



*God's Highway To
Happiness*

The Beatitudes

The Pentecostals of Deland

Home Bible Study Guide

God's Highway To Happiness

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God's Highway To Happiness

Dependence On God-Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit

Matt 5:2-3

*And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,
3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus' Sermon On The Mount is arguably some of the most profound literature ever written. Packed into those eight principles are the secrets to living an abundant and happy life. The word, "Blessed," means, "happy."
True happiness is tied to understanding and applying these beatitudes.

Happiness comes from depending on God.

Matt 5:3

3 "God blesses (makes happy) those who are (spiritually) poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. New Living Translation

Just what does it mean to be "poor in spirit?"
How can a person be happy by being poor?
To be poor in spirit means to recognize that we are not God.
We are not the master of our own destiny.
We are not capable of controlling our own future.
I can no more change me than a leopard can change his spots.

Jer 13:23

Can the leopard take away his spots? Nor can you who are so used to doing evil now start being good. TLB

Only until we realize that we are not masters of our own destiny but instead slaves to our sinful nature can we begin the journey to spiritual victory and happiness.

Do you ever know what you should be doing but can't bring yourself around to actually doing it?

Do you ever tell yourself, "just this once" to a forbidden indulgence only to end up getting caught up in a new habit or harmful lifestyle?

Do you ever make a decision knowing all along that it is wrong but you do it anyway?

Do you ever surprise yourself at your level of selfishness, pride or temper?

Have you ever tried to control people or situations by manipulating or bullying them?

If you said "yes" to any of these scenarios, welcome to the human race.

We are all dealing with our own set of hurts, hang-ups and habits.

Our dependence on God is the key to overcoming our flesh.

In Matt. 5, Jesus said that the path to heaven comes through being poor in spirit. (dependent on God)

Then he is linked humility with the path to heaven.

Matt 18:3-4

3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. KJV

Humility by definition is, "God and others are responsible for the successes in my life."

Whatever I am or whatever I've done is the result of the investment others have made in me.

"A tortoise sitting on top of a fencepost didn't get there by himself."

My happiness is dependent upon admitting that I am powerless when choosing between right and wrong.

Being poor in spirit is recognizing that I am not God and therefore my life is unmanageable outside of God's involvement.

False assumption:

I am the master of my own destiny. I get to play God.

We play God when.

1. We try to control our reputation.

We actually DO care about what others think of us.
We don't want people to know what we are really like.
We pretend. We fake it.
We tell people what they want to hear.
Yet the truth is, we don't want others to see the real me.
Pride and fear keeps us from being real and letting our hair down.
We assume, "They would think less of me if they knew the real me."

2. We try to control our problems.

Concerning our problems, we convince ourselves that we can handle it.
"I'm OK."
"I can handle this."
"I don't need the church."
"I don't need recovery."
"I don't need to share this or talk about it."
"If I ignore it, it will go away."
That, my friend, is the voice of someone trying to play God.

3. We try to control our neighbor.

We want to control and dictate to others, yet we don't want anyone telling us what to do or how to live.
We try to control other people.
Parents try to control their children. Children try to control their parents.
Husbands try to control their wives. Wives try to control their husbands.
Co-workers try to control their peers.

Over time, we develop tools to help us control others.
We use guilt, shame, intimidation, flattery, aggression and even the silent treatment as tools to control others.

4. We try to control our pain.

The problem with keeping the pain private is that we usually only make things worse.
We ignore it. We avoid it. We deny it.
We overeat to keep busy.
We drink to mask the pain.
We pop pills to escape the pressure.
We bury ourselves in our work.
We immerse ourselves in hobbies.
We drift from relationship to relationship.
We crawl into a bed of depression and try to shut the world out.
We can become manipulative, controlling, angry, abusive, critical or judgmental; usually to the very people we love the most!
The bottom line is: we are not God. We are not the masters of our own destiny.

The reason we play God lies with our sinful nature.

As long as we believe we are the masters of our own destiny and can control our urges, passions and cravings, we are setting ourselves up for repeated disappointments in life.
Ultimately, we sin, because we are sinners.
It wasn't, "Well I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time."
It wasn't, "I just got caught at a weak moment."
It wasn't, "He (she) made me do it!"
Rather we did it because we are sinners.

Don't believe the cliché that men are basically good. The thought is, give mankind enough government, education and resources and they will rise to the occasion.

Jesus said in Matt. 19, *"There is none good but God."*

Romans 3 tells us that *"there is none righteous, no not one."*

Left to our own devices, man generally tends to choose wrong over right.

Even Paul, the world's greatest evangelist, dealt with this sin nature.

Rom 7:15-17

15 I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. 16 I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. 17 But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things. NLT

The consequences for playing God bring fear, frustration, fatigue, and futility.

1. Fear

Out of fear, we tend to lie to ourselves.

When indulging in sin, we tell ourselves that we can quit anytime.

We convince ourselves that what we do is nobody else's business.

We tell ourselves that it's our body and we're not hurting anybody else.

It is only as we get drawn deeper into sin do we one day realize that we have become a slave to our sin.

We try to stop for a day, a week or a month.

Yet eventually, sin pounces on us at an awkward moment and we run up the white flag and indulge.

We tell ourselves, "Only this once." We convince ourselves, "I've been good for weeks now."

We tell ourselves, "Everybody's got to blow off a little steam every once in a while."

Only later do we realize that what was meant to be a onetime indulgence has become a roaring relapse.

When we find ourselves trying to control everything and everyone, we become fearful that if we fail, people might find us out.

They might see us are we really are.

We don't let others get close because they might see that we don't have it all together.

2. Frustration

It can get real tiring trying to be good all the time.

About the time you get one area of your life under control, another area pops up out of nowhere.

Ever play the carnival game, "Whop the weasel?" That's where you take a wooden mallet and whop the weasel back down and then another one pops up in a different place?

Life can be like that. You whop down one addiction or habit and "pop" here comes another one!

We soon begin to realize that we have a problem so deep and unsettling and that we are powerless to change it.

Ps 32:3-5

3 There was a time when I wouldn't admit what a sinner I was. But my dishonesty made me miserable and filled my days with frustration.5 until I finally admitted all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide them. I said to myself, "I will confess them to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. TLB

3. Fatigue

We can get weary quickly while running from reality.

Running from the confession that we are not in control.

Refusing to admit that we have a problem we can't fix.

There comes a moment in life when we wake up and realize that we are not in control of our destiny, our body or our own willpower.

4. Futility

The truth is, it's futile to play God.

There is only one omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent God in the universe. There is no room in Godhead for you or me!

We sin because we are sinners.

We feel guilt because we sin.

We are powerless to change from within ourselves.

We will never find true happiness until we drop the façade and get real with God and others about who and what we really are.

The cure to playing God is to admit we are powerless to change on our own.

In the story of Lazarus' death, Martha tried to convince Jesus that by rolling the stone away from Lazarus' tomb, they would regret that decision. "By now, (after 4 days) he stinketh."

To let the light in may also mean letting the stink out.

That's the way it is with truth. The miracle of Lazarus' resurrection could not be seen until the stone had been rolled out of the way.

There is a miracle waiting to happen inside us. But the stone has to first be moved in order to let the light in.

The light brings with it truth which reveals what's been hiding in our hearts; our sin, our selfishness, our pride, our weakness and our secrets. Basically, we all stink inside!

It's easy for us to relate to Martha's protest.

Martha didn't want to face all that decay and corruption lying in that dark tomb.

We, like Martha, are afraid to take the lid off our dark sins and stinky secrets.

We know that when the lid comes off, the light comes in.

Yet when the truth comes in, the stink might get out!

The fear of revealing how nasty, smelly and humiliating our situation is in the light of truth causes us to keep the lid on at all cost. . . even at the cost of our happiness.

When was the last time you came to the altar and really poured out your soul before the Lord?

But when was the last time you really talked with God about that side of you nobody else ever gets to see?

We tend to make choices at the time believing those choices will make us happier.

Are you happy with who you are and what you are?

Obtaining the kingdom of heaven is found by being poor in spirit; dependent, honest and needy.

God's highway to happiness is traveled by remaining dependent upon God.

Points To Ponder:

Question: Why do you think it is so difficult for us human beings to admit we are not in control?

Question: Why are we as humans so gullible when it comes to believing our own lies?

