanical illustration in black and white, featuring various plants including ferns, flowers, and leaves. The plants are scattered across the page, creating a dense, naturalistic background. The text is overlaid on this background.

MATT SEARLES

IN
QUIETNESS
&
TRUST

Lent devotions from the beatitudes

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early church, Lent has been celebrated as a period of 40 days (not counting the Sundays) to prepare for Easter. It has been a time of self-reflection, of pondering the need for the cross. As we reflect on our own neediness, we are reminded that being a Christian is not about earning anything from God, or trying to climb the spiritual ladder. The glorious blessings we have from God are received freely, through the work of Christ. We are not saved by our good works, or our religious performance – and this includes any Lent practice that we do.

Being a Christian is not seeking to ascend to God; rather it is a way *down*. We follow the way of Jesus, who went the way of the cross before resurrection. We follow the path of the seed, as Jesus himself said:

Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life (John 12:24–25).

These devotions will focus on the beatitudes from Matthew's gospel, beginning, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit...' These beatitudes exemplify this downward way: the way of quietness and trust. But the wonderful news is that this downward way is the *blessed* way. It is the way of flourishing.

So this Lent, let's spend time with Jesus in the wilderness. Let's join him on the downward way of the cross then resurrection; of the seed being buried in the ground before springing forth to abundant life. This is the path of our Saviour. This is the way of blessing.

This book has eight groups of five devotions, with each group focusing on the theme of one of the beatitudes from Matthew's gospel. Each day there is a

verse or passage from Scripture with an accompanying devotion, a prayer and a song. The songs can be found online, but you can also find them on a Spotify playlist called 'In Quietness and Trust – Lent Playlist'.

These devotions have been written to be part of a liturgy for daily prayer, to give shape to our devotional time. (In the appendix there is an alternative liturgy, as well as some shorter prayers for when time is short.) It is suggested that you pray through this liturgy each day, either on your own or aloud with others, reading the devotion for the day at the appropriate point. If you are using the liturgy, it might be worth finishing the liturgy before you listen to the recommended song.

Because Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent, it is not expected that you'll read one of these devotions on those days. However, if you would still like to do something on the Sundays, you may use the alternative liturgy in the appendix, with the accompanying 'Psalm of the day' reading plan. Also in the appendix you will find a bedtime liturgy, a pattern for a type of evening prayer called the Examen, brief guidance for the practice of heavenly meditation and also a suggestion for practising a time of silence, or 'micro-sabbath'.

But, of course, please use this book as is most helpful. You may just use the liturgy, or just use the devotions. You may choose to use some of the prayers, all of them or none of them. Don't worry at all if you get behind on the devotions, though once you are in Easter week, I suggest that you jump ahead to the final set of devotions, as these are focused on the events of Easter week.

However you use this book, my prayer is that within these pages there will be prayers, devotions and practices that might help you delight in our Saviour more, and spend time with him each day.





DAILY PRAYER LITURGY

The suggested pattern is that you use this each day, turning to the appropriate devotion for the day when you reach that part of the liturgy.

Call to worship

One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.
(Psalm 27:4)

A moment's silence may be kept to prepare our hearts.

Opening prayer

Blessed are you, Lord Jesus Christ,
who walked the way of the cross
and said 'not my will but yours be done'.
Grant us this lent season
to join you on this downward path
So that we may know the life that is true life
and rejoice with you on resurrection morning.
Amen.

Devotion for the day

Confession

If the meditation has not included a confession of sin, you may use one of the confession prayers from devotions 1, 3, 4, 8 or 29.

Words of assurance

God so loved the world
That he gave his one and only Son
That whoever believes in him shall not perish
But have eternal life.
Therefore there is now no condemnation
For those who are in Christ Jesus.
(Adapted from John 3:16 and Romans 8:1)

Prayers for the day ahead

A pause may be left before each 'we look to you', to give time to name before God particular needs for prayer.

Heavenly Father, gracious provider

we look to you today.

For the strength for every good work

we look to you

For the putting to death of sin

we look to you

For the humility that befits your servants

we look to you

For a heart that seeks to gaze on your beauty

we look to you





For help with the responsibilities we have

we look to you

For the things that worry and concern us

we look to you

For the care of our loved ones

we look to you

For the needs of our neighbours and our world

we look to you

We cast all our burdens on you Lord,

Knowing that you care for us.

