

It's something everyone wants, yet so few seem to ever find it. Happiness- where to find it? What is the key? American Poet Amy Lowell has written:

Happiness: We rarely feel it.  
I would buy it, beg it, steal it,  
Pay in coins of dripping blood  
For this one transcendent good.

And so we search for it in many things. Perhaps happiness is to be found in pleasure. Pleasure makes me feel happy. A rush of endorphins is released from the hypothalamus. They latch onto receptors in your nervous system, and everything feels real good. But it lasts only a moment. In a flash it is over. Nothing we try will make it last. Sex won't do it. Accomplishment won't work. My favorite foods are fun to eat, but they just make me fat, and then there goes the pleasure. Drugs give such an ecstatic high, but they steal everything why you aren't looking. Pleasure is fleeting. Enjoy it while it lasts because it never does.

Maybe happiness can be found in wealth. Nothing makes you feel good like a wad of cash. If I was just "set for life," then I could really be happy. I could buy what I want, do what I want, go where I want, whenever I want. But if this were true, wouldn't Beverly Hills be the happiest place on earth. No, the only things that Beverly Hills leads in is psychiatrists and divorce.

If not pleasure or wealth, then maybe happiness is in fame. The applause of people could give my life meaning. If I could just have a million followers, if it was my picture on the back of the bestseller, if it was my song people hummed as they drove in their car, then my life would be fulfilled. Or would it? The applause always fades. Cheers turn into jeers. Today's bestseller or number 1 hit is tomorrow's yard sale fodder.

But what if I had power? Influence could be the key to happiness. Imagine people listening to my every word. My thoughts carry weight with people. Trends, fads and fashion all swaying based on what I do. Stock markets rising and falling based on what I buy or sell. Everyone wants my opinion. Everyone asks, "What does Dan have to say?"

Happiness- it's all based on happenings beyond my control. Should my fulfillment in life be dependent on things I can do very little about? Is happiness just a mirage in the desert of life, or are we missing something here?

In the opening verses of Matthew 5, we see that God offers us something more. Something beyond happiness. Something better. God promises us not mere happiness, but blessing. Jesus tells us that there are 8 steps on the path to blessing. For hundreds of years Christians have called these 8 proclamations of blessing simply the beatitudes which simply means a state of blessedness.

The word used for blessing here means to be "fully satisfied." Jesus isn't just describing how these people feel. He is describing what God does for them. These aren't just favorable

circumstances, but divine favor. Jesus isn't just promising a fleeting sensation, but He is showing the way to lasting joy. Max Lucado calls this “sacred delight”

This is what our Savior offers. And this “sacred delight” is offered to a sorry group of losers that no one would ever suspect. “Happiness is promised to them?” No, not happiness. Blessing. And this blessing is discovered in the most unlikely of places. “They're blessed, how?”

Before we get into the beatitudes let me briefly set the scene for you. Jesus has been traveling throughout the northern regions of Israel teaching and performing miracles. Word about him has continued to spread. The crowds swell as more and more people come to see this remarkable rabbi that they have heard so much about. On one of these occasions Jesus sees an opportunity to teach the people, so he finds a high point where he can oversee the people, and his voice will carry to the crowds. Notice in verse 1 it says that Jesus sat down. In those days, it was common for the audience to stand, and the preacher to sit down. So why don't we try that. I'll sit down right here, and you all stand up. And you laugh. It's right here in the Bible.

The beatitudes open the most famous of all of Jesus' teachings. It is simply known as the Sermon on the Mount. It is the lengthiest of all of Jesus' teachings filling Matthew 5, 6, and 7. And yet the whole thing can be read comfortably in less than fifteen minutes.

In these three chapters Jesus sets forth a bold, daring vision for a new way to be human. It is a charter for what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. This isn't merely about what Jesus wants us to do. It's about who he wants us to be. Jesus goes to the very core of our being—our influence, our attitude, our motivation, our ambition, and our commitment. But the place he begins is in our character.

Now as we go through the beatitudes there are a couple of things we need to understand. First of all, Jesus is not blessing different groups of people. Over here you have the poor in spirit. Over here you have the meek, and over there are the merciful. No, rather these are the defining qualities of anyone who would follow Jesus. These are qualities that should describe each one of us.

Secondly, these are not eight separate paths to blessing, as if you can find God's blessing by being poor in spirit, or by hungering and thirsting for righteousness, or by being a peacemaker. These are not various routes to the same thing. These are not multiple choice. Rather, these are all mile markers on the same road to blessing. They are interrelated and interconnected. Each one opens the door to the next, and builds on the one before.

### **Blessed are the Poor in Spirit**

The path to divine blessing begins in the unlikeliest of places. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*” Poor and blessing just don't seem to belong together in the same sentence. The word Jesus uses for poor here means to shrink, cringe or cower. This word was commonly used in Jesus'

day to refer to beggars. This is not someone just struggling to make ends meet. This is the utterly destitute. Someone who has absolutely nothing.