Question: What is the typical relief method you've used in the past in order to avoid coming to terms with yourself?

Question: What have you learned here in this lesson that has been helpful for you in your own spiritual journey?

God's Highway To Happiness

Repentance Toward God-Blessed Are They That Mourn

Matt 5:3-4

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

4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

KJV

To "mourn" here in the Greek is "pentheo" and it means "to grieve."

We usually grieve or mourn over what has been lost.

To mourn spiritually means to recognize our loss of fellowship with God our creator and savior.

To grieve over our sins and transgressions actually causes God to draw near and comfort us.

"Blessed" in the Greek means, "happy."

Mourning causes us to turn to the Lord for forgiveness and reconciliation.

God's comfort then brings us happiness.

When we are poor in spirit (recognizing our dependence upon the Lord), dependence leads us to repentance where we mourn or grieve over our mistakes and sins.

For some of us, our relationship with the Lord has been strained over unrealized expectations.

We steam, fume and pout over the fact that God did not come through and answer our prayer as expected.

Disappointment led to disillusionment and disillusionment led to defection.

There is one English word in our vocabulary that haunts us, perplexes us and bewilders us.

This disturbing word I'm referring to is "WHY."

"Why does God let me hurt? Why did God fail to answer my prayer? Why didn't God show up when I needed Him most?"

God has NOT promised to exempt us from life's disappointments.

In Bethany, Lazarus, Mary and Martha were some of Jesus' best friends.

He often went to their house when he was in need of rest and fellowship.

Jesus was one day's journey away from Bethany the day a messenger came running up breathlessly to inform Jesus that Lazarus was sick and asked if would he come and heal him.

John 11:3

3 Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.

KJV

We know from the story that Jesus waited there 2 more full days before taking the one day journey back to Bethany where the two sisters waited.

It was toward the end of the 4th day after Lazarus died before Jesus made it back to Bethany.

Notice in the text, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick."

The women were implying:

"Lord, we know that you have the power to heal, deliver and do miracles."

"Lord, we also know that you love Lazarus (at least you say you do)."

"Therefore we're assuming that if you love Lazarus, and it is in your power to do something about his sickness and save his life, we believe that you will come!"

Can you see the implications here?

If you come and heal Lazarus, that proves to us that you really love him.

If you DON'T come, we won't know what to think about your feelings toward us.

Jesus left these women hanging and wondering for 4 days without a word.

They had seen and heard of the hundreds who had been healed and delivered by Jesus.

It was just assumed that if he would do it for strangers, it was unthinkable that Jesus wouldn't do it for them.

Down through the centuries, how many people have been disappointed by unanswered prayers?

How many people have vowed to abandon the Lord because they felt He had abandoned them?

When we're wounded, that's when we wonder.

When God doesn't show up, that's when we question.

When God doesn't spare us from disease, disaster or death, we doubt.

You see, we understand disease.

We know that disease and death are no respecter of persons.

While grievous when death comes, we do understand that our days are numbered and that we can't live forever.

We can relate to heartache, disappointment and broken relationships.

No one is exempt.

We get that!

What we don't understand is a God who says He loves us, but seemingly stands on the sidelines, when He has the power to step in and change our situation.

Job 33:13-14

13 "Why do you complain against Him, That He does not give an account of all His doings?

14 "Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, yet no one notices it. NASB

The truth is, there are probably hundreds of occasions where God has stepped in, intervened and we never even knew it.

Spared us from a disease.

Saved us from disaster.

Snatched us out of harm's way.

Healed us and we never even knew it!

The point?

There are going to be things that God does and allows that we will not understand now but will become clear later. Trust that God knows what He is doing and that He never makes mistakes!

John 13:6-7

6 When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

7 Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but someday you will." NLT

Our confusion begins when we try to determine the degree of God's love for us based on whether or not he answers a particular prayer.

Hear Martha's complaint.

John 11:21

21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. KJV

A few minutes later, Mary adds her complaint to Martha's.

John 11:32

32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. KJV

The Lord is not stoically impervious to our pain and grief.

John 11:33-35

33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, 34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. 35 Jesus wept. KJV

Notice that Jesus wasn't troubled so much over his friend's death as he was over Mary and Martha's hurtful barbs. While the two sisters were simply venting out of hurt and pain, Jesus was obviously moved by their complaints and disappointment. Jesus wept, but it wasn't over his friend's death. You see, Jesus knew something that the two sisters didn't know. Jesus knew that Lazarus was going to live again. He had told his disciples before he ever left:

John 11:11

11 Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. KJV

Jesus always knows something that we don't know. If God chooses to let us go through sorrow, pain, disease, death or trouble rather than deliver us out of it, He has a reason for it.

Jesus wept because he was feeling Mary and Martha's pain. Don't ever think for a minute that the Lord doesn't cry with you when you're heartbroken. Don't ever think that God is oblivious to your pain, loss and hurt. He may hang back and withhold his hand but not without it ripping His heart out. Jesus wept for Mary and Martha. Jesus weeps for you and me.

God knows our needs before we do and even more than we do. Why can't we simply trust that God will supply our needs according to his riches in glory? God has his reasons for not answering every prayer and granting every request. Remember, God knows something that you don't know about your problem, situation or dilemma.

God HAS promised to comfort us when we repent.

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

"Comforted" in the Greek is parakaleo (par-ak-al-eh'-o) to invite or to call near. Parakaleo refers to us being invited to come close and draw near. Mourning or grief forces our hand and moves us closer to God for comfort and help. Happiness is the end result of mourners approaching the Lord looking for reconciliation.

In Matt 27, While Jesus himself was hanging on the cross, the religious leaders mocked Jesus saying, "He says he trusts in God. He says that he is the son of God. Let's see if God will rescue him."

If God rescued Jesus (the man), then wouldn't that prove that God loved him? If God didn't rescue Jesus, wouldn't that also prove something else?

Jesus the man had to die, but not because he was not loved by the Father! Jesus had to die so that you and I could live.

If Jesus had saved himself, then he could not have saved us! You see, someone had to die for our sins. Jesus died for us, willingly and lovingly because he loves us. You see there is comfort in knowing that Jesus loves us more than He loved his own life!

You see, our grief and pain inevitably causes us to respond to His invitation. I can no more manage and control my life, my destiny and my future than I can fly. There is comfort for me in not having to come up with all the answers.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Like it or not, our pain serves a purpose. Our pain drives us into the arms of Jesus. Our grief causes us to draw near to the Lord where there is promised comfort and peace. In the arms and presence of Jesus, there is true happiness.

Jesus truly is our comforter.

Matt 11:28

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

KJV

Points To Ponder:

Question: Why do you think we are so obsessed with having to know “why” for everything that happens to us?

Question: What are some reasons as to why God would allow us to go through some things rather than deliver us out of those things?

Question: Why would God not fix for us what is in our own power to change?

God's Highway To Happiness

Submission To God-Blessed Are The Meek

Matt 5:5

5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

KJV

The word "blessed" means "happy" in the Greek language of the New Testament. A person's happiness is undeniably linked to understanding and applying these beatitudes. Our relationship with the Lord could be compared to taking a journey. Just as there are steps to take on the path, there are steps to make in your journey with God. These beatitudes represent those steps.

Dependence on God-Blessed are the poor in spirit

For us to be poor in spirit means to recognize our dependence upon God for the power to live an overcoming life. We are not God. We are not the masters of our own destiny. We are hopelessly lost unless God intervenes and saves us.

Repentance toward God-Blessed are they that mourn

To mourn speaks of the pain and shame (emotional, physical, spiritual) that brings us to an end of ourselves and drives us into the arms of Jesus where true happiness and comfort is found.

Submission to God-Blessed are the meek

Meekness is holding our peace and letting the Lord fight our battles. Meekness is also allowing God and others to speak truth and guidance into our life. Better decisions and choices lead to less chaos and more happiness.

Submission to God-meekness.

Injuries sustained from carousels or merry-go-rounds are common place! Why not? When I was growing up, the rules of the game were to sling off as many riders as possible. The last one still on board was the winner!

A merry-go-round for a 5 year old can be a lot of fun. It's fun as long as you get to control it. Inevitably some older kid comes along and decides that you're not going fast enough. At that point about all you can do is scream at the top of your lungs and hang on for dear life.