Amen.

Blessing

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace

as we trust in him,

so that we may overflow with hope

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,

and the love of God,

and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit

be with us all, evermore.

Amen.

(Romans 15:13 and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

The background of the page is a detailed botanical illustration in a light, muted green color. It features various types of plants, including ferns with feathery fronds at the top, delicate flowers and buds on the right side, and larger, more complex leaves and flowers at the bottom. The style is reminiscent of a scientific or natural history drawing.

THE BEATITUDES

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.

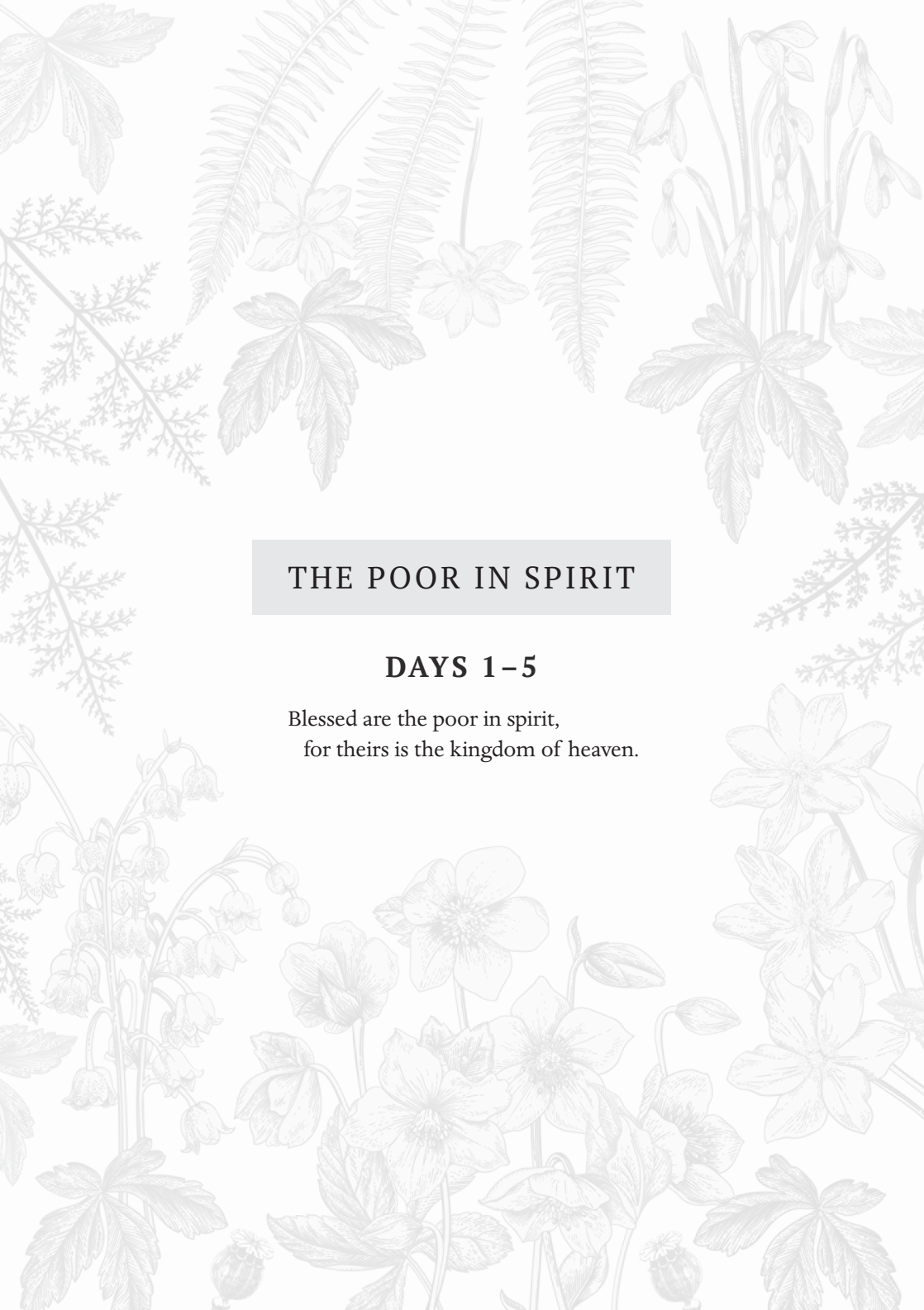
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