This isn't an economic statement. Jesus isn't talking about personal finances, fiscal policy or Wall Street. This is an audit of our spiritual condition. "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" **Jesus is talking about spiritual poverty.** Someone who is poor in spirit is someone who knows that they have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. The spiritually poor person stands before God and realizes they have nothing, and can do nothing to earn God's blessing.

And Jesus says that the person who recognizes this sorry state of affairs is blessed. What? Jesus you can't be serious. Maybe you've been walking out in the hot sun a little too long. How can such a person be blessed? Because the moment we realize that there's nothing we can do to fix the problem ourselves, we can begin to look to someone who can. When we finally throw ourselves on the grace of God, then we are truly blessed.

The NLT says it this way, "*God blesses those who realize their need for him.*" Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way in *The Message*, "*You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.*"

Augustus Toplady captured poor in spirit perfectly in his great hymn *Rock of Ages*. The third verse of this classic declares:

Nothing in my hand I bring.  
Simply to the cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly:  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.  
Helpless look to Thee for grace;

This truth flies in the face of our culture which says you're okay on your own. Just look inside. You can rely on your own inner strength. Look to the truth and light within you. The world's meattitudes would begin with, "Happy are the self-assured who feel good about themselves, for theirs is this world."

But Jesus says, "No, it is the spiritually impoverished who are truly blessed." It is to such people, and only to such people that Jesus promises the Kingdom of Heaven. The blessing of salvation is a gift that is given for free. It's wholly undeserved, and it can only be received with the dependent humility of a little child. Fullness begins with an admission of spiritual emptiness.

Have you realized your emptiness before God? Or are you still trying to do it on your own? Have you openly and fully confessed to God, "Lord, I am spiritually bankrupt. I can do nothing without you"? The path to blessing begins here. The door to sacred delight is opened by declaring our spiritual bankruptcy before God. Blessed are the poor in spirit

## Blessed are Those who Mourn

The second step on the road of blessing seems more paradoxical than the first. "God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Almost as if He is saying, "Happy are the unhappy." How can that be? How can mourning and blessing go together?

The first beatitude is being poor in spirit- to realize we have nothing before God. But once we realize this, what do we do about it? Mourning springs naturally from being poor in spirit. Realizing our spiritual poverty should cause us to be filled with sorrow, to be broken. This isn't just feeling sorry for ourselves, or bemoaning our fate. It is an intense, deep, heartfelt experience of brokenness. Our sinfulness troubles us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It is one thing to be spiritually bankrupt and acknowledge it; it is another thing entirely to grieve, and mourn, and be broken by it.

There are plenty of people who know they are sinners, but they don't care or do anything about it. To mourn is to be filled with a godly sorrow that grieves over the state of our relationship with God.

King David shows perfectly what it is to mourn in Ps 51:1-7 as he broken over his sin with Bathsheba:

*Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion.  
blot out my transgressions.  
2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you are proved right when you speak  
and justified when you judge.  
5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;  
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.  
7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. NIV*

We are far too comfortable with sin. We make excuses for sin. We tolerate sin. We define it as something else. We even celebrate sin. This isn't just a problem in our culture. It's a problem in the church. It's a problem in our lives. We act too much like sin doesn't matter. It does matter, and it matters greatly.

When we begin to see our sinfulness the way God does, we are one step closer to blessing. To those who are broken and mournful over their sin, God promises comfort. It is the only comfort that can ultimately heal their hearts. On our own, the best we can do is to cover-up our sorrows, or try to disguise them. But God blesses the mournful with real comfort. This comfort isn't just a hand on the shoulder.

It isn't just a few words of consolation or well-wishes. It is something very real that transforms us in the very core of our hearts. Only the *God of all comfort* (2 Cor. 1:3) can turn *wailing into dancing* (Ps. 30:11), only He can *bind up the brokenhearted* (Is. 61:1), and ultimately only God's comfort will *wipe away every tear in our eye* (Rev. 7:17) Blessed are those who mourn.

### **Blessed are the Meek**

Let's travel a little further down the road of God's blessing. The third beatitude is "*blessed are the meek.*" Again this runs contrary to every grain of our culture. The world says happy are the self-assertive. Happy are those that go after what they want. Happy are the forceful, the manipulators, and the powerful. But Jesus says, blessed are the meek.

But what does it mean to be meek? Meekness is not something we understand very well. In the minds of many meek means weak. It is to be shy and unassertive. It means to have a quiet manner. If we see meekness this way, though, we will completely miss our Savior's heart here.

To be meek is to be gentle, considerate and mild. It isn't to be powerless. It is to keep your power under control, to use it discretely, and to direct it carefully. A trained horse that is bridled and saddled has great power, but that power is contained and controlled. That is meekness. A fire in a hearth has power to warm, illuminate and protect, but it is power under control. That is meekness.