Do you know anybody like that? Life has them running in circles, screaming and hanging on for dear life. Most of us have lived our lives like that at one time or another.

Some seem to want life to be all about fun and games. Some live for the weekend where they can let off some steam and have fun. Friday seems to be America's day of deliverance. Grab your paycheck and hit the road. Sports bars and night clubs, here we come for a time of suds, songs, salsa and seduction.

The only problem with the weekend is that Monday has this nasty habit of showing back up. Our money's gone.

Our friends are gone.
The fun is gone.
Sometimes our self-respect is gone.

We wake up out of our stupor and decide, "I'm not going to do that anymore!"
Yet that is exactly what we go back to, because we're not sure if there is anything else any better; and besides, everybody else we know is doing the same thing!

We find ourselves on this merry-go-round where someone else seems to be in control.
Around and around we go, out of control, and with no way to get off.
All we can do is scream and hang on tight and hope the ride ends soon.

A look at life's merry-go-round.

Guilt leads to anger.
Anger leads to fear.
Fear leads to depression.
Depression takes us back to guilt. (It's a merry-go-round)

Guilt and shame are the result of a convicted conscience.
Guilt says, "I can't believe I did that!"
It's common to feel guilty over poor decisions or selfish motives.
We tend to dismiss our guilt with thoughts such as "Somehow, things got out of hand. But I won't let that happen again."

Guilt leads to anger.

We chastise ourselves, "I know better and I've been raised better than this."
Yet we tend to keep returning to the same sins and snares.
We get angry with ourselves over the fact that we can't seem to quit.
No matter how many times we tell ourselves, "That's the last time I get caught up in that," only to find weeks later we're right back up to our elbows in the same sin.
We get angry and frustrated over the fact that we should be able to stop this insanity but we don't. . . or can't.

Anger leads to fear.

Doubts and questions pop up.
What if I can't make myself stop?
What if I can't help myself?
Fear starts to take hold; what have I done?
I can't seem to shake this.

After several serious attempts to quit don't seem to work, we get frightened over the implications.

Fear leads to depression.

Fear of our inability to change leads us to the sad conclusion that there is no way out of our dilemma.
We are stuck
We've dug a hole so deep we can't seem to climb out.

Depression stems from the thought that my tomorrow will be no better than my today.
When we lose our hope for a better life, we tend to succumb to depression.
We feel helpless and hopeless.
We quit trying.

We feel sorry for ourselves.
We descend into feelings of despair with no plan, no motivation and therefore no future.
We just want to go to sleep and never wake up.

Then one day a ray of hope shines through the darkness and offers us a possible solution to our sin.
A new book.
A new therapy.
A new drug.
A new relationship.
A new landscape.

Like a drowning man grabbing hold of a life jacket, we latch on to hope that this time around things will be different.
After a few days, a few weeks or maybe a few months, we seem to do better.
Yet inevitably we fall back into our sin and selfishness.
Guilt and shame comes crashing in once more.

Depression leads us back to guilt.

At that point the cycle is complete and we survey the damage done by our latest season of self-indulgence.
Guilt sets in because we indulged, which again leads to anger. . . .
Here we go again on the merry-go-round of life!

It is then that we realize, "I'm back where I started again."
Where do I get off?
Do you ever feel that way?

Meekness is the answer.
Meekness is the key to getting off life's merry-go-round.

Meekness—Giving God and others permission to speak into our life.

Jesus came to the tomb of Lazarus after a two day delay and told them, "Remove the stone."
Lazarus had been dead now for 4 days.
Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth."
Amazingly Lazarus came stumbling out of the tomb still wrapped in his graves clothes.
At this time in history the Jews prepared the bodies of their deceased with aromatic spices to help hide the smell of decay.
They wrapped the dead body with thin strips of linen around and around each limb and then the torso of the corpse.
They also used a separate strip of cloth to bind the head and face.

When Lazarus came stumbling out of that tomb, he was wrapped from head to toe in his graves clothes.
Jesus immediately turned to Mary, Martha and their friends and said, "Loose him and let him go."
Jesus didn't unwrap Lazarus.
Neither did he command Lazarus to unwrap himself.
But he rather commanded Lazarus' family and friends and unwrap him.

Meekness says, "I'm going to need some help with all these smelly graves clothes."
Meekness says, "I'm going to need some help living this resurrection life for Christ."
Meekness says "I may be resurrected but I still have some stinky situations to deal with."
Meekness says, "I'm going to need a church full of caring Christians to help me stay on track."

When Spirit filled, new life is breathed into us.
We are a new creature in Christ Jesus.
Old things are passed away and behold all things are become new.
However, we're still going to need some help with our graves clothes.
Attitudes, mindsets, habits and associations have to change.

Meekness is allowing God to speak to us concerning our hurts, habits and hang-ups.
Meekness is allowing the ministry to speak in to our life giving us encouragement and direction.
Meekness is allowing seasoned Christians to help guide our decisions and oversee our spiritual progress.

Moses had led 2 ½ million Jews out of Egyptian bondage.
Now Moses was attempting to provide advice and judgment for everyone's disputes and problems.
Moses would sit in judgment from daylight until after dark each day.
The people were forced to stand in line and wait their turn through the long hours of each day.
Moses was under tremendous pressure and the people were frustrated and tired of waiting.
Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came visiting and observed the long procession and procedure.
He told Moses that he should set leaders over 1,000's, 100's, 50's and 10's.
Let those leaders resolve the disputes under their authority.
Only the disputes the leaders couldn't solve would be brought to Moses.
The judicial process would speed up and the people would be grateful.
Moses would not be burdened down and the work could be distributed amongst many.

Ex 18:23

23 If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace." NLT

Jethro wasn't butting into Moses' business.

1. Rather he made the suggestion and asked Moses to pray about it.
2. By marrying Jethro's daughter, Moses had given Jethro permission to speak into his life concerning his wife's needs and family matters.

As a new believer, have you given permission for someone to speak into your life?
Have you made it known to a few carefully selected people that you value their opinion and relationship with Lord?
Every new believer needs a pastor who can preach and teach truth to them without fear of offending them.
Have you given God permission to talk to you about EVERY area of your life? If not, why not?

Points To Ponder:

Question: Have you noticed a pattern or cycle to your life or that of someone you know? Explain.

Question: How do you best handle anger?

Question: Why do you think it is so hard to let God fight our battles for us?

Question: Have you ever been hurt by someone you trusted and believed in? What did you do?

God's Highway To Happiness

Passion For God-Blessed Are the Hungry And Thirsty

Matt 5:2-6

6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. KJV

Happy are the poor in Spirit-dependence upon God

Happy are they that mourn-Repentance toward God-Spiritual pain that drives us to the feet of Jesus.

Happy are the meek-Submission to God-Giving God and others permission to speak into our life.

Happy are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness-Passion for God-pleasing God is what brings happiness and peace to people.

We must be passionate about right living for the right reasons.

While millions of people may demonstrate a spiritual hunger and thirst to know God, they may not necessarily be seeking God for the right reasons.

It is possible to seek God while looking only for forgiveness or relief from guilt.

Yet we still might not be seeking to know God for who He is.

We live in a microwave generation.

People want what they want and they want it now.

For some, God is only a means to an end.

While God wants to do a major overhaul, we may be only looking for a quick fix.

We want to be free from the pain of poor decisions and sinful choices.

We want God so that we can feel better about ourselves.

We desire just enough of God to get us over the hump.

We typically look for a quick fix while God is looking for a long term cure.

We just want to get out of our present pain, predicament or problem without making tough choices.

God wants us to be passionate for Him- living right for the right reasons.

You see, this is where true happiness is; not just doing what's right but doing right for the right reasons.

Three root sins:

Revealed in the garden of Eden:

Lust of the flesh

Lust of the eyes

Pride of life

Sexual impurity-(lust of the flesh)

I want to gratify my selfish desires at the expense of another human being.

Greed-(lust of the eyes)

I want to control and manipulate people and circumstances for my own selfish ends.

Pride-(pride of life)

I can't be real and honest with God and others because they might think less of me.

Notice that all three sins revolve around the root of selfishness.

We want forgiveness-God wants fellowship.
We want reprieve-God wants relationship.
We seek relief from guilt-God seeks to restore grace.