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)



THE POOR IN SPIRIT

DAYS 1-5

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



SEARCH ME, O GOD

Search me, God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.
(Psalm 139:23–24)

Lent is traditionally a season where we ponder our sins that led Christ to the cross. It is a time of self-reflection, of pausing from busyness, of turning down the noise and chatter of life, and of being honest with ourselves and with God. Christians are always called to confess to God and say sorry for the wrongs we have done, but Lent is a particular season for this. The 40 days of Lent mirror the 40 years that Israel spent in the wilderness learning to rely on God, and the 40 days Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted.

The first beatitude is a wonderful place to begin our Lent journey. The first day of Lent (known as Ash Wednesday in some traditions) is a day of sorrow for our sin. Being honest about our sin is part of what it means to be poor in Spirit. When we confess our sins, we are acknowledging that we do not have the spiritual or moral excellence to earn anything from God. All that we have is by *grace*. When we confess our sins, we are reminded not just of our own spiritual poverty, but also of Christ's extraordinary generosity!

Confession is the way of *blessing*. Penitence is the path of flourishing. We admit we are empty, and Christ fills us. We confess we are unworthy, and we are given heaven.

So, this Lent season, let's take time to be open and honest before the Lord. Let's spend time allowing the Lord to search our very inmost being; not hiding, nor trying to cover our sins with fig leaves, but acknowledging our poverty of spirit. It won't always be easy. It won't always be comfortable. But it is the way of blessing.

Prayer

Search me, Christ, and know my heart

Lord you know all our inmost desires and motives

And to you there are no secret sins

May I use this season to know my own heart better

And open myself to your searching gaze

Test me and know my anxious thoughts

I so readily fill my life with distractions

And my thoughts run to and fro

Grant me the rest that is only found in repentance

And the peace of a heart fixed on you

See if there is any offensive way in me

You call us to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly

Yet so often I have failed in these areas

Christ have mercy on me

And conform me more into your perfect character

And lead me in the way everlasting

Christ, you died daily on the way to Calvary

and set your hope on joys to come

May I take up my cross and join you on this journey

So that I may also rejoice with you on resurrection morning

Song: *Rock of Ages* by The Choirs of Britain's Cathedrals





BLESSED ARE...

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:3)

We've begun to think about what it means to be poor in spirit, but we mustn't skip too quickly over the first word of this (and every) beatitude. The first word of the beatitudes sums up what they are: *blessings*. This is what the name 'beatitude' means.

The beatitudes are not first and foremost calls to live a particular way. Rather Jesus is pronouncing blessings on a particular group of people. The beatitudes are *all* descriptions of followers of Jesus. Some of them are virtues that we might seek to grow in (for example, becoming more meek, hungering and thirsting more for righteousness), but fundamentally they are descriptions of all Christians.

Those who follow Jesus are blessed. Those who have taken up their cross are living the best way. Despite all that this world might value and celebrate, the life that is to be envied is the life of following Jesus. The way of Christ is the 'blessed' life: the flourishing life, the good life.

The second half of each beatitude explores what this blessing looks like. Followers of Jesus possess heaven, inherit the earth, are comforted and satisfied, will be shown mercy and are known as children of God. Although the full experience of these things will be in the new creation, all these blessings begin *now*! Jesus' way is not simply a way that leads to blessing; it is itself the blessed way to live.

The surprise of the beatitudes is that this blessed life, this flourishing life, is a 'downward way'. Being poor in spirit, mourning sin in the world and in our lives, seeking purity not riches, and so on – this is not the way that most people seek blessings. But Jesus points us to the glorious and paradoxical truth that this is the way of *life*. The way down is the way up. The way of giving is the way of receiving. The way of self-emptying is the way of being filled.

If you are a Christian, no matter how the world views you, no matter how you view yourself, Jesus' verdict on you is clear: you are *blessed*!