How does this apply to the beatitudes? To this point, the beatitudes have dealt with how we view ourselves in the presence of God. With the third beatitude, we see how we view ourselves in the presence of others.

If we are spiritually impoverished, and we are truly mournful of that condition, it will also change how we view others. Because of our spiritual brokenness before God, we know that we are no better than anyone else. That means I should not act as though I am better than them. Meekness is a humble, gentle attitude toward others that springs from a right understanding of our spiritual condition. Meekness refuses to assert the power of self over others, because it realizes we're all in the same spiritual boat.

Imagine a Covid ICU where one patient weakly manages to pull off his oxygen mask, turns to his neighbor and says, "You deserve to be here, but I don't." That's the problem of self-righteousness.

Too often we insist upon our way. We demand our rights. We clamor for attention. We force

our way on others. But meekness realizes that we are no more deserving than the next person. Meekness, however, realizes that I need the grace of God just as much as you.

To such people Jesus promises they will inherit the earth. How can this be? It seems the earth is inherited by those who forcefully take for themselves. How will the meek inherit anything?

First of all, this is not a mandate. These are not marching orders to go out and conquer the world. That defeats the whole idea of meekness. The inheritance Jesus promises here isn't taken, it is given.

Though the forceful and powerful seem to dominate now, a day is coming where they will not. Eternity does not belong to the Vladimir Putins of the world. Psalm 37 looks forward to this time. Let me highlight a few of the verses.

*Do not fret because of evil men  
or be envious of those who do wrong;  
2 for like the grass they will soon wither,  
like green plants they will soon die away...*

*9 For evil men will be cut off.  
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.  
10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more;  
though you look for them, they will not be found*

*11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace...*

The new heaven new earth will be inherited by those who receive the blessing of God through the salvation of Jesus Christ. Ps. 37:29 tells us that this promise is about eternity, "*The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever.*" We hear the echo of this promise in Jesus' words. This is not a promise to be fulfilled in the here and now. It is fulfilled in the words of Revelation 21:1-4.

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

And in this way, the meek will inherit the earth.

### **Blessed are Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness**

Once we realize our spiritual bankruptcy, once we begin to mourn the poverty of our soul, once we realize that we're no better than anyone else, it all begins to lead us to the place we really need to be. It brings us to the fourth beatitude, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*" We crave a right relationship with God and the transformation of our lives. We realize that we have no hope unless God gives it to us, and we long for that hope. We don't

deserve it. We can't earn it. We desire that which only God can give.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness isn't just to have a taste for something. It's not like when you're watching TV and you suddenly get a hankering for potato chips, "Man, some Ruffles sound good." No, the hungering and thirsting that Jesus talks about here is a desperate craving. This is the need of a starving soul. We are spiritual deserts parched for living water.

If you look at these first four beatitudes together you realize they describe the process of someone coming to Jesus. They describe the journey of salvation. Everyone who would know Jesus as their Lord and Savior must travel this path. But it's a cycle that will repeat in every Christian's life. As we grow in our faith, as we see new things that God wants to do, as the Holy Spirit works on new areas of sinfulness, we will again be poor in spirit, we will mourn anew, we will remember once more our meekness, and we will hunger and thirst again for righteousness.

And when we crave his righteousness, Jesus gives us this promise. We will be filled. Not the passing fullness of a chocolate bar. Not the fleeting happiness of pleasure. Not the momentary boost of ego from applause. No, he promises eternal satisfaction.

This filling can begin now, and it comes in a number of ways. God fills with His own Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), we can be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy (1 Pet. 1:8). We can be filled with the fruit of righteousness (Php. 1:11), and according to Eph. 3:19 we can be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Clarence Jordan points out how we can see the wisdom of Jesus if we apply his teaching to other areas of life. Instead of entering the kingdom, we could apply it to education. Blessed are those who are ignorant and know it, for theirs is learning. Blessed are those who wish they were not ignorant, for they are on the path to knowledge. Blessed are those who enroll in school, for they shall be taught. Blessed are those who submit to the teacher, for they shall inherit wisdom.

Or compare it to entering into health. Blessed are those who face up to their illness, for theirs is to health. Blessed are they who go to the doctor, for they will be helped. Blessed are those who listen to the doctors instructions, for they are on the path to healing. Blessed are those who take their medicine as described, for they will be healthy.

Just as education begins in ignorance, health begins in illness, so God's blessing begins where there is no blessing. I don't care where you are in life. Blessing may seem to be the furthest thing from you. You may think there is no way you could ever find blessing in your life. But God's blessing begins right there, right where you are. To get on God's path to blessing takes a first step anybody can take. All you need to do is realize where you are. You can take that step. *"God have mercy on me a sinner."*