If we are not careful, we can see coming to God as merely a means to an end.
God becomes a tool to exploit for the purpose of relieving our pain or fixing our circumstances.
This is why true happiness (being blessed) is reserved only for those who are truly hungry and thirsty to do right because it pleases God rather than merely benefits them.

We sometimes want to bargain with God.
“God, I will if you will.”
Instead, what about us saying, “God, I will, because you already have!”

Once we get a picture of Calvary and just what was accomplished there on our behalf and for our benefit, it changes the way we see God and how we see ourselves.

God wants more from me than just confession and repentance.
God wants more than my admission of guilt.
God wants me, God wants you.
God wants our heart, not just our obedience.
God wants to know that we love Him, submit to Him and obey Him for the right reasons.

Living right for the right reason is what will make us happy.

The happiest people are those who hunger and thirst for God Himself, not just for what He can do for them.
The happiest people are those who understand the extent of Calvary's cost and the depth of God's love.

Typically we feel unworthy to receive from the Lord.
So we end up trying to earn God's favor and forgiveness by trying to change under our own power.
We want to straighten up and fly right before we muster the courage to invite God in to live with us.
We want to clean the house before our company shows up.
That's like trying to nurse yourself back to health so that you can feel worthy enough to take the medicine that is intended to make you well.

I heard a preacher say one time, “Only a passion can conquer a passion.”
A passion, habit or addiction can only be conquered by finding another passion that is greater than our present pursuit.

The closer we can get to Jesus the greater our passion and love for Him.
That passion brings the power of God into our life for deliverance, victory and joy.

Acts 1:8

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. KJV

True happiness is found when we seek and find Jesus Christ for the right motive.
What motive might that be?

Love is the greatest passion of all!

Luke 7:44-47

44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath

anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. KJV

Here was a woman who had been used and abused by men.
We don't know which sermon or on what day Jesus had impacted her life.
Somehow she had heard Jesus' message that offered her hope, forgiveness and self-respect.
He had made her feel like she had worth and value.
Jesus was different from other men she had known.

She entered the house of Simon the Pharisee uninvited.
She couldn't help herself.
She knew she wouldn't be welcomed.
She understood that her reputation would follow her into that house.
She knew that she was not on the guest list.
She wasn't even sure they would let her get close.
Yet she had to at least try.
Somehow she had to show Jesus the change he had made in her.
She just had to show Jesus how much she loved him for restoring her with forgiveness, acceptance and dignity.

She slipped into the house, came up behind Jesus while he reclined on the couch and began to weep, her tears falling upon his feet.
She then wiped his dirty, dusty feet with her own hair and kissed them repeatedly.
Then she anointed his feet with the perfume from the alabaster box she had brought with her.

Simon was appalled. "If this man were a prophet, he would know what manner of woman is touching him."
Jesus responded with the story of the two men, one who owed the equivalent of 50 day's wages and the other who owed 500 day's wages worth.
Since neither could repay, both men were forgiven of their debt.
Then Jesus asked, "Which of the two men will love that creditor, the most?"
Simon answered, "I suppose the man who owed his creditor the most."

Jesus then unveiled the contrast between Simon's love for Jesus and this woman's love for him.

Luke 7:44-47

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." NIV

This woman was not forgiven because she loved but rather she loved because she was forgiven.
She had lived a life of regret, humiliation and fear.
She had wrestled with low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness.
However, Simon, a Pharisee, saw little in his life that could be construed as sin.
He kept the law, followed the rules and remained ceremonially clean.
Since he was such a good Jew, he felt he had little need of forgiveness and mercy from God.
Simon was blind to his own pride and prejudice.
Simon marginalized his sin.
Since his sin was so insignificant in comparison to his good works, he assumed little forgiveness was needed.

Our level of love for God reflects our level of depravity.

He who thinks he has sinned little, who has been forgiven little, will love little.
Someone who sees no need to be forgiven will lack in passion and love for the Lord.
He who believes his sins are of little consequence will not appreciate the beauty of divine forgiveness.
In contrast, he who is forgiven much, loves much.

Love based on gratitude and thanksgiving will cause us to do things for Christ we simply otherwise would not do.
Loving God for the right reason brings us true happiness and peace of mind.
The more we see our sin through God's eyes, the greater will be our love and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Sin is not human frailty.

Sin is not making a mistake.

Sin is not a disease or moral weakness.

Sin is so hideous, despicable and nauseating to God, words cannot describe how offensive it is to Him.

Isa 64:6

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. KJV

The word, "filthy rags" in Hebrew means "a cloth of removals."

A cloth that is so polluted that it can't be cleaned, but instead must be thrown away and burned.

Our sin is so insulting and repulsive to God, we are only good for being gathered up and thrown into the fire.

Yet, instead of abandoning us, rejecting us or discarding us, God devised a plan to redeem us!

Eph 2:13

13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. KJV

Titus 2:13-14

Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. TNIV

Cinderella was swept off her feet and fell in love with Prince Charming who came and rescued her,

They lived happily ever after.

Yet Cinderella is still only a fairy tale.

There is however one story that is not a fairy tale:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

How can we not fall in love with this Prince (not Prince Charming but the prince of peace)?

How can we not be happy, having fallen for the one who saved us and has promised us a castle in the sky!

Points To Ponder:

Question: How can you know that your motives are pure for wanting to find God and allow Him to work in your life?

Question: Why do you think we as humans tend to want to fix ourselves and then approach God for relationship?

Question: How close do you think God will let you to get to Him?

God's Highway To Happiness

Mercy From God-Blessed Are The Merciful

Matt 5:7

7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

KJV

A relationship with God is much like taking a journey.

Along the way there are landmarks and points of interest as we travel.

For every person seeking to walk with God, these 8 beatitudes reflect some of those relational landmarks.

Depending upon God, being repentant toward God, being submitted to God, have a passion for God and receiving mercy from God are all part of the process and part of the journey. Sit back in enjoy the ride.

Why should we forgive others?

"They don't act like they are sorry. They've never tried to make amends."

Blessed are the merciful-your happiness is tied to forgiving others and extending mercy.

We choose to forgive them whether they deserve it or not.

We choose to forgive them whether they ask for forgiveness or not.

That's why it's called mercy.

We forgive them because it is to our advantage and for our benefit.

1. Because God has forgiven us.
2. Because resentment works against us.
3. Because we'll need forgiveness in the future.

1. Because God has forgiven us.

If God has been merciful enough to forgive us, shouldn't we be willing to forgive others?

Col 3:13-14

13 You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. NLT

It's always easier to forgive others when we stop and think about how much the Lord has forgiven us.

God will never ask you to forgive someone else more than He has forgiven you!

"Yea, but you don't know what they did to me."

But God does know, and yes, He expects you to forgive them.

Why? Because God forgave you.

Eph 4:31-32

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. NLT

The phrase "Get rid of" or "put away from you" in the KJV literally means in the Greek, "to weigh anchor and sail away."

How do we get rid of bitterness and unforgiveness?

We pull up the anchor, set the sails, leave unforgiveness back on the dock and sail away!

When you weigh anchor and sail away, there is no turning back.

Sailing ships would have to wait for favorable winds to leave the harbor.
A ship could spend weeks waiting for a wind that would sail them out of the harbor.
The same wind that carried you out of the harbor was the same wind that kept you from coming back.
Whatever or whoever was left behind on the dock would have to wait for the next favorable wind.
There was no going back!
Someone needs to leave their offense and bitterness back at the dock!
I'm leaving the dock and a whole new wide world of opportunity lies before me.
We will never have to forgive someone for more than God has forgiven us.

2. Because resentment works against us.

Resentment is unreasonable.

Job 5:2

2 To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do. TEV

Why is holding on to resentment and unforgiveness a foolish thing to do?

Because the only one we are hurting is us.

It's like the phrase I first heard a few years ago. "It's like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die!"

Ecc 7:9

9 Keep your temper under control; it is foolish to harbor a grudge. TEV

Bildad scolded Job,

Job 18:4

4 You are only hurting yourself with your anger.

Will the earth be deserted because you are angry? TEV

Bildad was saying, "You're not hurting anybody but yourself. Do you really think your resentment and anger is going to change anything?"

Think about it.

We're the one who is stewing, stressing and fretting.

We're the one losing sleep and feeling miserable.

The other person?