Prayer

The LORD bless us
and keep us;
the LORD make his face shine on us
and be gracious to us;
the LORD turn his face towards us
and give us peace.
(Adapted from Numbers 6:24–26)

Song: *Blessing Song* by Matt Searles





THE JOY OF SALVATION

Restore to me the joy of your salvation (Psalm 51:12).

Confession of sin may not seem an obvious ingredient for a flourishing life. In society, admitting we have done wrong and apologising feels an increasingly outdated practice. In churches, weekly confession of sin may not be as common as it once would have been. Without the regular rhythm of corporate confession, it would be no surprise if confession were not a regular part of daily devotion for many Christians. Perhaps it is because confession of sin is seen as a negative thing. It is not part of the ‘positive thinking’ that we think leads to flourishing.

Psalm 51 is David’s most famous prayer of confession. Notice that, for him, confession of sin is the way to know the joy of salvation. It is part of the privilege of being a child of God.

We don’t confess our sins because we just want to beat ourselves up, or see ourselves as worthless. We confess our sins because we are of *great* worth: we are children of God, but children who err and stray like lost sheep, and so need to keep saying sorry. We do so, knowing that God loves to forgive, God loves to give his children fresh starts.

Being honest about our sins may be painful – it was for David in Psalm 51. Lent may not always be the most comfortable season. But it is the way of *life*. Hiding our sin is not the way to joy (Psalm 32:3–5). Pretending that we are better than we are leads only to exhaustion and disappointment.

Confession of sin is not simply admitting that we can’t earn our way to God; it is also freeing ourselves of the burden of trying to! What joy and freedom there is in confessing our sin to God. We admit that we have done worse than we dare imagine, but knowing that we have a God who already knows the worst about us and loves to forgive.

We should be aware of our sin, but we must remember that it does not define us. Confession of sin is vital, not as an end in itself, but because of where it leads. Confessing our sins leads us to the joy of our salvation, because it leads us to our Saviour!

Prayer

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge...

Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
(Psalm 51:1–4, 7–12)

Song: *Have Mercy (Psalm 51)* by Caroline Cobb





HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT

These are the ones I look on with favour:
those who are humble and contrite in spirit,
and who tremble at my word.

(Isaiah 66:2)

Lent is an opportunity to see ourselves rightly. A vital part of the downward way of flourishing is true humility: not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. So much of modern life consists in seeking to rise up, to ascend. We are told that blessing and flourishing are found in trying to be *more*. We are encouraged to present our best, idealised self to the world. Yet the way of Christ is the way of less. We humble ourselves before him. And he exalts us (1 Peter 5:6).

Pride is the opposite of poverty of Spirit. Pride is thinking that we have what it takes, that we have spiritual resources to draw on, so that (if we dare admit it) we don't need to rely fully on God. Pride is not just putting ourselves in the wrong place; it is putting God in the wrong place. We will never think of God rightly unless we also think of ourselves rightly. If I think that I'm big, that must mean I think that God is small. True blessing is found in the way of John the Baptist and what he said about Jesus: 'He must become greater; I must become less' (John 3:30).

Humility is the way of flourishing, because it is embracing reality, putting aside all pretence and self-deception. Humility isn't about being less human; it is being *more* human. We surrender our pride, and our personality shines through. We stop having to have everything *our* way, and discover the freedom of receiving life as a gift. We stop trying to justify ourselves, and rest secure in the one who justifies us.

God already knows everything about us, and he has already loved and accepted us in Christ, and made us his precious children. So we can surrender any pretence, and lay ourselves open before him. We have nothing to fear, nothing to hide.

Humility is the way of flourishing, because as we humble ourselves before him, he exalts us. We bring him our emptiness, and he fills us. We don't even deserve the crumbs under his table, but he gives us a seat at the feast.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, gentle and lowly
Deliver me from pride and grant me true humility:

From thinking much of myself

Lord deliver me

From looking down on others

Lord deliver me

From always wanting to get my own way

Lord deliver me

From craving the approval of others

Lord deliver me

From the fear of being criticised

Lord deliver me

From speaking too much and listening too little

Lord deliver me

From minimising my sin

Lord deliver me

From exaggerating my successes

Lord deliver me

From wanting to be well thought of

Lord deliver me

From thinking I can achieve anything without you

Lord deliver me

From making much of myself, and little of you

Lord deliver me

Amen.

Song: *Let My Words Be Few* by Matt Redman