Why it's not bothering them at all.

They're fit as a fiddle.

They sleep well at night.

In fact, they may not even know that they have hurt us as bad as they did.

Have you EVER heard someone say, "You know, I just feel so much better and lighter holding on to this grudge!"

Resentment is unhealthy.

Resentment and unforgiveness are like a cancer eating us alive, a little more every day.

"That guy is a pain in the neck!"

Have you ever thought that maybe the pain in your neck is caused, not by your offender, but by of your unforgiveness?

Research reveals that resentment leads to the physical consequences such as depression, stress and fatigue.

It's like the old saying, "It's not so much what you're eating, but rather, what's eating you that matters."

3. Because we'll need forgiveness in the future.

Happy are those who choose to be merciful to others so that they might obtain mercy for themselves.

Mark 11:25

25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him and let it drop (leave it, let it go), in order that your Father Who is in heaven may also forgive you your [own] failings and shortcomings and let them drop. AMP

We cannot receive for ourselves what we are unwilling to extend to others.

Matt 6:12

12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have given up resentment against) our debtors. AMP

Can you imagine praying, "Forgive me Lord, but only as much as I am willing to forgive others."
Yea, but my sins against God aren't near as bad as what he/she did to me. You don't even want to go there.
Our sin cost an innocent man his life! (Jesus)

Mat. 18 contains the story of the man forgiven a debt of 10,000 talents or literally 10s of millions of dollars.
At that time it would take a man working 20 years to earn one talent of silver. (75 pounds of silver)
This man would have to work 200,000 years to pay the king back.
He was NEVER going to work off his debt to the king. It was an impossible amount to repay.
Yet this same man wouldn't forgive a neighbor a debt of about \$20 and even sent him to prison over it.
The man was unwilling to grant to others what had been granted to him.
The king heard, the man was brought back before the king, his debt was reinstated and the man was put behind bars for the rest of his life.

God is asking us to forgive our fellow human beings who have done nothing to us as compared to our crimes against God.
God has had to forgive us of a lifetime of attitude, evil desires, inexcusable offenses and wretched crimes.
When baptized in Jesus' name, we have been given more than a reprieve. We have been forgiven a debt we could never repay.
But somebody DID had to pay.
Just like the king had to eat a \$20 million dollar loss when he forgave his servant, so Jesus had to pay for our sins when he chose to forgive us.
Our debt was paid at Calvary. Our debt cost Jesus his life!
How do you fix it when you caused the death of an innocent man? You don't. You can't!
You get that little tidbit in your head and heart and you will find sufficient grace and mercy to forgive.

How do we forgive others?

1. Face the past with facts.

You can't get over a hurt until you admit that it hurt!

We can ignore our feelings by pushing them to the side and moving on.
We can say, "It's no big deal. He didn't mean to say what he said."
We can say, "It's OK. She really didn't mean to do what she did."

The journey to healing begins with admitting that you got hurt and that it is a big deal.
Those people really did hurt you. They did mean to do what they did to you. It wasn't an accident. Don't explain it away or dismiss it. Don't cover for them. Facts are facts. You got hurt.

Admitting it then gives you the chance to forgive them.
Why is it that we don't want to admit that the people we love and care for the most have hurt us?
Did you know that it is possible to hate the person you love?
You might think. That's impossible. How can I hate someone and love them at the same time?
That's because hate is not the opposite of love.
Indifference is the opposite of love.
You might care less what the crowd thinks of you, but you can't be indifferent to the people you love.
Their barbs, their words and their attacks hurt you MOST because you love and care for them most.
You can hate that they have such a hold over you.
You hate the way they can make you feel.
You can hate the situation they have put you in.
You can hate the fact that it's their approval and attention you need so desperately.
People you love can hurt you and disappoint you in ways that strangers and acquaintances could never touch you.

Ps 55:12-13

12 If it were an enemy making fun of me, I could endure it; if it were an opponent boasting over me, I could hide myself from him. 13 But it is you, my companion, my colleague and close friend. TEV

2. Face the present with forgiveness.

When do I forgive my offender? Forgive them now. Don't wait for them to ask for forgiveness. Forgive them for your sake, not their sake.

How often do I have to forgive them? As many times as necessary. Usually, over and over again.

Matt 18:21-22

21 Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" 22 "No!" Jesus replied, "seventy times seven! NLT

Feelings of resentment have a way of creeping back up into our lives.

Old wounds can be reopened so easily and unintentionally.

You may have to forgive a person a hundred times for an offense before you have completely released them from their hurt against you.

How will I know when I have truly forgiven them?

1. When you think about him or her and it doesn't hurt anymore.
2. When you find yourself praying for their soul, asking God to forgive them and bless them.

You may not forget the offense but yet now the pain is gone.

Who said you have to forget in order to forgive?

You may remember but the pain is gone when you think about it. That is forgiveness.

3. Face the future with peace of mind.

Somewhere in the process it is normal for us to think that our offender might be somehow getting away with something.

He or she not having to face you and admit their wrong and seek your forgiveness seems to be letting them off the hook.

Rom 14:10-12

All of us will stand before God to be judged by him. 11 For the scripture says, "As surely as I am the living God, says the Lord, everyone will kneel before me, and everyone will confess that I am God." 12 Every one of us, then, will have to give an account of himself to God. TEV

God will one day settle the score. No one gets away with anything. Your offender will one day have to give an account to God for their behavior, decisions and offenses. Don't try to play God. Only God is qualified to judge. Leave your offender in the hands of God.

Col 3:15

15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. NLT

Points To Ponder:

Question: Why is forgiving someone a cooperative effort between us and God?

Question: Why do you think we usually have to go through the process of forgiving someone over and over again?

Question: Why would we wish we could pay someone back for having hurt us rather than let God take care of the problem?

God's Highway To Happiness

Honesty With God-Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

Matt 5:8

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

There are more life-changing principles packed into the Sermon On The Mount than any other writings on planet.

Depending **on** God, repenting **to** God, hungering **for** God, submitting **to** God, receiving mercy **from** God and being honest **with** God are all essential elements in a vibrant relationship with God.

Happiness is the inevitable result applying these principles in your own life.

Matt 5:8

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. KJV

To be pure in heart means to be honest with God about your desires, motives and intentions.

John 5:5-6

*5 There was a certain man there who had suffered with a deep-seated and lingering disorder for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus noticed him lying there [helpless], knowing that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, **Do you want to become well?** [Are you really in earnest about getting well?] AMP*

"What kind of question is that?" "How can you ask me that?"

"You see me here, lying on this cot, just like I've been doing every day now for years!"

"I've been coming here for a long time, trying to beat everybody else to the water when it's troubled in order to secure my healing."

"I've tried as hard as anyone else here and yet have absolutely nothing to show for it."

Why would Jesus ask this man a question like that?

Jesus always seemed unusually compassionate and sensitive toward the sick, helpless and homeless.

Jesus never catered to the intellectuals, the politicians, the powerful or the wealthy.

In fact, Jesus was typically despised and disregarded by that crowd.

Jesus rather appealed to harlots and hobos; sinners and sailors, the undernourished and underprivileged.

And yet right there in front of this man's friends, Jesus piped up and asked him a question that penetrated to the man's core.

Do we REALLY want to be healed?

Jesus knew something this stranger didn't think Jesus could possibly know.

Jesus knew WHY this man was suffering from his sickness.

This man's sinful lifestyle had put him in his present condition and position.

He had lived to bitterly regret his past choices and was now paying for it by way of his present condition.

How do we know that?

Because after Jesus healed the man and met him later on in the temple, he warned the man about it.

John 5:14

14 Afterward, when Jesus found him in the temple, He said to him, See, you are well! Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. AMP

Jesus' statement made it clear that this man's past 38 years of disability had been the result of his sins.

Jesus' penetrating question actually contained two critical principles that we need to discuss.

1. We must be honest about our present motives.

Jesus asked the question, "Do you want to be healed" for a good reason.
After all these years, the man still wasn't cured.

What would you have said if you were that man and Jesus asked you if you wanted to be healed after 38 years of disability and disadvantage? I think I would have shouted, "YES!!!!"
But instead, this man pulled out his long memorized list of reasons why he had not been healed by the troubled waters of the pool.

Maybe Jesus was implying that this man over the years had not only lost his hope but also his desire to be healed.
Maybe Jesus was hinting at the man's unresolved sense of guilt and regret over past sins and now felt that he did not deserve anything better than his present permanent condition.
Maybe the man had grown accustomed to his handicap and had actually gained sympathy and financial support from others.
The big question is, "How bad do I want to be fixed?"
The next question we should ask is, "Why do I want it?"

God has a way of cutting through the chase and getting to what really matters.

Some people say, "I want God in my life."
Yet do I ever consider the implications of the changes that occur when God enters my life?
Do I really want to be healed?
Am I ready for true change?
To be healed of my sinful condition also means a radical shift in my lifestyle and habits.
To be healed means a change from what I want to what God wants.

Purity in heart says, "I'm giving God permission to change my habits, my preferences and my lifestyle."

The Lord asks us, "If I forgive you, will you go sin again?"
"If I heal you, you will go get sick again?"

This man was focused on a method for healing-getting to the pool when the water was troubled.
He should have been focused on the man-Jesus Christ.
Jesus wanted the man to shift his attention from the question of HOW to be healed to the question of WHO is going to going to do the healing.

We tend to want to tell God HOW he can cure us.
We want to write the rules of engagement between us and God in order to secure our cure.
We want to bargain with God as to just how much it will cost us-our will versus God's will.
We want to argue with God about just how much change is necessary to secure a cure.

We know all about methods-books, tapes, CD's, seminars, self-help groups, pills, medications, therapies, rehab, etc.
What we don't need is another method.
What we do need is the MAN-Jesus Christ.
What we do need is a close encounter of the God kind!
What we do need is a cessation of hostilities. The war is over.
What we really need is an unconditional surrender to God.

We need to consider why we want to be spiritually healed.
Are we ready for true change. . . . or are we just looking for a quick fix?
We must be honest about our present motives.

2. We must be responsible for our past choices.

Jesus asked, "Do you want to be healed?"
Instead of answering Jesus' question about the present, the man blamed his failures on the past.

John 5:7

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. KJV

“Sir, I don’t have anyone. . . .If only someone cared enough.”

“To put me in the pool. . . .If only someone would help me.”

“When the water is stirred. . . .If only I had another chance.”

“Someone else always get there first. . . .If only I were as strong as others.”

Purity in heart means that we must be honest with God about our spiritual condition and its causes.

We can blame our enemies.

We can blame our friends and family.

We can blame the establishment.

We can blame the circumstances.

We can even blame God.

Yet when we move from BLAMING to BELIEVING, that is when Jesus shows up with the solution.

“Do you really want your spiritual healing?”

“Do you really want out?”

Jesus told the man what to do.

“You make the effort and I will do the rest!”

“Pick up your bed and walk.”

The man immediately stood up, rolled up his mat and walked out!

Jesus never asks us to do something we are incapable of doing.

Sir, God CAN do what you can’t do.

But God WON’T do what you can do.

We have to face our sin.

We have to confess our past.

We have to own up to our responsibility.

Jesus is asking us, “How bad do you REALLY want it?”

“If I give it to you, what are you going to do with it?”

Happiness comes to us when we come to God with a pure heart and clean motives.

Ps 51:10

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me. AMP

Purity of heart says, “Lord I don’t know how, but if you can heal me of my sinful life, I’m willing to trust you and believe that you can.”

Purity of heart says, ‘Lord I admit that I am hopelessly bound by my carnal desires and fleshly tendencies.’

Purity of heart says, “God, I give you permission to change me into who and what you want me to be.”

When Jesus asked the man if wanted to be healed, the man assumed that his deliverance was tied to the pool of Bethesda.

His faith required him to get to the troubled waters first.

The problem was that his condition prevented his cure.

Without being helped, others always arrived at the pool first.

The man obviously believed the legend that when an angel came and stirred up the pool of water, the first person in was healed.

The man didn’t need quicker reflexes, angelic intervention or the help of a man.

What he did need was a word from **the** man-Jesus Christ.

Someone needs to hear this:

We don’t need more rehabilitation, a different psychiatrist or a new medication.

We don’t need a self-help book or a change of scenery.

What we need is for Jesus to show up!

What we need is the transforming power of the Holy Ghost in our life.

While the portico was stacked with sick people, Jesus only healed THAT man at the pool. Jesus saw the man's honest desire for change and showed up right there on the spot.

The man got up, picked up his bed and walked.

The first place this man headed for was the temple.

This act revealed where the man's heart was and why Jesus probably sought him out and healed him.

He had been excommunicated from the temple ever since his disorder had appeared 38 years ago.

He exhibited a pure heart by going straight to the temple to offer sacrifices and perform the purification rites required by the law.

Jesus met him at the temple and that is where Jesus usually meets us-at the house of God.

People with a pure heart don't have to be challenged, chastised or chased when it comes to being in the house of God and the presence of God.

The pool of Bethesda means "house of mercy."

This man discovered that mercy was not found in a place but rather in a person, the person of Jesus Christ.

Happiness is found in obeying and following Jesus Christ for the right reasons.

Points To Ponder:

Question: Do we really want to be delivered, healed or set free?

A person has to be sick enough of sin in order to honestly wish for freedom from sin.

Question: Why do we really want to be freed, delivered or healed?

Some wish to be freed from the consequences of sin and yet still want the freedom to continue in sin.

You can't have one without the other.

Question: Why is accepting responsibility for our poor choices and refraining from blaming others a necessary part of the healing process?

Question: Why would joining a local church be so crucial to our spiritual healing?

God's Highway To Happiness

Restitution To Others-Blessed Are The Peacemakers

Matt 5:9

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Sooner or later, we are going to be in the position of trying to make peace with someone. We're human!

Written Apology Note:

"I would like to apologize to anyone I have NOT offended. Please be patient. I will get to you shortly!"

To forgive others for their offenses and trespasses releases us from the poison of bitterness, resentment and grudges.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

But there is the other side of the coin.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

"Peacemaker" here means to work for peace. It means to pacify or to make peace.

There is a quality of serenity about us when we make amends with those we have wounded in the past.

We've discussed extending forgiveness to others. What about **seeking** forgiveness from others?

Or to phrase it better, making amends to others for **our** offenses.

No doubt, we've all been deeply hurt and wounded at times.

Not only have people hurt us, but undoubtedly, we have hurt others.

That is what this beatitude is all about.

Part of our Christian maturity and happiness is found in making amends with those we have wounded.

Note left on a car:

"Sorry, I hit your car! There is only a scratch on the left back panel. But because you looked rich, I'm not leaving my number!

Sorry!"

Two Questions:

Why should we need to make amends with those we've hurt?

Matt 5:23-25

23 "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and suddenly remember that a friend has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there beside the altar and go and apologize and be reconciled to him, and then come and offer your sacrifice to God. TLB

The closer people are to you, the more they can hurt you. But that road runs both ways. The closer you are to people, the more YOU can hurt them.

Strained or severed relationships do cause a high percentage of self-inflicted habits and addictions.

People use all kinds of self-defeating methods to dull the pain, cover the guilt or try and forget their offenses.

Guilt over having wronged someone does not simply go away or even necessarily fade with time.

Joseph's brothers had never forgotten the wrong they had committed against him years before.

They still held a silent guilt over their mistreatment and betrayal of their brother Joseph.

Even though the incident took place 20 years before, their guilt and self-condemnation still haunted them.

In a moment of jealousy these brothers had maliciously sold their younger brother into foreign slavery.

Then they lied to their father and told him that Joseph had been torn to pieces by some wild animal.

They thought they had finally gotten rid of their little pest of a brother.
Yet they found out that Joseph was still with them in their thoughts and activities.
They still couldn't get rid of him.
They couldn't get Joseph off their mind.

How do we know this?

Years later, they found themselves unknowingly standing in front of Joseph, now a grown man, who happened to be the prime minister of Egypt.

Here they were begging Joseph for wheat during a famine and didn't have a clue that he was their brother.

Joseph imprisoned one of them in order to ensure that they would come back with their younger brother Benjamin who was Joseph's full blood brother.

Gen 42:19-21

Only one of you will remain in the prison. The rest of you may go on home with grain for your families. 20 But bring your youngest brother back to me. In this way, I will know whether or not you are telling me the truth. If you are, I will spare you." To this they agreed. 21 Speaking among themselves, they said, "This has all happened because of what we did to Joseph long ago. We saw his terror and anguish and heard his pleadings, but we wouldn't listen. That's why this trouble has come upon us." NLT

Did you know that our relationship with others affects our relationship with God?

Matt 5:23-24

23 "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, 24 leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. NLT

Making amends means that you take reasonable steps to restore peace between you and someone you have wronged.

How do we make amends?

1. Make a list of those you've wronged and what you did to them.

Have I broken a promise I made to someone?

Do I owe money to someone I promised to pay back?

Have I been too controlling or possessive of someone?

Have I been verbally or physically abusive to someone?

Have I been unfaithful, insensitive or unfair to someone?

Have I lied to someone?

2. Put yourself in their place and consider how you would want someone to make amends to you.

Be sincere.

Note to his wife:

"I'm sorry I forgot our 3 month anniversary that **YOU** didn't remind me about."

There is a difference between making an apology and making amends.

The first is simply saying, "I'm sorry."

By admitting and confessing the damage you've caused the other person, **YOU** usually feel better mentally and spiritually.

It always feels better when you "get something off your chest."

However for the offended, a mere apology can be like putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound!

Making amends, however, is showing the other person that you recognize that talk is cheap and making amends is actually taking steps to restore (as much as possible) what has been damaged or lost.

In the Old Testament, when you stole from someone, you were required to pay back what was stolen plus another 1/5 or 20%.

Why would the law require that?

Because by paying back more than was stolen, you were signaling to the offended person that were truly sorry for the theft

The point is to fix, repay or repair the damage that you have caused the other person if possible and reasonable.

3. Wait for the right time.

Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

You shouldn't approach someone and suddenly bring up such a serious subject if the other party is busy, preoccupied or rushed.

Eccl 8:6

6 There is a right time and a right way to do everything, TEV

Make sure that the time is convenient for them, not for you!

Seek a private moment and an appropriate time.

4. Approach with humility.

Note left on a refrigerator door:

"I'm sorry we fought. I hate it when **YOU'RE** wrong!"

Sincerely state what you did wrong. Don't make any excuses. Don't get into any extended explanations. Just admit to your part of the problem and assume responsibility. The other person may have been partly responsible too. You're not there to fix them. You are simply trying to right a wrong on your part.

5. Expect nothing in return.

Don't expect anything from the person you are making amends to.

If the other person is not ready to accept your sincere apology, it really doesn't matter anyway.

This is not about them, but it's about you doing what you can do.

6. Decide if contact is appropriate.

There are some situations in which contacting the other person to make amends would be unwise.

If contacting them would cause embarrassment or trouble for them, then it would be inappropriate for you to contact them.

Example:

An old girlfriend/boyfriend who has moved on with his or her life.

Ex husband or ex wife who has remarried.

The more serious the offense, the less likely you should contact them.

If making direct amends is not possible, make your amends indirectly.

You may not be able to restore that relationship that has been lost.

Find someone or some organization and help them in the same manner you would have wanted to help to restore the person you have harmed.

7. Offer restitution.

Make restitution wherever possible. If you've borrowed money, pay it back, even if it takes years to repay.

If you've tarnished a reputation, restore it. If you've wounded someone with words, confess it and seek forgiveness.

After hearing a sermon on Psalm 52 about lies and deceit, a man wrote the IRS, "I can't sleep knowing that I have cheated on my income taxes. Enclosed is a check for \$150. If I still can't sleep, I'll send the rest."

Zachaeus the tax collector

Luke 19:8

8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. KJV

Zacchaeus' life was changed by his encounter with Jesus Christ.

While his relationship with Jesus was restored, that still did not fix his strained relationship with others whom he had extorted and cheated.

For them, he decided to repay everyone he had ever cheated fourfold.

In certain situations, the OT law required a man pay back twice what was stolen.

Zacchaeus gave back more than required to according to the law.

Here was an Old Testament scrooge who had suddenly been transformed.
He was freed from his guilty conscience by repaying what he had extorted from others, yet went above and beyond the law in repayment.
Why? Because he wanted to express his sincerity and repentance.

Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus created an immediate shift in his priorities.
Zacchaeus climbed up that tree as a greedy money-hungry cheat.
Zacchaeus came down out of that tree a different man.

Restitution is going back and making things right for the things you took or the people you hurt.
It is "restoring" to the original owner what is rightfully theirs – their property, respect or reputation.
It is also going back and making things right for the hurtful things you've said or done.
Restitution is asking forgiveness for those harsh words, that hair trigger temper or that out of control tongue.
Restitution is seeking forgiveness from a family member you've wounded.
A trust you severed with someone you care about.
Maybe it was divulging sensitive information that was told to you in confidence.
Restitution can be life changing because it forces us to swallow our pride and exhibit humility.
Restitution also puts us back on track with our relationship with God.

While there are just some things that can't be fixed or restored, don't underestimate the power of a sincere apology to repair a relationship.
Your happiness and peace of mind are dependent upon it!
Peacemakers are the children of God and are most like their father in heaven who at all costs seek to restore and repair relationships, no matter who is at fault.

Let's say you had a next door neighbor who came asking to borrow your lawn mower.
You loan it to him, he says "Thanks," and off he goes to mow.
He brings it back to you after a few days, and tells you that the mower is broken and he can't fix it.
Your neighbor shrugs and says, "I'm so sorry."
Then he leaves you with your broken lawn mower.
What if he were to ask you to borrow your lawn mower again?
Would you feel good about loaning it to him again? I wouldn't.

But what if the same neighbor borrowed the lawn mower, broke it, brought it back and told you about breaking the mower, but before you could say anything, he told you that he had taken it to the repair shop and had gotten it fixed along with fixing the grass catcher that had stopped working months ago.
He tells you again, "Thanks for letting me borrow the mower" and leaves you with your mower in better shape than he borrowed it.
What if he wanted to borrow your lawn mower again? Would you even hesitate to let him? I wouldn't.

We make restitution (by giving back MORE than what we took) in order to show that we are truly sorry and can be trusted again.
If more than an apology could help the situation the extra effort will be noticed.

Not everything can be fixed.
We can't always go back and right every wrong and repair every relationship.
Jesus told the woman caught in the very act of adultery, "Go and sin no more," not go back and try to fix every past sin.
Not everyone wants to forgive offenders or restore relationships.
Do what you can with sincerity and humility. Leave the rest to God and them.

Points To Ponder:

Question: What usually keeps us from seeking forgiveness from others?

Question: Why do you think personal guilt is so destructive?

Question: Why is humility so important in seeking forgiveness from another person?

God's Highway To Happiness

Persecution From Others-Blessed Are The Persecuted

Matt 5:11-12

*11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. KJV*

Jesus goes on to explain in this passage that Christians are to be salt and light in this world. Salt changes the taste of everything it touches and everywhere light is introduced, darkness flees.

Both salt and light radically change the environment wherever they are introduced. Jesus was saying, everywhere a true Christian goes, he or she should radically change the atmosphere and environment. Every room a Spirit-filled Christian enters, the Holy Spirit just entered that room with them. People can sense and feel the change.

Yet not everyone welcomes the presence of God. Because of the fact that just our presence and speech can be so convicting to seekers and unbelievers, we will not always receive parades and welcoming committees.

Here in America, where free speech is still somewhat respected, we know very little about true persecution. Whatever you want to say about the United States, we have been blessed to live here. However, overseas the persecution of Christians happens on a far more serious level. According to one source, over 45 million Christians have been martyred over the last 100 years.

Even here in America persecution is rising:

A teacher in New Jersey was suspended for giving a Bible to a student.
A football coach in Washington was placed on leave for saying a prayer on the field at the end of a game.
A fire chief in Atlanta was fired for publishing a book defending Christian teachings.
A Marine was court-marshaled for pasting a Bible verse above her desk.
Anti-Christian activists hurl insults at Americans who hold traditional beliefs about marriage and accuse anti-abortion Christians of waging "war on women."

Christians are increasingly being forced to choose between acting out their faith or obeying the law.
A Catholic Charities organization in Illinois shut down their adoption services rather than place children with same-sex couples (as the state required).
A Christian counselor was penalized for refusing to advise gay couples.
A court clerk in New York was told to issue same-sex marriage licenses, despite their religious objections.
A wedding photographer was sued for refusing to shoot a same-sex wedding.

In each case, these Christians were not attempting to impose their religious views on others. They simply didn't want to be forced to support for something they felt was biblically wrong.

2 Tim 3:12-13

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. KJV

We are now living in a day when the same people who shout the loudest for tolerance and acceptance are the same ones who are so intolerant of Christians just because we don't happen to agree with them! Regardless, we are commissioned to share our faith and live out our lives in a biblical manner.

While you may want to hide, God wants you to share.

But share what? Our superiority? Our righteousness? Our sinlessness?

God loves to take ordinary people; people with hurts, hang-ups, habits and use them to encourage others.

People are not helped by observing us in our strengths.

People are helped and encouraged when they see us being honest about our weaknesses.

When we testify about our strengths, others say or think, "I could never be that good."

Or, "my faith is not as strong as theirs."

Yet when we share with others about our weaknesses and how God helped us through it, then people can begin to relate to our testimony.

We're not perfect, just forgiven!

Martha didn't want Jesus to open up Lazarus' tomb because "by now (4 days) he stinketh!"

Aren't you glad that Jesus didn't allow the stink to keep him from raising Lazarus?

If the truth were known, there usually is some stink that comes with our miracle.

When I look at you, I see the miracle. When you look at me, you see the miracle.

Seldom do we smell the stench.

We tend to see the best in each other.

At church, we're on our best behavior.

Here at church, we tend to act as if things can't get any better.

Yet behind the forced smiles and shallow shouts we don't always have it together.

We leave our houses like Clark Kent and put on our Superman suits on the way to church.

We jump out of our cars, fly into the building, stamp out evil and change back into Clark Kent when we get home.

Sincere seekers and new believers say, "Wow." I wish I could be a superman!"

Come on now. We need to get off our high horse.

The truth is, We left the house in a huff.

On our way out the door, we yelled at the spouse, snipped at the kids, kicked the dog and spit at the cat.

Then we come flying through the door and greet the usher with "Hallelujah."

The way some Christians paint it, they never get mad, they never get sad, they never speak out of turn, they never get depressed, they never want to quit and they never have doubts.

They leave the impression that God even pays their mortgage and car payment each month.

Come on now. That's not your testimony! That's a tall tale!

Why don't you tell them the truth.

Tell them how you were ready to walk out of your marriage until the Lord got a hold of you.

Tell them how you almost went crazy until you turned it over to the Lord.

Tell them that you still get mad, speak out of turn, overreact, and have bad hair days.

Tell them that you still struggle with low self-esteem, you have days that you want to quit and even times you don't feel saved.

What impresses people with our testimony is when we tell them that in spite of life's pain and disappointments, God still loves an accepts us.

Why does God allow our pain?

1. God allows pain to prove our free will.

One of the ways we know that man was created in the image of God is that we have a free will.

You can love God or reject God-it's your choice.
You can choose right or you can choose wrong-it's your call.
You can pick heaven over hell, life over death, or the other way around. God has given you that right.

You can't honestly say you love someone until you have been given the choice not to love them.
Love without choice is nothing more than obligation.
God wants people to love Him and serve Him out of love and devotion, not obligation and force.

Deut 11:26-29

26 "Today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse — 27 a blessing, if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; 28 but a curse, if you disobey these commands and turn away to worship other gods that you have never worshiped before. TEV

This wonderful experience, called free will, also carries great responsibility.
Free will is a great blessing.
It can also be a great burden.
Poor choices bring painful consequences.
If we choose to consume alcohol and take drugs, we can easily get addicted. That's our choice and our fault.
If we choose to be promiscuous, there are penalties to pay for that lifestyle.
If we choose personal pride over a relationship with God, the consequences are unavoidable.
God doesn't send people to hell. It is a matter of their choice, not God's lack of love.

Since God gives us a free will and choice, it also means that God gives everyone else a free will too.
Others can, out of their own free will and choice, hurt you, mishandle or mistreat you.
God could have prevented YOUR hurt by taking away THEIR free will, but that would also mean God would have to take away your free will also.
Thus pain is part of the package that comes with the free will gift.

2. God allows pain to get our attention.

Pain is not the problem.
Pain is merely the symptom of something deeper and bigger at work.
Like putting your hand on a hot stove, pain alerts you to the fact that your hand is in danger of permanent damage unless you move it . . . like right now!
Personal pain is God's wake up call for change.

Your pain may be the result of betrayal by a loved one, abandoned by a parent when you were young, mental, physical or verbal abuse, low self-esteem, loss of a loved one, physical impairment, etc.
You may be suffering the repercussions of past poor choices.

Not all pain is bad though.
God is in the business of using personal pain to bring us back to Him.

2 Cor 7:8-10

8 I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was sorry for a time, for I know that it was painful to you for a little while. 9 Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to have remorse and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. 10 For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. NLT

3. God allows pain to teach us dependence upon Him.

The moment our pain becomes so great we think we can't stand it anymore can also be the moment when we turn it all over to the Lord.
Our worst experiences have a way of getting our attention back on what should be most important to us.

Only God knows how many people have turned to Him out of pain so great they could no longer bear it. If pain is what it takes to save us from our folly, I say, "God, let whatever happen happen. . . . just don't let me go to hell."
2 Cor 1:8-10

8 We don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. 9 We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally — not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead! 10 And he did it, rescued us from certain doom.

THE MESSAGE:

When everything we love has been snatched from us, it is then that we see God who was there all along. We didn't see him before because of all our other options and choices. God was simply lost in the shuffle.

Pain teaches us to look to the Lord for help, comfort, and direction.

Ps 119:71

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

KJV

4. God allows pain to prepare us for ministry.

Admittedly, pain makes us humble, sympathetic, and sensitive to the needs and struggles of others. Pain prepares us to serve.

Why does God comfort us so much, when we turn to Him in our hour of pain and struggle?

So that we might be sympathetic toward others who have suffered much like we have.

2 Cor 1:4

4 He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

NLT

When we are hurting we naturally want someone who can understand us and sympathize with us.

This is why we prefer someone who has been through what we are going through.

Pain, however distasteful, puts us in the position to sympathize with others who are like us.

Happiness is found in serving and helping others.

This is why the pain of persecution, rejection, and chiding can inevitably cause us great joy.

God is able to salvage our hurt and reprocess it into a victory by having us help others who are going through what we've been through.

Always be ready to answer those who question your checkered past and how you got through it.

1 Peter 3:15

Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.

from THE MESSAGE:

How did you get over your addiction?

How did you recover from your divorce?

How did you find your way back to God?

How did you learn to forgive?

When did you conquer your temper?

The day you were born again was the day you were given a mission.

Your mission is the great commission.

"To seek and to save that that was lost."

You became a part of God's plan for reaching out to hurting people.

There are only two things you CAN'T do in heaven.

You can't sin and you can't share the gospel with lost people.

You go figure why the Lord didn't snatch you out of here the moment you were saved.

In fact, God is willing to risk you backsliding for the chance you might save others.

There is a whole world out there that desperately needs to know that there is peace on the other side of their pain.

There's a good reason you're still here. You have a story to tell!

As believers, it is our responsibility to share in the pain and problems of others.

It isn't always easy to share our own painful past and conversion, but there is a happiness that comes with doing exactly that.

Acts 20:24

24 But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus — the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.

NLT

People need to hear your story.

Every time you tell your story, you are restoring yourself.

While dispensing hope to them, you are releasing healing to you.

Every time you share your story, you get that much stronger.

There really is power in your testimony!

When we begin to understand that God uses our weaknesses and hurts to help others; that is when life takes on new meaning and purpose.

In fact, you know you are on the highway to happiness when your thoughts turn from **your** hurts to "How can I help others with similar weaknesses?"

You are on the road to recovery and restoration when you start saying and thinking, "How can I help someone else like me?"

Persecution? Misunderstanding? Rejection? It goes with the territory. Tell your story anyway! Somebody will receive it!

Jesus said to rejoice and be exceedingly glad! Greek for "exceedingly glad" means "jump for joy."

Jump for joy whether they receive your testimony or don't.

Your story still deserves to be told!

Points to Ponder:

Question: What has God allowed in your life that initially brought you pain or confusion? How did you deal with it?

Question: What is it about your story that God would want you to tell others?

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